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NOTAS ESPIRITUALES SOBRE LAS CONSTITUCIONES CLARETIANAS

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**SPIRITUAL NOTES
ON THE
CLARETIAN CONSTITUTIONS**

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Introduction

Following the process of revision of our official texts carried out after Vatican Council II, the Claretian Missionaries have at their disposal, together with the official text of our Constitutions, the work entitled *Our Project of Missionary Life*: an interdisciplinary commentary, promoted by the General Government, and very complete in its three volumes. Other commentaries, with different perspectives and accents, have been used in some provinces to facilitate the reception of the renovated text or to accompany it with a critical reading of the biblical texts cited therein. In the latter case, such is the voluminous study of Father Pere Franquesa, *¿Las Constituciones claretianas son misioneras?* (Barcelona 1997).

With a more modest intention, the present writing proposes only some notes that highlight or underline the *spiritual message* of the renewed Claretian Constitutions: a message condensed in the Fundamental Constitution and the eight chapters of the first part. With this limitation and perspective, these pages were effectively born in moments of spiritual retreat or formation courses, both initial and permanent, of groups of Missionaries of the Congregation.

In fidelity to this purpose, the reflections begin with two introductory chapters, which precede the Fundamental Constitution, to which two more chapters are dedicated. Then, they move on to the first part, which, as its title suggests, offers a description of the Congregation's missionary life: our way of life in the Spirit.

I am grateful to the General Government, which, through the CESC of Vic, has made this edition possible.

With fraternal affection, I dedicate these pages to all who have shared and continue to share this same source of missionary spirituality. In addition, if I may be allowed, as I surpass eighty years of age, I would like to express my gratitude to the Congregation where I have tried to live and serve the Lord as a missionary son of the Heart of Mary and a disciple of Claret.

The author

Frequently used abbreviations

ACW	<i>Autobiography and Complementary Writings of St. Anthony M. Claret</i> , ed. J. M. Viñas and J. Bermejo, Editorial Claretiana, Buenos Aires, 2008. Translated by Joseph Daries.
AUT	<i>Autobiography of St. Anthony M. Claret</i> , various editions.
AW	<i>Autobiographical Writings, Works of St. Anthony M. Claret, Vol. II</i> , Translated by Joseph Daries, 2009.
CCTT	<i>San Antonio Maria Claret Constituciones y Textos sobre Congregación de Misioneros</i> , edition prepared by J. M. Lozano, ed. Claret (Barcelona 1972).
CESC	Centro de Espiritualidad Claretiana (Center for Claretian Spirituality)
CICLSAL	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Roman Curia.
CPR	<i>El Claretiano en el proceso de renovacion congregacional</i> [The Claretian in the Process of Renewal], XX General Chapter of (Rome 1985).
DC	<i>Declaration on the Charism</i> , Chapter Document of 1967.
DTVC	<i>Diccionario Teológico de la Vida Consagrada</i> , Claretian Publications (Madrid 1989).
EA	<i>Escritos Autobiográficos de san Antonio M. Claret</i> , ed. J. M. Viñas and J. Bermejo, editorial BAC (Madrid 1981). See AW for the English translation.
EC	<i>Epistolario (activo) de San Antonio Maria Claret</i> , 3 volúmenes, ed. J. M. Gil, editoriales Cocala (1970) y Publicaciones Claretianas (1987), Madrid.
EE	<i>Escritos Espirituales de San Antonio M. Claret</i> , ed. J. Bermejo, editorial BAC (Madrid 1985). See SSW for English Translation.
MCT	<i>The Mission of the Claretian Today</i> , XIX General Chapter document (Rome, 1979).
MFL	<i>Men on Fire with Love</i> , XXIV General Chapter document (Rome, 2009).
NPVM	<i>C.M.F. Nuestro Proyecto de Vida Misionera</i> , vol. I <i>Comentario a las Constituciones. Aspectos Fundamentales</i> & Vol. II, <i>Comentario a las Constituciones Constitución Fundamental y Primera Parte</i> , (Roma, 1989) por J.M. Viñas y J.C.R. Garcia Paredes (Roma 1991). See OPML for English translations.
OPML	<i>Our Project of Missionary Life</i> , vol II, Commentary to the Constitutions by J. M. Viñas and C. R. Garcia Parades. Translated by J. Daries (Rome 1991).

- PC *Perfectae Caritatis* (Decree on Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life), October 28, 1965.
- SL *Selected Letters from the Correspondence of St. Anthony M. Claret*, Vol. I, 1832-1857, Trans. by J. Daries, (Bangalore, 2007).
- SW *Servants of the Word*, XXI General Chapter document (Rome, 1991).
- SSW *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Volume III, Selected Spiritual Writings*, Translated by Joseph Daries, Claretian Publications (1991), Quezon City, Philippines.
- VC John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Rome 1996).
- VR *Vida Religiosa Revista*, Claretian Missionaries (Madrid).
- VFC *Fraternal Life in Community*, CICLSAL (Rome 1994).

I. CONSTITUTIONS

For the Missionaries, the Constitutions is that little book that, beginning with our religious profession, has to do with our life. For each missionary, it is a book of life; for our community, it is a unifying principle. Moreover, in any case, it has validity because it is the bearer of the Gospel. Therein lies its source of meaning and validity because it is an operative proposal of the following of Jesus.

From this perspective, we cannot but consider the changes shaping the understanding and sensitivity of this type of community text, called rules or constitutions, through generations and cultures. Something that has been experienced with force - and even with a particular drama - in recent times, during the transition brought about by Vatican II. For this reason, with the help of some historical and ecclesiological elements, it may be helpful for us to try to discover the best and most evangelical meaning with which this little book can be placed in our life today, a time of renewal. Let us begin with a brief historical overview.

Constitutions then and now

From the outset, we must recognize that *consecrated life*, like the Kingdom of God itself, *takes place* in history. It is given first as a *fact of life*. It is the continuity of the Gospel of Luke 5:11: "They left everything and followed him." Its codification and its very theology will come later.

a) Of this *form of life* (which over time will be called evangelical, apostolic, religious, and consecrated...), the first occurrence has been traditionally pointed out in virgins and hermits for the sake of the Gospel. People, who in many cases lived in deserted places, and others who were attracted by their example, wanted to be their disciples, to know, and to make their experience of following Jesus their own. The first formulations of this phenomenon have come

to us through the narrative genre, specifically through exemplary biographical accounts. Such is the case of St. Anthony Abbot's story (*Vita Antonii*), written by St. Athanasius.

Encouraged by this attraction to holy men and women, it soon led to an intensely experiential mode of transmission, of which we know many elements thanks to the collections of *apothegms* that have come down to us.¹ The apothegm (answer to a question) is usually presented as a short sentence or as a brief instructive and inviting story from a spiritual master to his disciple.²

In that closeness to holy men, the aspiration by holy followers to live in community matured, leaving behind the ideal of the solitary life, which offers fewer opportunities to live the precept of love. In this context, the *spiritual father* acquired a more defined role, whose function began moving from personal conversation to guidance and animation of large community groups. This guidance is what explains the birth of the *Rules*: rules (at least by attribution) of Saint Pachomius, father of the coenobitical life (c. IV), of Saint Basil (IV century), of Saint Augustine (V century), of Saint Benedict (VI century) that would encourage for centuries the way of the evangelical life.

As time went by, different groups (congregations) would be inspired by one or another of these rules, adding additions or adaptations that, when compiled together, were called *Constitutions*. In the sixteenth century, with the Clerics Regular and especially with the Jesuits, the value of these documents changed. Thus, the Constitutions became the main code of these institutes, while their Rules contained particular and secondary elements. By the nineteenth century, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and, later, the *Normae* of 1901 spoke of Rules when they referred to religious orders and Constitutions when they referred to modern congregations taking simple vows.³

Beyond the words in use and the canonical aspects of all this, it is essential to note the fundamental relationship that has emerged, through a *father* or a *founder*, to this little book of life since the very beginning of life in a community of consecrated persons. It can be outlined as follows:

¹ Cf. *Sanctorum senium apophthegmata*, PG, col 71 to 440; *Les Apophthegmes des Peres*, Sources Chretiennes 387, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, SJ; *Los Padres del desierto*, J. Martorell.

² J.-C. Guy, *Histoire de la vie religieuse*, p. 25 (ed. Media Sevres, Paris); Jesus Alvarez Gomez, *Historia de la vida religiosa*, I p. 196 (ed. PC, Madrid).

³ Cf. J. Alvarez G., art *Constituciones*, in DTVC, pp. 444 ff (ed. PC, Madrid, 1989).

<p>From an experience of God</p> <p>Holy man --- Apothegm --- Disciple</p> <p>Spiritual Father --- Rule/Constitutions --- Community.</p>

b) At the *time of the birth of our Congregation*, what idea of constitutions did the Church and our first missionaries have?

Constitutions were an *ascetical precept*, a "meticulous code, almost like a community regulation."⁴ This is the feature proposed by the *Normae* mentioned above in 1901, which had already been used for a long time. In the constitutions, biblical quotations and ascetic teachings or spiritual exhortations were to be avoided. They were to propose the Congregation's fundamental laws and the community regime's norms. In general, they were to conform to the models already tested (and approved) by the earlier Orders.⁵

This process can be verified in our case, especially by following the approval process of our early constitutions with the instructions from the reviewers in Rome.⁶ These instructions were based on organizational models (Dominican, Redemptorist). Regarding asceticism, our Founder was inspired above all by Rodriguez (*Practice of religious and Christian perfection*) and Petit-Didier (*Exercitia spiritualia*), and because of them in the spirituality of the Jesuits and, to a certain extent, in St. Alphonsus Liguori. In any case, it is good to note two things: 1. that Claret succeeded in introducing many ascetic teachings into the text, and 2. that this text was unusually rich in biblical references.

The 1917 Code proposes the theme of the constitutions (c 593) in the framework of "obligations" and as an instrument to achieve the "perfection of one's state." On the other hand, at the time, the theme of "observance" was highly developed as a concrete way of placing oneself before the constitutions and accepting the Rule.

c) *Since Vatican II*, a new way of conceiving the constitutions has been developed, starting from PC 2, which gives religious two fundamental guidelines: the return to the sources and the

⁴ Cf. J. Alvarez G., ib p. 446.

⁵ Cf. J. Alvarez G., art "Las Constituciones: que son y como leerlas," [The Constitutions: what they are and how to read them] en NPVM, I, p. 21 (Rome 1989). See OPML.

⁶ For this, see CCTT, by J. M. Lozano, and the *Historia de la Congregación* by Fr. Cristobal Fernandez.

original inspiration, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the adaptation to the changed conditions of the times. Along these lines, and as an example, the MP *Ecclesiae sanctae*, II no. 12, affirms that the constitutions must include evangelical and theological principles, together with expressions that transmit the tradition or spiritual patrimony of the institute. These ideas are now codified in the 1983 Code (cc 587 and 578 combined) under the title "Common Norms to all Institutes of Consecrated Life," a kind of chapter of definitions for understanding what is consecrated life.

More recently, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (no. 37) gives an interesting version of the attitude to take towards the constitutions when it speaks of "creative fidelity" and points out the "pressing need today for every institute to return to the rule, since the rule and constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, following a specific charism confirmed by the Church."

It is as if the constitutions, within the ecclesial framework of the recognition of the institute, became more than an ascetical precept, an inspirational text:

<p style="text-align: center;">Understanding the Constitutions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1. Ascetical Precepts - Observance</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2. Memorial - Discernment Project - Creative fidelity.</p>

The mind of Vatican II is at play here, with its peculiar position in the face of the changes of this era: cultural changes, which confront historical thought, personalism, socialization, etc. Consequently, symbolic changes in institutions, rites, rules of the game, language, etc., *symbolize* insofar as they express what we intend to be. It is as if our dreams and aspirations were poured into the constitutions that identify us.⁷ This little book should have the capacity to initiate new generations into the collective dream of the Institute.

Hence, the constitutions need to be redefined in their significance, giving them a new reason for their authentic personal and community validity. One proposal is presented here.

⁷ Cf. G. Arbuckle, *Strategie di crescita nella vita religiosa*, pp. 17-35 (ed. Paoline 1990).[See *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life*, New York: Alba House, 1987]

The Constitutions, a mediation

They are mediation insofar as they do not have an absolute reason to exist. They are, in reality, a guide, the map of a journey... the journey of following Jesus.

a) The constitutions are a *mediation concerning the Gospel*, in which the proposal to follow Christ is offered to us. In addition, as VC says (no. 37), they express a charism given, above all, for the following of Christ in an integral way, all the while illuminated by the *attraction-grace* of a determined feature of their marvelous personality.⁸

The constitutions translate and arrange the Gospel into a program of personal and community life, where those who feel called and identified with it assume it for life. Hence, there is a need for the constitutions to make continual and explicit reference to the Gospel and to affirm that "the following of Christ, as outlined in the Gospel, is our supreme rule" (Const no. 4).

b) As mediation, the constitutions also express an *experience already lived*, a rehearsal, and a journey of the *Founder*, a follower of Jesus. As mentioned above, this was the case from the beginning of coenobitic life.

The rule, justified on the grounds of the community, is intimately linked to the community and its history. It conveys the evangelical experience of a spiritual master and his disciples following Jesus. In this sense, the process followed by Ignatius of Loyola with the first companions of the Society was very significant. However, in one way or another, it has happened in all cases.

For the Claretian Missionaries, it is essential to have, alongside the Constitutions, a narrative text of the same experience already lived. This is the meaning found in Claret's *Autobiography*, written precisely for the Missionaries of the Congregation. Given the normative framework that was in place, it was difficult to introduce the fresh inspiration of the charism into the Constitutions. However, it transmitted the foundational experience more spontaneously.

⁸ In this perspective, it is not surprising that the post-synodal document *Vita Consecrata* gives so much space to the theme of divine beauty (cf. nos. 19, 20, 25, 75, 104, 109).

Therefore, the Autobiography is the natural gloss of the Constitutions and their indispensable source. That is why, in the period following Vatican II, it was taken into account during the process of renewal.

II. OUR CONSTITUTIONS AND THE BIBLE

The Constitutions are valued as a mediation of the Word of God, hence their capacity to program a believer's existence starting from the Gospel. For this reason, we are interested in verifying how the Constitutions of the Claretian Missionaries are related to the Bible. It can be helpful for us to trace its explicit terms and its presence and inspiring force for our vocational journey.

The earlier Constitutions

As we have recalled, the *Normae* of 1901 made explicit the criterion of avoiding biblical quotations in the Constitutions in force since the previous century. However, J. M. Lozano tells us that no constitutions in the last centuries, before Vatican II, were comparable to the Claretian Constitutions for the number of biblical quotations and that it would be necessary to return to the Franciscan Rule to find something similar.⁹

In fact, in the old text (1865), there were 64 explicit biblical quotations. Of these, 14 came from the Old Testament, and only one was from the prophetic books.¹⁰ References to the New Testament prevailed notably, and among these were those of Matthew (13), Luke (8), and Corinthians (8+2). In the opinion of Fr. Angel Aparicio, these are "the books that define us," the most inspiring sources of the Claretian way.

The renewed Constitutions

Following the pattern of Vatican II (PC 2), the path of congregational renewal, especially in its constitutions, has explicitly returned to biblical sources. In our case, this was facilitated

⁹ Cf. *Mystic and Man of Action*, (Claretian Publications, Chicago, 1977), pp. 82-83.

¹⁰ Jer 9:20-21 "la muerte entra por la ventana de los sentidos" in the 2nd part, n. 3 [of the 1865 Constitutions.] ("for death has come up into our windows," NRSVCE)

by our Founder's experience and vocational process, which were intimately related to the Word of God.

a) Before focusing on particular points, *a premise on the "spiritual sense of Scripture,"* taking into account the orientations of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, from the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini* of Benedict XVI,¹¹ may be helpful. Understood according to the Christian faith is "the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it." Accordingly, 1. It is not to be confused with subjective interpretations dictated by imagination or speculation. 2. Many times, especially in the New Testament, it is not distinct from the same *literal sense*; it speaks directly (*per se*) of the new life that comes from the risen Christ. 3. It seeks to relate three levels of reality, especially in Old Testament texts: the biblical text, the paschal mystery, and the present life circumstances in the Spirit. 4. So understood, we are in the presence of a genuinely biblical sense, the Word of God.

In the process of *lectio divina*, the meditation moment relates to the three mentioned levels.

b) The Constitutions are a *biblical commentary*. Concretely, there are 190 biblical citations, of which only eight are from the Old Testament. Some of these citations are not entirely clear.¹² As in the previous text, the most frequently used books are Matthew (the Gospel of the Church), Luke (the Gospel of the Mission), and the Letters to the Corinthians (ministerial texts). It can be noted, in another way, that the presence of the Prophets remains limited to what the Autobiography suggests, with only four references.

In no. 4, the Constitutions focus their position on the Gospel when it says (with PC no. 4) that the "following of Christ, as proposed in the Gospel, is our *supreme rule*." They want to be a commentary and application to life about this supreme rule. By concentrating on the Gospel, they make Christ and the paschal mystery central to our life project. Moreover, they concretize their Bible reading in a spiritual key. Moreover, as Benedict XVI recalled, "By living chaste, poor, and obedient in following Christ, one becomes a living 'exegesis' of the Word of God."¹³ By their evangelical reference and content, the Constitutions seek to be a "New Law,"

¹¹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, II B 2 (Rome 1993); Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 37 (Rome 2010).

¹² It would be desirable that in a future dedication of the Constitutions, some improvements and clarifications in this matter be introduced in the footnotes.

¹³ *Verbum Domini*, no. 83.

not enslaving but liberating, the word of the new covenant in Christ, which regenerates the community of the people of God.¹⁴

c) *A vocational reading of the Bible*. It can be said that in the renewed Constitutions, there has been a specific change in the use of Scripture. From the previous text, which sought to corroborate the 'ascetical precepts,' we have moved on to pursue our vocational status in the Word of God, which gives us the reason for our life choices. We are especially aware of the passages that are most inspiring for our vocation-mission, which bring to light the charism of service of the Word. In this way, the Constitutions open the way for a *vocational reading of the Bible*, especially from the document *Servants of the Word*, no. 14,¹⁵ recommended to all Claretians beginning with the experience of Claret, our Founder.

The reading of the Autobiography has accustomed us to feeling the notable and decisive impact of the Word of God in the initial inspiration and Claret's complete vocational journey. Taking into account the spiritual reading of the Bible, it affirms that in the experience of Claret, the *new life* that the Spirit aroused in him is evident. In this sense, it is legitimate to speak of a charismatic experience.

It is unnecessary to recall here that Claret learned in the seminary the custom of *continuous reading* of the Bible of two or more chapters a day. There are others possible. The Forge in Daily Life project proposes the liturgical order of reading the Word to make us live more intensely with the liturgical seasons.

On the other hand, Claret's experience can also be helpful to us in the *diverse forms* he employs in his approach to the biblical text. In some way, they are also present in our Constitutions. Let us consider the following points.

1. Through *biblical characters*. In the Autobiography, see especially nos. 214 to 224. The inspirers of Claret's vocation have been the Prophets, the Apostles, and Jesus Christ. Here, he gives more recognition to the Prophets, their life, spirit, ministry, and death-sacrifice. However, there are only two references to the Prophets in the Constitutions when he speaks of the novices (no. 62) and the presbyters (no. 82). More emphasis is extended to the presence of the Apostles, our Co-patrons (no. 35c), of whose ministry the Claretian participates (no. 82), in whose likeness he is being called (nos. 3, 4, 10 and 23). The Constitutions refer to the biblical image

¹⁴ Cf. Pironio, art *La nuevas Constituciones*, in VR (Madrid), vol. 57 p. 6.

¹⁵ XXI General Chapter (Rome 1991), p. 33.

of Jesus Christ in practically all the chapters of the first part, abounding in the enumeration of features that cannot fail to touch the heart of those who wish to be his disciples.

2. Through *specific texts or words* that Claret personalized in a vocational sense. Examples are nos. 113 to 120 of the Autobiography. His manuscripts collected in ACW pp. 594-597 and 612-618 can be added together; one can make an extensive list of Old and New Testament biblical sentences that have been for Claret words of invitation, orientation, and vocational discernment: these have formed him into an Apostolic Missionary. Some have been explicitly or implicitly included in the current constitutional text.

3. The Bible has more complex themes of vocational content that have nourished the vocation and service of Prophets and Apostles. Claret has made these the object of reflection, spiritual assimilation, and ministerial inspiration. The following examples can be considered, among others.

* *The glory of God*. Theme typically seen as prophetic (Isaiah), which is not limited to the field of worship; it leads to zeal for Yahweh, to the service of the Word, to the service of people, to the commitment to the salvific project for which God has established a covenant with them. This theme also has a strong presence in the Apostles (Paul). It is from here that Claret is motivated in his zeal (*Aut* 202-264), defines his missionary identity (*Aut* 494), and believes this is the reason he was saved from drowning, to give glory to God (AW p. 197). - It is a theme proposed vigorously in the Constitutions, already from the formulation of the *obiectum* (no. 2) and in many other places (nos 9, 20, 41, 66, 81.2).

* *The servant of the Word, a man free and itinerant*. The paradigm of *Abraham* taken from his homeland for a pilgrimage and as the bearer of a promise (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; Josh 24:2-3); His kerygma-promise of blessing generates in him fruits of freedom about all the rest (Gen 13:8-9; 14:12-16). - *Elijah*, an itinerant prophet (1Ki 17:3-9; 19:8). - In this line also goes the apostolic condition as it is given in Paul, sent to the pagans (Gal 1:16; 2:6-9; Acts 13:3; Rom 15:16). In relation with this, one sees in Claret: "I finally went out to preach..." (*Aut* 193); "my spirit is for the whole world" (EC I p. 305-6), an attitude also proposed in the *obiectum* at the beginning of the Constitutions (cf. CCTT p. 169) and later, in no. 4 and Chapter VII, on *our mission*. Claret's explanation of the talents' parable is very illustrative of this in which the missionary is given to the four corners of the world (*Advice to a priest* in SSW p. 312).

* *The servant of the Word as intercessor*. Claret has underlined this particular aspect several times, inspired by the intercessory function of Moses (cf. Ex 17:11; 32:12; Num 14:19) and

Elijah (1Ki 17:17-24 and 18:20-38). This aspect is also found in the Autobiography nos. 219, 263, and 663.¹⁶ Hence, the theme in the Constitutions, no. 24 (with several biblical quotations in the footnotes) 35, a and 84.

The reader can make a similar approach to other themes relevant to understanding the Claretian vocation, e.g., the following and imitation of Jesus, the poverty of the one sent, pastoral charity, etc. In general, the Constitutions contain a concrete proposal and exercise of *vocational reading* of the Bible. They are a collective *meditatio* of our congregational community, anchored in Claret's charismatic experience. To be a living text, the Constitutions must sustain two references: to the Gospel, from which they acquire the soul, and to the personal and community projects, in which they acquire the body.

¹⁶ See also *El Colegio Instruido (The Well-Instructed Seminarian)* II 1, 22, 1; *The Origin of Public Calamities*, in SSW pp. 274-275; and *Selfishness Overcome*, in SSW p. 467.

III. ORIGIN AND OBJECTIVE OF THE CONGREGATION

FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION (1)

Our Constitutions before the Second Vatican Council began at the beginning of the first part with the chapter *Titulus et obiectum*. There, the identity of our Institute was proposed, indicating in the first part its name, its place of origin, and its Founder. The brief formulation of the objective of the Congregation was fundamental and substantial. Through the Patroness and the list of the Patron Saints, it was also given something like a spiritual family and, finally, the ecclesial bond of communion and collaboration with the Pope and the bishops in the service of the Word.

The theological and spiritual richness of the documents of Vatican II led Father General, Peter Schweiger, as early as 1966, to consider a new heading for the constitutional text with a more organic chapter on *the foundation of the Congregation or Claretian ecclesial formula*. Something that could be regarded as the *formula institute*. Regarding this formula, the pre-capitulary Commission of 1967 presented diverse drafts that were not passed to the Assembly hall since that chapter did not directly address the revision of the constitutional text.¹⁷

The post-capitular Commission in charge of this review did address the issue. Thus, the study text distributed in 1971 was the *Fundamental Constitution* entitled *De origine et missione Congregationis in Ecclesia*, with four numbers. There, taking into account the previous contributions, an adjusted synthesis was achieved, which the two successive General Chapters would modify and expand to the present nine specific numbers.

This fundamental constitution aims to synthesize the *identifying elements* of this vocational path or to use the expression of the Council¹⁸ and the *proper nature* of the Congregation. This

¹⁷ Cf. J. M. Viñas, in OPML, pp. 27-28; also G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III: la renovación conciliar*, pp. 72-73 (English translation pending).

¹⁸ Cf. LG 44, 2; see also the document *Mutuae relaciones*, 11 of the CICLSAL.

proper nature interests the Church, which sees itself enriched by it. Hence, it seeks to protect and confirm it.

Keys of identification

We start from the fact that this identification responds to a reality of grace, which certainly takes shape historically and socially. It takes shape through the experience of many individuals, starting from an originator or founder. For this reason, our fundamental Constitution (no. 1) begins the first part by offering us very succinct data that identifies our Institute, first by a *generic designation* (Congregation of Missionaries) and then by its more *proper names* (Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary or Claretian Missionaries).

It also gives a very brief *history*: the place and date of its foundation (Vic, July 16, 1849) and the name of its founder (St. Anthony Mary Claret, whose pastoral ministry - archbishop and recognized sanctity - is recalled in two words). Together with this, the ecclesial belonging of the Institute is affirmed from the beginning by the approval of the Supreme Pontiff (granted by Pius IX on December 22, 1865). It is necessary to say that Claret was the founder of the Congregation during the twenty-one years between 1849 and 1870 when he died in Fontfroide, France. It is a fact that the project of this Congregation needed in him and the founding group a clear evolution marked by necessary elaborations (e.g., on the vows, community life, the Missionary Brothers, etc.). On the other hand, it is also clear that, despite the imposed remoteness from his missionaries, Claret presided over the work of updating the Rule and accompanying the Missionaries with his correspondence and with solid moments of animation.

From no. 2 onwards, the constitutional text begins to express the *charismatic identification* of the Congregation. With a very synthesized and traditional formula, our *vocational grace* is proposed: the most intimately identifying element of all that is ours, its *raison d'être*. It allows the Congregation to understand itself within the saving plan of God in Jesus, thanks to the active presence of the Spirit. This represents the *obiectum Congregationis*, contained in a paragraph with few editorial changes since the first Constitutions until today, maintaining its structure and essential content.

Dedicating special attention to this *obiectum*, the core element from which our spirituality and ministry are developed, is worthwhile.

The objective of our Congregation

The renewed text of the Constitutions once again used in number 2 the word *obiectum*, which the Founder had already used in the first drafts and which the editions made between 1924 and 1974 had been replaced with *finis*. This idea of the end was in keeping with the societal conception of the congregations, deeply rooted in post-Tridentine thought and prevalent in the years following the Code of Canon Law of 1917. The word "objective," used by the Founder, was used in a less juridical context that, using the language of a scholastic flavor, made it easier to propose the various aspects of life in communion, of activities, and of the ecclesial mission included in the Congregation's project. It synthesized the original vocational inspiration of the missionaries "to whom the Lord had given the same spirit that motivated me" (*Aut* 489).

Restored in the present Constitutions, this concept allows a more enriched reading of the original inspiration in light of conciliar thought. The key to this new reading is offered by the expression "according to our missionary charism in the Church," which closes no. 2. This means that the fullest sense of the "*obiectum*" is obtained by proposing it as a *reality of grace*, a vocational gift consistent prior to our operative choices. It cannot be understood in a voluntary sense, as if it were an undertaking that a human group will carry out. It is a space in which we move, hand in hand with the dynamisms established by Jesus, in the sense that the Constitutions will say from no. 3 onwards.

For the Claretian, the glory of God, the sanctification of community, and the salvation of people worldwide are certainly three distinct concepts. Still, they are a single *objective of charismatic experience*, from which one's life is unified. It is natural that this unity, valid at the level of spiritual experience, resists particular distinctions between its elements (formal or material, primary or secondary...). Moreover, it precedes and transcends us as persons and is rooted in the collective Congregation, which also gives that unity that will be expressed in the same sentiment, in the communion of life and a single great apostolic project. "It is a gift in the mystery of the Church, and from this dimension, its very being and its life is glory, sanctification, and mission."¹⁹

¹⁹ Cf. OPML, p. 55.

Claretian living of the triple objective

To illuminate the unitary sense of this "*obiectum*," it is worth rereading, in the light of some elements of conciliar doctrine, the Claretian spiritual experience, especially that belonging to the Founder. The glory of God, the sanctification in community, and the salvation of humanity are not abstractions but concrete graces translated into comprehensive projects and real surrenders of one's existence.

a) The glory of God

It is impossible to overlook the importance of the glory of God in Claret's spiritual experience. His writings show that the prophets, especially Isaiah and St. Paul, inspired him. On the other hand, one must remember the influence of the Society of Jesus. Hence, the *Definition or Memorial* of the Missionary, which we find in the Autobiography (494), states, "His only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate him in working, suffering, and constantly striving for the greater glory of God."

This centrality of the glory of God has two immediate derivations in Claret. First, as a horizon that gives reason to one's own life, it brings to the surface the importance of *humility*, understood in the truest sense of renunciation of any project that could be centered on one's person. We know what humility meant for Claret as the foundation of an apostolic spirituality: it was "the first virtue that I strove for" (*Aut* 340). Secondly, it gives the perspective of what the missionary work has to seek: that all men and women, all creatures, may know, love, serve, and praise God, our Father (cf. *Aut* 152, 233, etc.). This is the basis of a personalizing concept of conversion, which is not only a change of behavior but also a turning towards the person who matters the most.

The glory of God is not, similarly, a safe conduct to escape from this world and the historical responsibilities it proposes.²⁰ Nor does it have to do with the triumphalism of monuments or lofty undertakings. Nor can it be compressed into worship alone. According to the Bible's constant language, God's glory is a kind of footprint of God's presence in our world, luminous and, at the same time, hidden. This radiance shows with what design the world has sprung from a person's heart: things taken out of chaos to illuminate the beautiful and harmonious cosmos, a world free from fatalism and animated by a destiny of communion at the highest level, which is the person.

²⁰ See a falsified idea of the glory of God, put in the mouth of Voltaire, in F. Savater, *El jardín de las dudas*, p. 192 (ed. Planeta 1993).

This personal profile of God has been studied since ancient times, only to be seen face to face in Christ Jesus. From Christ, we see more clearly how this presence-glory of God dwells in people: in them, it is subjected to obscurity, to humiliation, to death on a cross. From here, he has to be recognized and liberated, especially in the most suffering parts of humanity, and work in favor of a transformation.²¹ Like Jesus himself, in the years of his earthly history, he serves the glory of God by giving dignity to the poorest and most excluded. Living within this design is part of our vocational grace and placing ourselves at God's service.

b) The sanctification of its members

How will we feel and present our vocation to holiness today in the Congregation? What does the term "objective" mean concretely?

First, it is essential to avoid any voluntarist interpretation here. We are also here before a reality of vocational grace, a gift from God. It must also be said that the Constitutions do not intend to usurp a good that belongs to every Christian, constituted holy from the baptismal font, thanks to communion with Christ and belonging to the "holy people," united with the Spirit. It may have come as a surprise when Pope John Paul II could not but remind all believers at the beginning of the third millennium that "holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task" and that "all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."²²

All genuine discourse on holiness must take place within this framework. It is there that our vocational gift is rooted. Claret, who was not a man of abstractions, understood no other holiness than Christ, communicated in an ecclesial milieu, nurtured by the Spirit to transform the world. Throughout his spiritual itinerary, which goes through numerous moments of crisis-conversion,²³ Claret's experience emphasizes some aspects worth remembering. On the one hand, when he finally realized that he was not called to the Carthusians (*Aut* 113), he understood that his sanctification could not be separated from a solid dedication to others "to save the souls of my neighbors." On the other hand, referring to the founding of the Congregation (*Aut* 489), he identifies the primary reason for this work in the fact that the Lord had given to others "the same spirit that motivated me:" a spirit, a vocational grace that had to be developed in a community of life.

²¹ See S. Aalen, art *Gloria*, in *Diccionario teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, vol II, p. 192 (ed. Sígueme 1980).

²² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 30.

²³ Cf. Guillermo Randle, SJ, *Discernir en el desconcierto: una experiencia, Claret (1807-1870)*, pp. 72-112 (Madrid 1993).

For the same reason, holiness is not a solitary journey. The second point of the *obiectum* means that, in the spirit of the Claretian experience, all of us who make up the Congregation become brothers in welcoming and developing this vocational gift that everyone has received. This solidarity is so strong and significant that it translates into a single life project, within which are placed, with an exact direction, the various instances and moments of the life of the members, the animating function of the superior, the fraternal support and correction, the articulation of the efforts and the missionary efficacy of the various activities.

On the other hand, as in Jesus, sanctification glorifies God in acts of service to people, which is also the place of our crises and conversions. Together with the Founder, it allows us to follow Christ and give our lives for our brothers: for the disciple of Jesus, the encounter with the Lord to follow him and witness his Gospel is an unavoidable path.

c) The salvation of people all over the world

It is the third element of the objective of the Congregation that we must also seek in everything. Here, too, we encounter the dimension of *gratitude*, essential to the salvation proposed by the Gospel. It is not an undertaking or a heroic adventure that we will carry out. It is an initiative of God the Father, who offers us liberation salvation in Jesus his Son: the good news that had never crossed our minds and now must be proclaimed: an unexpected dimension for which we sense we are unworthy.²⁴

Regarding this salvation, the Church is the historical sacrament. We find its meaning, we live it, and from it, we are given to serve with a ministry that is also part of what we call *our charism*. Through the Church and the Apostles, the Claretian is connected to Jesus himself: an idea that impassioned our Founder, who knew he was called to the same mission of Jesus,²⁵ proclaimer of the good news. From the experience of the Founder, our service for the salvation of all has some features worth mentioning.

* Among the privileged salvific actions are those more directly related to the communication of the Word. When this communication is genuine, it becomes part of the saving action that translates into conversion, personal and community transformation, and consolidation of the Kingdom values that produce the fruits of living together in justice and fraternity.

* The *person who is to be saved* is indicated in no. 2 of the Constitutions in a non-descriptive way and with a scope that in successive numbers will acquire more concrete features: they are

²⁴ In all this matter, rather than "objective" it seems preferable to speak simply of "object" as the Constitutions do. See the mode of expression of OPML II, pp. 68-69.

²⁵ Cf. Letter to the Missionary Theophilus, in *SSW*, p. 415-416.

those who suffer pain and sickness, victims of injustice and oppression (44), those who are marginalized from society (83), do not know the God of Jesus (46, 47 and 81), nor share in the hope of the Kingdom (20, 40).

* An essential element of this service is the sense of *universality*: "the people of the whole world." There is no need to recall here the importance of this aspect for our Founder and his way of understanding and living the mission: a perspective that remains fully valid in the Constitutions. The centrality of this element must illuminate the correct sense in which the Congregation has been speaking for some decades now of "options" (of places, of means, etc.) and of "preferential subjects." Neither the option for the poor nor the subjects we have historically preferred can be interpreted as a liquidation of the utopia of universality. We are rather at its service; we are on the path towards this horizon; they are the key from which it is approached. On the other hand, this universal projection constitutes the necessary instance of discernment on the missionary value of our choices as individuals and as a Claretian community.

* Whatever the point of view is that we look at it, this is a work that always has its roots in the people or, to put it better, in the *ministry*, of which St. Paul speaks (cf. Eph 1:7-14; 3:3-9): a benevolent design, in which, thanks to our vocational gift, we are involved. We can enter it only with a grateful heart and bending our knees, as Paul himself did (cf. *ibid.* 3:14). It is the historical place of the *glory of God*, where his heart is laid bare and where the secret splendor of his intimacy ("God is love," 1Jn 4:8) begins to give meaning and a future to this world, and consequently, to our service. This reality connects us to our vocational gift, "our missionary charism in the Church."

* In the brief statement of the *obiectum*, the Congregation finds not only a variety of perspectives but, above all, a united and fulfilling grace. This grace expresses God's fidelity to his people and inspires a strong, united, compact spirituality like our Founder's. In it, we find the natural synthesis between action and contemplation, historical options and missionary universality, personal growth, and community solidarity on the path of sanctification.

IV. OUR MISSIONARY CHARISM IN THE CHURCH

FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTIONS (2)

The Second Vatican Council provided a key to understanding the consecrated life and other realities of Christian life through the theological category of charisms. At the 1994 Synod of Consecrated Life, the Relator of the Synod, Cardinal Basil Hume, affirmed that this category is “most commonly used and considered the most suitable to express the variety, richness, and inner unity of this way of life.”²⁶

This has also been the experience of our Congregation. It may be said that the Fundamental Constitution is a compact proposal of this charism or *vocational grace*, which offers the appropriate framework for the remaining chapter of our book of life. As lived out in previous centuries, it is also, in our case, a gift that has become historical and is made available to us through the intense experience of a person, the *Founder*, who transmitted it to us in words, options, and actions.

After the first two numbers already commented, the Fundamental Constitution draws from the biblical source and from the intuitions and experiences of Claret the main lines of our way of life and mission, the expressive traits of our charism with the people of God.

Jesus the Son sent our prototype

Vatican II did not fail to note that the phenomenon of Consecrated life arose from the beginning as the *following of Christ*.²⁷ It also verified (LG 46) that the diversity of charisms has its source in the fullness of the grace of the Lord himself (cf. Col 2:9; Ep 4:7-12). Although Claret did not initially have a proposal of consecrated life for his missionaries, it is clear that

²⁶ Cf. *Relatio ante disceptationem*, 10.

²⁷ See the decree *Perfectae caritatis* in nos.1, 2, 5, 8, 13; also *Lumen Gentium* no. 44.

his vocation arose from his *attraction* to the missionary Jesus (*Aut* 221-222). Moreover, from there, his whole project would develop.

Our Constitutions, from no. 3, make us aware that our gift is understood, starting from our condition of *sons and those who are sent*: an affirmation of the experience of Jesus himself (cf. Jn. 3:17; Lk. 2:49). Thus, in Claret was the development of a *filial and missionary* spirituality, which naturally could not overlook the role of the maternal action of Mary (cf. ACW pp. 597, 617) through the working of the Holy Spirit. It is not strange that the evocative language of prophetic anointing is used here, which implies election to a mission. Our being sent, as Claret, a follower of Jesus himself, was understood and is configured according to Isaiah's prophetic design and the declaration of Jesus himself in Nazareth: sent to evangelize poor people (cf. Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19). It is the path of the historical Jesus and remains a necessary path for those who accept to be involved in the work of the mission. It was experienced by the Apostles and, after them, by missionaries.

One of Jesus' historical tasks was to *associate others* with his mission. The plan was "to be with him and to be sent out to preach" (cf. Mk 3:14), the two constitutive dimensions of *apostolic life*. Claret understood this clearly and expressed it with the formula identifying him: *Apostolic missionary*. These two words, of different linguistic roots, mean in reality the same thing and, in their redundancy, emphasize a sending that can be understood only from the experience of the Twelve, which arose from their having shared the life, tasks, and paths of Jesus, the Son sent by the Father. This sharing enables the apostolic missionary and the Church itself to announce and bear witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 1:21-22). There is no other objective that Jesus himself has proposed to the Church.

The evangelical life

Starting from the same inspirational source, the Constitutions cannot but offer us (nos. 3c and 4) the features of the *evangelical life* that make our *following of Christ* a reality, which, as proposed in the Gospel, "is part of our supreme rule." We recognize that it is part of our vocational gift to carry out this following "in communion of life" as a group, in the manner of the Apostles. Our communion is with Jesus and with those who have received the same apostolic gift, which is linked to the gift of *evangelical fellowship* around the Lord—this fellowship is directly with the second clause of the objective of the Congregation. At the same time, because we belong to the people of God, *we seek to represent* "the same kind of life" of

Jesus in the Church. Furthermore, from there, we dispose ourselves to announce and *witness* the good news of the Lord.

In the second section of no. 4, by gathering some fragments of the Gospel of Jesus, which anticipate what will be developed in the following chapters, it intends, above all, to show the intimate character of the Lord Himself, the keys of life, and the beatitudes He wanted to share with us, His relationship with the Father, the fraternal bonds he created with the little ones of this world, the message of love and peace he left to all men and women of goodwill... All this can be translated as an introduction to the attraction of the disciple who approaches Jesus with the desire to follow him.

No. 5 traces for us the concrete way to make our own "the way of life of Jesus, which the Virgin Mary also embraced in faith: "the so-called *evangelical counsels*, that by living them, we *represent* in the Church the virginity, poverty, and obedience of Christ, dedicated to His same mission, and knowing that we are the spiritual family of that group of disciples and apostles that he summoned to himself.

All this, going beyond the pure intimacy of persons, acquires institutional status and public character thanks to its *anchor in the Church*, which needs it to be a visible evangelical reality and which accepts and defends it. For this reason, Vatican II was able to say that although this form of life "is not the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to its life and holiness" (LG 44).

The service of the Word

The matrix of Claret's foundational purpose has been none other than the *mission*. From here, he incorporated all the dynamism of "being with Jesus," imitating and following him that would enable him and his brothers for the missionary itinerary of the Lord himself. This mission was the great mandate left by Jesus to the Church, designed by him so that the good news could reach the ends of the world (cf. Mt 28:20). Claret always lived it as an ecclesial experience. That is why it was so important for him *to be sent* and at the bishop's disposal (cf. *Aut* 192, 454). In addition, the Constitution has left us with the mandate to "be strong assistants to the pastors in the *ministry of the Word*" in the service that our charism urges us to render at all times. United with other charismatic expressions, we build and enrich the ecclesial communion, a work of love, as Claret felt in defining our relationship with the Pope. Moreover, like Jesus himself (cf. Lk. 2:49), we express the love of God's children in our obedience as the one who is sent.

With the perspective of the "salvation of people of the *whole world*," which is part of our "objective," we place ourselves in the dynamics of the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation. This key to the *universality* of our mission is especially emphasized when, in no. 6, we also speak of the universality of means. It is a question, of course, of means for the service of the Word: communicating the good news. It is a challenge to the *creativity and discernment* of the communicator: two dynamisms, where the missionary has to remain continuously active in every situation and use every instrument at his disposal. This is an indispensable exercise for the validity of the mission so that the Word may be proclaimed "whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (2 Tim 4:2). Chapter VII of the Constitutions will develop the elements outlined here.

Summoned to the missionary community

In no. 7, the Constitutions tell us that we share the same missionary vocation - *priests, deacons, brothers, and students*. We are part of the same community, the same fraternity. Nothing is more important than the persons in our Congregation. For this reason, developing what is synthetically formulated in this issue, the Constitution dedicates the second part (chapters IX to XII) to persons. To the list of persons proposed in the former Constitutions (no. 5) after Vatican II, the renewed text includes the category of *permanent deacons* established in the Church by Pope Paul VI.²⁸

The fundamental Constitution goes beyond the simple enumeration of these categories. They are understood as significant realities for the *vocation*, the *community*, and the *mission* of the Institute, which are common to all its members. Later on, in Chapter XII, the ministerial and spiritual profile is described, which can be added to what is stated in our Directory (nos. 252-268).

Our rule of life clearly understands the heterogeneity of the persons who make up our community as a gift or charismatic grace that enriches the whole for the realization of its own "objective:" "in keeping with our gift of order and the special role we perform," says no. 7. And, as the Directory does (no. 252c), we can speak of "the manifold character of our community."

²⁸ M. P. *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*, 18 June 1967. For the process that followed among us for this establishment, see G. Alonso, *Misioneros Claretianos, III: la renovación posconciliar*, pp. 136-138.

Along with this heterogeneity, the Constitutions affirm the *equality* of these persons by using the word "*same*" four times: the same vocation, the same community, the same mission, the same rights and duties. Undoubtedly, with the exception of students (transitory vocation), the other categories, being complete vocations (Directory, ib), are theologically distinct. Equality results from *commitment* to the *same missionary project* of the Congregation. In this sense, the Constitutions themselves (no. 80) could say that they complement each other ("*mutuo se complent*"). They aim to enrich the Congregation's service as an apostolic body and "community for the mission" (MCT no. 126ff). It is not a question, then, that we all do the same things and have the same functions but that we all converge for the good that touches the life in our community that is at the service of the mission. To use an expression used by both the Founder and Fr. Xifre, we can say that we all belong to the "*estado misionero*" [*the status of being a missionary*].²⁹

We can approach a *characterization of the common mission* by uniting and relating those elements that we usually consider in identifying a Claretian:

- his main concern is the service of the Word, communicating the integral mystery of Christ;
- to be *servants*, we become disciple-listeners and servants of the Word, understood as a rule of life;
- in the manner of *Mary*, we pass the Word through our own heart, in an apprenticeship of the attitudes of Jesus as the One who was Sent;
- serving the Word by *the witness* of our own personal and community life;
- in the space where *living together in an evangelical fraternity* generates apostolic collaboration from the gifts that each one has received;
- aware that in addition to being *disciples*, we are *also sent*;
- with a perspective of *universality* (to all people), starting with those who are poor and taking upon ourselves the law of enculturation;
- with a sense of *itinerancy* of people and positions;
- open to the universality of means;
- aiming to generate a *movement of evangelization*, with the promotion of new evangelizes;
- inspired and sustained by the power of *cordiality*, which is the Marian way of welcoming and transmitting the Word.³⁰

²⁹ Cf. CCTT, pp. 287 and 620.

³⁰ These and other elements that make up our charismatic profile contributions can be found in the post-conciliar documents of the Congregation. For example, Chapter of 1967 (DC no. 24); Chapter of 1979 (MCT no. 145); Chapter of 1991 (SW no. 4); Chapter of 2009 (MFL nos. 28ff).

Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

No. 8 of the Fundamental Constitution seems to be there to give a reason, from the beginning of our rule of life, for the *title* of the Congregation seen in no. 1 and for the various references to Mary in the successive numbers.

It begins by referring to a particular form of *filiation* of the Institute itself with Mary since, to her, by congregational tradition, the *foundation* is attributed. Attribution in a moment of intimacy that Claret shared with his missionaries during the Spiritual Exercises that he directed in 1865.³¹

On the other hand, the experience of *Marian affiliation* had particular importance in the spiritual journey and the missionary vocation of our Founder. Numerous passages of the Autobiography testify (nos. 71-72, 76), but in a particular way, no. 270, addressing himself to Mary, says to her: "You are well aware that I am your son and minister, formed in the forge of your mercy and love." This Marian dimension is the experience that Claret wants to share with the members of his Congregation when, in *Aut* 488, he speaks of the "plan to form a congregation of priests who *would both be* and be called Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Therefore, the Congregation has *Mary as Patroness* under the title of her Immaculate Heart. We *venerate her* with love and filial trust. That is why we *give ourselves* to her, on the one hand, to be configured to Christ her Son and, on the other hand, to carry out the apostolic mission, imbuing it with the cordiality and maternal solicitude that she contributes to the work of Jesus.

In this way, the Constitutions outline the fundamental elements of the *Marian spirituality* of the Claretian, which is rooted in and expressed with the same traits of Jesus: filiation and mission, intimacy and outward projection, intense love, and unconditional dedication.

The definition of the Missionary and the metaphor of fire

The post-conciliar editions of the Constitutions have included, since 1971, the *Definition of the Missionary*: a very personal text that Claret had written before writing his Autobiography. It had an autonomous circulation in the Congregation through the "little paper" sent by Claret

³¹ Cf. CCTT, p. 602.

to Fr. Xifre to share with the Missionaries.³² According to the testimony of Fr. Clotet, during the Exercises of the foundation, the Father Founder had spoken to his confreres about "what they had to be, with these very words."³³

The General Chapter of 2009 proposed "focusing on the theme of *Claretian identity*" but did not opt for a philosophical definition. It preferred that "little paper" of Claret. The most personal and profound experiences are often defined and transmitted through metaphorical and symbolic language. Glossing an expression of this Chapter, it is worth saying that this definition places us in a *theological and mystical perspective* of Claret's vocation and our vocation.³⁴

In the definition of a Missionary, the repeated use of verbs related to fire is striking: *to burn, to scorch, to ignite...* It is about the "*fire of divine love*," as is stated there. This fire and love are the central point here and explain everything. It is a mystical experience: the experience of a relationship with what transcends the intimate communion with people and God through personal surrender. No experience is as fulfilling and transforming of the person as this going out of oneself, of being transformed by this fire and giving one's life for this love, just as the Lord Jesus.

The Founder had given the "little paper" sent to the Missionaries titled "Reminder that Anthony Mary Claret often makes to himself."³⁵ It was a memorial for him. Moreover, it is not difficult to verify, both in the Autobiography and other writings, the power and centrality of the theme of love and apostolic zeal in his life. It may also be helpful for us to review and recall Chapter 30, [no. 438], of the second part of the Autobiography, which begins by saying that "the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most of all is love," which he then illustrates with comparisons and examples. We have already mentioned the allegory of the *forge* (*Aut* 270, 342) and many other places in the same Autobiography (439, 440) and other Claretian writings that can remind us of this indispensable vocational key.³⁶

³² Cf. Carta al P. Xifre (20 de agosto de 1861), in *Cartas Selectas* (ed. BAC), pp. 151-153. As far as we know, the text of the Definition had its first printed publication in Father Vallier's book *Prácticas espirituales* (1888).

³³ Cf. J. Clotet, *Vida edificante del P. Claret, Misionero y Fundador*, p. 253 (ed. J. Bermejo, Madrid 2000).

³⁴ Cf. the document *Men on Fire with Love*, no. 54.

³⁵ Cf. AW, 278.

³⁶ See, for example in SSW, *The Ascetic Letter*, p. 159; *Selfishness Overcome*, p. 493; *The Virgin, the Eucharist, and Charity: Allocution to the Vincentian Conferences*, pp. 572 and 576.

V. OUR MISSIONARY COMMUNITY

The early Constitutions contained a chapter (XI of the second part) entitled *De ordine domestico*, which dealt with the community from a regulatory, organizational perspective. On the other hand, chapter IX of the same second part, *De caritate fraterna*, also appeared in that text, which gave the spiritual profile and the soul of living together in a community.

After the Special Chapter of 1967, the matter that interests us here was proposed in two chapters of the first part: *Community of Life* and *Fraternal Charity*. Since 1979, these two chapters have been merged into *The Missionary Community*, which appears as chapter 1 of part 1. On this theme, other complementary places exist in the same constitutional text, such as chapter 15 (part three).

The *new location* of this theme, relevant by all means, is obvious. Our time's cultural background, marked by socialization, is a true sign of the times and an expression of John XXIII, which has played a significant role. Moreover, one can speak of the ecclesial consciousness that emerged during Vatican II: the Church as the people of God, the Church as communion. This followed the charismatic reading that the Congregation made of our vocation, a significant reality and servant of this communion and its salvific dynamism. This explains why the language and focus used tend to be more closely inspired by the Word of God, especially the New Testament.

On the other hand, this is an inseparable reality of the missionary perspective, the other defining feature of our vocational profile. In this context, we are interested in approaching the inspirational keys, which the Constitutions use when proposing Chapter 1 of the first part, and, in general, this theme.

Our community is understood as a gift

Let us now consider numbers 4, 10, 14, and 17 of the Constitutions in a particular way.

Our community is a grace of God insofar as its participation in the way of being most co-natural to God manifested in the economy of salvation. The post-synodal document on Consecrated Life speaks of it as a *theological space*, "a human community in which the Trinity dwells."³⁷ The latter "extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons." Consecrated life thus becomes a "*confessio Trinitatis*."

The community understands itself within the new creation, the *new promise* constitutive of the new People, won over by the blood of Christ. This awareness happens amid people thanks to the Holy Spirit, who pours charity into our hearts. It is not a utopia or pipe dream but a historical experience.

The community is a *messianic gift*, scrutinized in the Old Testament and anticipated in the communities of prophets, Anawim, Qumran, the "rest"... Then, Jesus introduced it when he called the Twelve "to be with him:" a sign, anticipation, and awareness of the People of God. Hence, the community of Jesus with the Twelve and the community encountered in the Acts of the Apostles has been a constant point of reference for all in the historical models of the evangelical community. Like the former, the consecrated community must be understood as a salvific gift for the world's people to transform human relationships (VC no. 41), thus contributing to a new evangelization (ibid. no. 45).

In an evangelical community, God's gifts are:

- the neighbor, *the image of God* (Const. 15), which calls for discovering and bringing to the fore their qualities: to encourage them to express themselves freely (17) and to acquire personal maturity in the community (12).

- being together: in *family life* (11), which, according to Claret, is the prevention of evils and stimulus for good,³⁸ at the same time as a continuous enrichment through mutual communication (12): the gift of our vocation is in reality "con-vocation."

- The outpouring of many and varied gifts in the brothers through the work of the Holy Spirit, for common use (17): above all that of charity (10). Keep in mind St. Paul 1Cor 12. It is important not to hinder the surprise that, through these gifts, each individual is in the community (17). It is a matter worth keeping in mind when it comes to discerning issues such as small communities, homogenous communities, etc.³⁹

³⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata* (VC), nos. 41 and 42.

³⁸ Cf. Secular Clergy Living in Community, in SSW, p. 379-384.

³⁹ Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio*, no. 40; also CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community* (VFC), 1994, no. 64. One can appreciate the possible positive aspects of these communities, especially in relation to the apostolic

It is a fraternity

In Chapter I, the Constitutions use the expression *frater* or derivatives eleven times. This expression should be taken in the strict sense since it appears frequently in the Gospel and is a key element in Jesus' proposal of the Kingdom.

a) In the *Bible*, this concept is used concretely (brother), never as an abstraction (fraternity). It is like something known, which does not need to be explained; instead, it serves to explain many things. It is used in many ways: in the strict sense (the children of the same father or mother), relatives, members of the same tribe, all the descendants of Abraham, and Israel's allies. In any case, the Old Testament emphasizes a link (through the same origin, the same promises, and solidarity) and marks a barrier. Both the link and the barrier are of the flesh.

In the New Testament, starting from the paternity of God, this spiritual proposal is made: he is a brother who is born of God and has heard his Word; he has the same Father as the firstborn Jesus, and who is in need. In addition, here we can identify an origin (the Father of heaven, not carnal), a destiny-promise (conformation to Christ, acquisition of the freedom of the children of God), a solidarity of people, where all have equal dignity. Moreover, there are no barriers.

b) *Our fraternity* is understood with this horizon without barriers: as a summary, it signifies it and is at its service. It is the proposal of solidarity that knows no distinctions of flesh and blood: "with any of our brothers whose origins, age, cultural background, or opinions differ from our own..." (Const no. 17).

It becomes concrete through the *gracious* experience of our identical origin, that is, 'our common vocation': common with all the members of the Institute. Hence, our primary attachment is to the Congregation (no. 11), with the consequent availability.

This community is animated by shared purposes, which, for the glory of God, unite us in solidarity: the sanctification of the members and salvation of the brothers (no. 2). On the other hand, it calls for particular expressions when we are in the presence of needy brothers and sisters, such as the elderly and the sick (no. 18).

The community is built up by exercising all the virtues (cf. 1Cor 13) (Const nos.15-16). In addition, with the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-24: love-agape, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control...). Likewise, the Constitutions

work, as well as the disadvantages of homogeneity in the choice, which would entail an inevitable impoverishment of the witness and the sign expected of the evangelical community.

recognize the constructive role of genuine communication among community members while cautioning against language ambiguities (nos. 16-17). Genuine communication must be personalized, not just institutional or out of a sense of duty. The same applies to responsible participation in governance (no. 12).

Further, the Constitutions will tell us that the fraternal community is built with the *Eucharist and the Word* (no. 34), which actualize the gift, rebuilding and strengthening our bonds starting from the Lord Jesus, the center of our fraternity. There is also the place of community prayer (no. 37), which refreshes daily life, the indispensable theological space of this form of life.

It is in mission

In Chapter I of the Constitutions, one cannot but notice the presence of the category *mission* and its various expressions: missionary community, missionary life, ministry of the Word, service to the Church and the world, service to the Gospel... This category is a substantial element in the inspiration and configuration of our form of community life.

a) First, it is good to remember the diversity of perspectives from which coenobitic or community life has been approached in history. J. M. Lozano's reading of this can be useful.⁴⁰

- From the desire to live the Gospel integrally and radically. For this reason, in Basilian spirituality, it is necessary to separate oneself from the world and to link oneself as brothers with those who share the same purpose. For Francis of Assisi and his followers, evangelical radicalism has much to do with poverty, which is what guarantees fraternal coexistence and the sharing of everything. Horizontal relationships of fraternity and littleness (*minoridad*) are significant here.

- The Augustinian ideal of life seeks mainly fraternal communion in the community, the great result of the Resurrection and Pentecost, in which the principal mandate of Jesus, the heart of the Gospel, is found. Communion in exercise is the community, where charity (sharing of spiritual goods) and poverty (sharing, understanding, of material goods) rule.

- The Benedictine community is considered a school of divine service, animated "under a rule and an Abbot." It is thus a pedagogical environment for the service of God. The paternal role of the Abbot, who is the teacher and spiritual guide of the monks and is perceived as a

⁴⁰ See *La sequela di Cristo*, ed. Ancora (Milan 1981), pp. 228-234.

vital unifying element of the community, is particularly emphasized. The monk lives in obedience with a filial and disciplinarian attitude but also understands that the brother's need is an evangelical mandate for him.

- From the time of the mendicants, mainly Dominicans, apostolic service would begin to play an essential role in the inspiration of community life. *Order founded to preach the Gospel* (O.P.); *Apostolic Body* (S.I.). It is a perspective that modifies the meaning of domestic life and the relationship with the external world, formation, etc.

All this induces us to think of the religious community as an *evangelical reality* linked to the events of the Kingdom of God in the most diverse situations, in which it always makes explicit those relationships that constitute it more intimately. This reality has allowed some theologians to place this community among the evangelical councils as a significant path to the values of the Kingdom.

b) In the origin of the *Claretian community*, one cannot but recognize the "collaboration in the ministry of the Word" (Const no. 13). The risen Christ, in whose faith and in whose power the believing community is built, in our community, he is made present above all by the command "go into the whole world..." the constitutive experience of the apostle (cf. *ibid.* no. 3). Claret experienced it in this way, understanding that these words were addressed to him, so that he could affirm that his spirit was for the whole world, at the same time that he became aware that he had to carry out this tremendous *work with others*.⁴¹

- Hence, the characterization of our community:

- It positively incorporates external activity. It is necessary to remember the figure of the *beehive*, with which Claret identifies the missionary community of Santiago de Cuba (cf. *Aut* 608). There is a movement of mutual dependence and nourishment between the internal and external aspects of this form of life.

- It integrates diverse ways of realizing "collaboration" (Const. no. 13), the diversity of gifts for evangelization (no. 17), and the work in apostolic teams (no. 13).

- It inserts itself in particular Churches and diverse situations (no. 14) with organizational plasticity, e.g., through large and "small" communities, community groups, etc.

- Hence, also the role that community animation should have among us:

⁴¹ Cf. Letter to the Apostolic Nuncio of Spain], August 12, 1849, in SL, p. 179.

- keeping active, with fidelity and method, the community instances (nos. 12, 54, 110), especially concerning the "community project" in all its aspects.

- Giving prominence to the community as an instance of discernment and feedback (no. 54).

- Promoting solidarity among all the members in the spirit of no. 13, with the awareness that, already from the community itself, the mission is shared.

- Not losing sight of the challenge of universality, continually present in our missionary service (no. 11).

From the perspective of this communitarian conception, it is helpful to read the post-Synodal document *Vita Consecrata*, nos. 51-56. Here is a profile of what is called a "spirituality of communion," proposing simultaneously the different spheres in which this should be manifested today. This profile includes the Church at its various levels and the world of people of goodwill who are producers of positive initiatives. The document has also spoken of the need for a "new creativity of charity," which will make communities true witnesses of the Gospel and centers of missionary animation.⁴²

⁴² Cf. CICLSAL, *Starting afresh from Christ*, no. 33, 36 (Rome 2002).

VI. CHASTITY FOR THE KINGDOM

After giving us the design of our missionary community, our Constitutions propose the subject matter of the evangelical counsels, dedicating a separate chapter to each of them. The General Chapter of 1979, after considering the proposal to unify the three themes in the same chapter, preferred to maintain their treatment in a separate form, as in the old text. It decided to modify that text's order, adopting the order used by Vatican II in *Perfectae Caritatis*, nos. 12-14.

Father Founder did not speak of the three counsels but only of chastity in the Exercises of the foundation. In the Exercises, he preached to the Missionaries in 1865, dedicating a talk to each of them.⁴³ It is a demonstration that, under the guidance of the Founder, the initial group was taking steps towards a more radical form of consecration.

The renewed text has been enriched with an integral use of the inspirational keys that influenced our Founder's experience and are most significant for missionary spirituality in our time. The weaving of these three chapters is developed, in fact, with the following coordinates: a) starting with Jesus, his word, and his life; b) for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven; c) with apostolic projection; d) as living in community; e) with evangelical asceticism.

The experience of Jesus

The Constitutions propose chastity as an *imitation of Jesus Christ* (no. 20). Unlike the other evangelical counsels, the earlier text did not allude to the imitation of Christ here. Using the part now introduced, the renewed text wanted to clarify that our chastity is for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and that it is understood starting from the very life of Jesus and his teaching.

⁴³ Cf. CCTT, pp. 571-772 y 590-91. 596-601.

What does this historical option of Jesus mean? Undoubtedly, it concerns the path of kenosis that Jesus wanted to follow in his earthly existential life. The condition of the eunuch (or, in general, that of the person unable to fulfill himself sexually) entailed frustration and marginality, with no lesser force than the condition of the poor (deprived of goods) and the enslaved person (deprived of freedom). Jesus starts his historical path from [the perspective of the] last ones.

In any case, chastity for Jesus - and that of his disciples - is not imposed. Moreover, without excluding that others may opt for it for various reasons, Jesus chooses it and proposes it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, where there is no room for contempt or absolutism of the sexual reality of the human person.

Living and proposing celibacy for the sake of *the Kingdom of heaven*, Jesus chose that way of relational life that expresses the decisive and non-transitory values of this Kingdom, which are *filial and fraternal relationships*.⁴⁴ On the one hand, what fulfills Jesus is to be with an undivided heart in the things of his Father (Lk 2:49: quote in Const. no. 3): a thought that, applying it to the disciple, Paul would clarify this in 1Cor 7:32, 35. On the other hand, according to the Gospel (cf. Mt 12:50; 23:8-9; Lk 8:21), the definitive characteristic of the Kingdom is outlined as the brotherhood of humanity in Jesus, which inspires a sense of communion and equal dignity of persons and as such suggests the most genuine meaning of every other way of relationship, including the marital and the family. "The chastity we profess fosters a new kind of fraternal communion in Christ; it builds up a community based neither on blood nor on carnal desire, but on the will of God" (Const. no. 21).

The power of the Risen One in our frailty

The Constitutions say (no. 20) that "the Lord Jesus manifests the power of his glory in the frailty of our flesh by the chastity we profess and live." This is a paschal reality, an expression of the Lordship of the Risen One on the frailty of the human condition. In this way, our frailty proclaims the glory of the Risen One by manifesting a very concrete embodiment of his life-giving power. The flesh is clothed with the Spirit.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Cf. M. Rondet, art *Renouvellement theologique*, in P. Valadier, M. Rondet, Th. Matura, *Fondement evangelique des vœux et anthropologie moderne* (Paris, Centre Sevres, 1980), p. 42.

⁴⁵ According to VC, no. 24, consecrated life has a "paschal dimension."

Starting from this conviction, the Constitutions introduce in summary form the features of prophetic and missionary novelty expressed by living consecrated chastity.

a) First of all, its *eschatological sense* is made explicit insofar as this witness to the power of the Risen One encourages "in everyone the experience of the life to come" (no. 20). As suggested by the texts of Matthew 19:29 and Luke 20:35-38, cited in the footnote, celibacy for the Kingdom orients the vision of the believer towards the end of time, in which the differences between *free man-slave, man-woman*, etc., will be superseded: all will be one in Christ (cf. Col 3:11). It is, therefore, a proclamation that generates a definite hope, capable of sustaining from now on in those who have goodwill and a commitment to the values of fraternity and genuine love, as Vatican II taught in *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

b) Chastity, the work of the power of the Risen One, "strengthens us to struggle in our apostolic ministry against the powers of evil" (Const no. 21). It is about "our struggle" of which St. Paul speaks from his perspective as an Apostle in Eph 6:12: a passage cited here in the footnote and which we know as one of the essential vocational texts for our Founder, who explicitly relates it to his victory over the temptations against chastity in his student years.⁴⁶ The missionary is called and strengthened for this struggle because his fight is not against persons but against mentalities and environmental forces that infect the moral sense of coexistence. His own experience of celibate life is for the missionary himself and the believing community, verification of the power of Jesus that makes itself felt in the actuality of salvation.

c) Celibacy is also a victory of the power of the Risen One insofar as it gives rise to an unexpected capacity of personalized love for God and for all fellow men and women and generates *liberty and spiritual fruitfulness* (Const. no. 21). By freeing the missionary both from a marital bond and from the bonds of sterile solitude, it makes him a man for others, for the community, for those deprived of affection and solidarity. It drives him to develop a love without boundaries, with a self-giving that does not exclude martyrdom. His active service, far from being a stifling agitation of cordiality, is a joyful praxis that testifies to the power of God's love.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Cf. *Aut* 101 and ACW pp. 587-592.

⁴⁷ Cf. VC, nos. 88 and 24.

Let us love chastity as a gift of God.

In conformity with the teachings of the Council (PC 12), in this very brief Chapter II of the Constitutions, chastity is referred to three times as a gift (nos. 20 and 22). As a consequence of what has been said above, we can affirm that it is a messianic gift introduced by the Lord Jesus. It is not only a hidden treasure for each one of those called but also the patrimony of the New Alliance and the wealth of the new People of God.

a) The concrete content of this gift is, as we have just seen, the freedom of the one sent and of his ministry, as well as the spiritual fruitfulness to which we have alluded and which generates dedication to the forgotten and enlarges the family of God. As the Constitutions say (no. 21), chastity is a gift for the building up of the community, and it is so not only within the walls of the religious house but also in the whole body of the Church and of society in general. As VC no. 80 suggests, this life option is presented as a *provocation* aimed at transforming in an evangelical sense certain customs and deviations rooted in the most diverse social and cultural environments of the world.⁴⁸

b) Chastity, a freely assumed commitment and a gift, is not *lived in fullness* if it is not loved, appreciated, experienced, and cultivated with intimate joy, as the Constitutions tell us (no. 22).

On the other hand, we cannot hide from ourselves that, like all the realities of the Kingdom in the present *kairos* of salvation, chastity is also lived in the Spirit of the cross of Christ and "imposes some renunciations on us." It is only in this Spirit that this gift is cultivated and developed. Hence, going beyond the affirmations of principle (which could seem idealizations or sublimations), our Rule of Life proposes here, in a very brief form, some ascetic guidelines for the chastity of the missionary. It is the proposal of traditional means whose validity continues to be confirmed by daily experience. In the first place, the *trusting supplication*, like nothing else, expresses the awareness that we are before grace and that we appreciate it uniquely and ask for it from the One who can give it to us and preserve it. At the same time, in *the light of the Word*, we seek to *know ourselves* intimately to identify what is harmful to us and what we must avoid. Knowing that action and communication are the natural ambit of our vocational journey, we cannot look for isolation as a remedy to our temptations; it corresponds to *pastoral prudence*, which is the ability to discern and realize what truly makes our adhesion

⁴⁸ One cannot but perceive in the post-synodal document *Vita Consecrata* a kind of extroversion, which seeks to imprint on consecrated life, highlighting the projection that it has outward from itself toward the Church and the world, from its intimate condition of *confessio*, *signum*, and *servitium*. In this sense, it is a gift for the Church and humanity.

to the Gospel. In addition, there is no doubt that this finds opportunities and solid certainties in *living in the community*, as the Council already recalled (cf. PC 12). Moreover, this is the space where fraternal relationships fulfill and bring people to maturity.

VII. THE POVERTY OF THE MISSIONARY

The renewed Constitutions deal with poverty in Chapter III, which consists of five numbers. In the old text, this chapter preceded that of chastity and consisted of only three numbers. As in the renewed text, the previous chapter began with "imitating Jesus Christ": this was the basis proposed to us for opting, as in the other vows, for a perfect degree of poverty.⁴⁹ We cannot forget the importance of Jesus' virtues in Claret's spiritual journey: these were his concrete sources of inspiration. They were particularly so in his living of poverty.⁵⁰

The text preceding the Council did not abound in other motivations. Ascetic accents prevailed above all, reflecting the intense austerity with which our Founder lived poverty, guided by the strictest models of the past. These contained, for example, the guideline of not accepting money as alms for the sacred ministry and the prohibition of accumulating interest in patrimonial goods.⁵¹

In approaching this subject, it is necessary, first, to recognize its vastness, which makes it advisable to focus the present commentary on the central and most significant points in the spiritual journey of the Claretian.

The perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven

In no. 23, it begins by placing before our eyes the three major paradigms that present and introduce the Kingdom: *Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles*. The language of imitation, of taking them as examples, is used for all three. There is a historical path of poverty, which is the one

⁴⁹ Cf. Constitutions of 1865, I, no. 63 (in CCTT p. 421).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Aut* 357-371; see The Well-instructed Seminarian, in SSW, pp. 279ff; also the Spiritual Exercises preached to the Missionaries in 1865, in CCTT p. 596.

⁵¹ Cf. Constitutions, ed. 1924, II, 16 and I, 81.

that a Claretian has to walk. As we have already recalled, we are interested in the *poverty of Jesus*: that which he lived and that which his disciples lived.

a) Poverty *is a reality* that neither Jesus nor the Gospel invented. It is in the world: it is concretely in many men and women as an unwanted evil, a misfortune in some cases, and many others because of selfishness and effective social marginalization.

By the way, the Gospels do not use the abstract word *poverty*. They refer more concretely to *poor people*.⁵² This condition of many people is the one that Jesus freely assumes, with a transparent purpose: to divest himself to share and to be enriched by their poverty (2Cor 8:9). In this way, he establishes what has been called an unexpected "theology of sharing," which can only be understood based on praxis. Jesus' command to his followers was, "you have received freely, give freely" (Mt 10:8). Claret put this in the Constitutions of 1857.⁵³

This dynamism of exchange touches St. Paul: "we are considered poor, though we enrich many" (ibid. 6:10). In this characteristic movement of the *kenosis* that is at work for salvation. The voluntary poverty of Jesus redeems from imposed poverty and rebels against it, which is unacceptable and opposed to God's plan.

The Constitutions (no. 23) rightly correlate Jesus' dedication to the proclamation of the Good News with the fact that "the Son of Man does not have a place to lay his head" (Lk. 9:58): a text that greatly influenced the vocation of our Founder.⁵⁴ Like Claret (*Aut* 363), the Constitutions take into account how Mary and the Apostles dealt with these things for Kingdom. That is why we have the quote of the texts of St. Luke 1:48-55 (the Magnificat) and 5:11 (the four calls to leave everything to follow Jesus).

In order to give a concrete grounding to our experience of poverty today, it is good, despite the distance of years, to focus on the discernment that Claret made in his time in *Aut* 357-359. Also, today, evangelical poverty must be a prophecy and a denunciation insofar as it shows that a form of exchange and sharing is already possible and is an anticipatory reminder of the values of the Kingdom of God (cf. Const. no. 23).

⁵² An exception to this is, to a certain extent, in the New Testament, the passages of 2 Cor 8:2-9 and Rev 2:9.

⁵³ Cf. no. 69 (CCTT p. 211).

⁵⁴ See in ACW, pp. 597 and 617, for Claret's two transcriptions of this text when referring to his vocational journey.

The radical nature of the renunciations proposed in nos. 26 and 27 gives special significance and prophetic force to the experience of poverty, which is of no minor consequence for those who have a genuine missionary vocation. This prophetic force is emphasized in the post-Synodal document *Vita Consecrata* no. 89.

b) The *option for the poor*, made explicit by the Congregation in MCT, no. 173, as an option "for an evangelization from the perspective of the poor and needy," does not appear with a similar formula in the renewed Constitutions.⁵⁵ Its inclusion in a more explicit form would undoubtedly have been very positive. However, what is said in Const. no. 24 is not without relevance in this sense: "We seek above all else the Kingdom of God, which belongs to the poor." Here, Mt 6:33 and 5:6 are cited in the footnotes. This means that our option is expressed primarily as a search for the Kingdom of God that is inseparable from the poor, to whom it belongs. At its root, this is not a political or class option, even though it must inevitably have political implications. Power and wealth do not ensure the change we seek, and they do not, by the same token, deserve our confidence (cf. Const. no. 24).

The Kingdom of God introduces us to a *Eucharistic* attitude towards things, which are gifts of God.⁵⁶ It is an attitude that dismantles the possessive and exploitative spirit that some people use for their affirmation over others. The recovery of this sense of trusteeship gives origin to the liberating gesture of sharing. Moreover, in this way, poverty is no longer a handicap that excludes but a door that opens the heart to the brothers [and sisters] and affirms solidarity.

Poverty and fraternity

"Voluntary poverty builds up the fraternal community that is one in heart and mind," says the Constitution, no. 24. Through this voluntary poverty, goods enter into the dynamism of sharing and communion in fraternity: the opposite of what happens when the law by which they are handled is one of partition and appropriation.

Starting from the experience of the community in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:44-47 and 4:34-37), we must understand evangelical poverty as a *communal sharing* in favor of the

⁵⁵ In any case, it should be remembered that the same General Chapter of 1979 undertook the definitive revision of the Constitutions and issued the document *The Mission of the Claretian Today* (MCT).

⁵⁶ Rondet, art. cited above, p. 44.

most needy.⁵⁷ The Gospel invites us to think of the multitudinously poor human community: "you will always have the poor among you" (Mt 26:11). In that perspective, as a sign that makes this reality concrete and explicit, is the fraternal community of consecrated persons to be understood. On the one hand, according to VC no. 87, this experience of poverty is a *spiritual therapy* for the unlimited possessive desires of the man and woman of our time. On the other hand, it must be seen that the things and values of the consecrated community (qualities of its members, activities, spaces, resources...) are *at the service* of people experiencing poverty and that the condition of work, a law common to all, is shared with them (cf. Const. nos. 24 and 26).

This is what inspired some of the guidelines of the General Chapters of the period of renewal on sharing the conditions of life of people experiencing poverty and on incorporating communities into these populations.⁵⁸ The Constitutions abound in Chapter III in practical elements by which persons and communities are to make this poverty generate fraternity.

Our poverty is apostolic

The strength of this statement (Const. no. 25), which is corroborated by two gospel quotations (Mt 10:7-10; Mk 6:7-9), "lies in the conviction that the poverty of Jesus and the Apostles is the most adequate to announce with credibility the coming of the Kingdom of God."⁵⁹ This is what the Claretian lives most through his charism, without excluding that there are other *Christian* dimensions of poverty (e.g., mystical, ecological, simply communitarian...).

a) It is significant that an analysis of reality and his discernment, *in the light of his apostolic vocation*, led Claret to his choice for radical poverty. Of particular interest is what we read in no. 359 of the Autobiography: "I believed that this dreadful giant, which worldlings call all-powerful, had to be confronted with the holy virtue of poverty. So, wherever I encountered greed, I countered it with poverty. I had nothing, wanted nothing, and refused everything."

⁵⁷ This concept appears several times in writings of apostolic times; see, for example, *Didache* IV, 8.

⁵⁸ See MCT nos. 176 and 184; CPR nos. 87 and 65; SP no. 20.

⁵⁹ Cf. OPML, p. 378.

Jesus' command to send out the twelve expressed nothing else (Lk 9:3; Mt 10:9; Mk 6:8). It is about something that has to do with the Good News of the Kingdom of God and makes it understandable and identifiable by contrast with any other existing form of kingdoms in this world. It marks a clear contrast with the mechanisms of greed that arms human power. On the other hand, Jesus' command indicates that the *service of the word* is fruitless without signs. Teaching in the Constitutions (no. 25) understands poverty as "both a personal and communal sign of the Gospel." An important part of this sign is that the service of the Word should not be commercialized. "We should never undertake sacred ministries for the sake of gain " (no. 26), but because of their necessity in and of themselves.

b) Our Constitutions take it for granted that our apostolic works require *that goods be* available (no. 26) and managed. Both the reason and the measure of this is that they are "at the disposal of others:" and that they serve the apostolic end. The fundamental criterion, therefore, for their possession and management is that *we are administrators of these goods*: they are things that ultimately do not belong to us, nor are they for our benefit.

It is well known that this criterion is neither easy nor automatically operative in certain individuals and communities. Hence, the urgency of always active and firm discernment of the "so much—how much," which removes from persons and works the will of accumulation and the possessive spirit. Voluntary poverty is like a path that, in the concrete situations and operative complexity of the mission, must be created every day starting from the best gospel resources of persons and communities.

c) Undoubtedly, when *one is among people experiencing poverty* and chooses to be with them, the Word of God, which is addressed to them in a privileged way, is received in its best context, with new clarity and strength, more clearly, and with more harmony.

From this, it also arises that when poverty is experienced in daily life, it can be a source of joy (no. 26), which must be vocationally fulfilling for the missionary. It is the joy of being completely devoted to searching for the Kingdom of God, with the filial and unreserved dedication that Jesus himself had for this project, feeling compensated by the love and unfailing providence of the Father. It is the *perfect joy* of Francis of Assisi. It is the contentment and joy of Claret "*with my most beloved poverty*" (Aut 363).

VIII. TO BE SENT IN OBEDIENCE

Perhaps to emphasize the importance of obedience in the life of the missionary, the earlier Constitutions (1857) gave it first place among the evangelical counsels.⁶⁰ It is well known that, in a particular medieval tradition, "being admitted to obedience" signified the totality of the life project proposed to the religious by the Rule.⁶¹

Our renewed Constitutions, by proposing obedience in third place among the counsels, adopt the order followed by Vatican II in PC 12-14: an order that probably takes its cue from the greater or lesser explicitness with which the proposal of these life options appears in the Gospels.

For the rest, in the development of the theme, the Constitutions follow a scheme similar to that observed in the two previous chapters, taking care that the Christological meaning of obedience, its ecclesial and communitarian profile also appear here, and its missionary dimension. It should be noted that the explicit canonical dimensions of this vow is not lacking here (no. 28).⁶²

Perspective of the plan of salvation

Also, here, the starting point for the exposition of the Constitutions is the *imitation of Christ*, "who was sent to do the will of the Father" (no. 28). From this, obedience is posed in terms of *the filial relationship* with the awareness that this will of the Father is not for subjugation but for blessing-love-salvation. With these contents and attitudes, Jesus embraces

⁶⁰ Cf. CCTT, p. 205.

⁶¹ See J. M. Lozano, *La sequela di Cristo*, pp. 261-262.

⁶² The CICLSAL reviewers set guidelines for the approval of the renewed Constitutions, one of which was to include in the text the canonical concept of each vow.

obedience: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:7). And, likewise, Mary also says: "Let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

In this way, the plan of salvation is introduced in Christ through a free and voluntary choice of his heart as Son, which adopts as its historical place the condition of those who were last, enslaved, or deprived of freedom (cf. Phil 2:7-8). This way is opposed to that which introduced sin and death into the world: "one man's disobedience" (Rom 5:19). Jesus lived his human condition by committing himself in his works to the will of the Father, to his concerns (cf. Lk 2:49). In addition, from this nucleus, he showed his freedom concerning all other things: those with which he freely expressed his solidarity and to those things which he did not make his own: power, possessions, prestige...

Jesus lives this obedience in concrete *deeds and human situations*, even extreme ones, which had to do with the will of God his Father: he obeys "to the point of death and even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). In this action of doing the will of the one who sent Him is his nourishment (cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30). His supreme acts of obedience are his most significant acts of love. In the depths of the heart is the saving power of his gestures. "He learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obeyed him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

How does one actualize and re-present the work of salvation over time if not through obedience? The Constitutions tell us (no. 28) "we are made conformable to Jesus Christ, who for our sake became obedient even to death, death on a cross, and are united in all we do with the saving will of God."

Community perspective

Up to this point, the historical Jesus with whom we follow is obedient to God the Father. This is the great task of the disciple, which is learned in familiarity with Jesus himself (cf. Jn 15:8-11): to carry out the will of the Father.

a) But the obedience of the religious missionary, committed with vows, is obedience to people: concretely to the "lawful superior in those matters that pertain directly or indirectly to

the life of our Institute" (Const. no. 28).⁶³ Of this type of obedience to an Institute, there seems to be no trace in the Gospel or, in general in the New Testament. It does speak of "submission" to civil (Rom 13:1), family (Col 3:18-21), and social authority (Col 2:22-24).

Obedience to the will of God the Father - the Kingdom - is proposed in the New Testament less directly: through ecclesial-community mediation. The will of God that we propose to realize through obedience is not an abstraction or a secret to be discovered; it is the plan already manifested and historically implanted in the people of the New Covenant, which is the community organized based on the values of the Kingdom. There, the Word of God can be heard, and His will recognized. This community is, in fact, the environment in which the Word is proclaimed (cf. Acts 2:42; 4:33), and to those who are to be saved are added (cf. *ibid* 2:47) since they have obeyed the Gospel (cf. 2Th 1:8; 1Pet 1:22), the Word (2Th 3:14).

b) Our community recognizes itself and is recognized by its ecclesial mother: it actualizes and makes visible the community dimension of the Church itself. It wants to make explicit the fraternity and the other values of the Kingdom anticipated by Jesus with the Twelve, with the certainty that therein lies the will of the Father (cf. Jn 17:21-23; Acts 4:32; 1Cor 12:4-31; Eph 4:3-6, 13).

The ecclesial approval of the Institute and its Constitutions guarantees that this community is articulated based on the values of the Kingdom of God and proposes a genuinely evangelical way. In addition, it is there where, to preserve and maintain this articulation, the function of someone called *religious superior* makes sense. According to our Constitutions (no. 30), he visibly expresses the unity of love and the mission of the community. Since obedience is a matter of love, as mentioned above, this person is expected to convey to his brothers the charity with which God loves them (cf. PC no. 14).

The superior is undoubtedly not an oracle: with his faculties and limitations, he is at the service of the plan-project of God who gathers us together. Moreover, along with the other religious's positive acceptance of his role, all participate in the discernment and elaboration of decisions (cf. Const. no. 104). "We seek together to know and do the will of God" (*ibid*. no. 31), with active and responsible obedience (cf. PC no. 14). It is not excluded that this search can involve moments of particular complexity that lead to conscientious objection. The

⁶³ In no. 6, the Constitutions recall that our obedience is also due, in virtue of the vow, to the Roman Pontiff. The affirmation is contained in the Code of Canon Law, c 590.2.

Constitutions (no. 31) do not deny some room for one's position; instead, it offers the proposal of time for dialogue, always with a view to a genuinely Gospel discernment.

Perspective of the mission

Our obedience requires that everything focus on the *community's project* as proposed in the Constitutions. This is what no. 28 says and what we have assumed before the altar with our Formula of Profession (cf. no. 159).

a) Now, the project of a religious community always includes a *particular form of mission* or sending out into the world. The history of consecrated life has shown the great variety of these forms, which some experts have sought to group into categories.⁶⁴

The post-Synodal document *Vita Consecrata* (no. 72) categorically affirms that "mission is essential to every institute," whether it be an active or contemplative life. All institutes carry out evangelization; they are on mission.

b) According to our community project, the Constitutions, our mission is understood as service or *ministry of the Word*, by which "we communicate to people the whole mystery of Christ" (Const. no. 46). This means that this element—this service—refers to the obedience of the Claretian given realizing his missionary condition in the Congregation. He understands mission only in this framework, in the sense of St. Paul: there is no preaching without being sent (cf. Rom 10:15).

To the Claretian, the sobering experience of the Founder is proposed: for the missionary Claret, the *mission-sending exercise of obedience* is an inseparable reality. Thus, referring to the beginning of his missionary activity, he spoke of "the care he took that the superior sent me to preach" (*Aut* 192-198). It is worthwhile to follow the reasoning he makes. He first adduced practical reasons concerning the organization of his work, which remained in the hands of the bishop. Secondly, it serves him as discernment to find the will of God in his activities. This disposition is also how he most resembles Jesus, the prophets, and apostles.⁶⁵ And, finally, taking as a parable about sending out the Gospel accounts of miraculous fishes (cf. Lk 5:4-7;

⁶⁴ See, among others, the attempt of Th. Matura in the article *Les fordements bibliques de la vie religieuse*, in P. Valadier-M.Rondet-Th.Matura, o.c. pp. 65-66.

⁶⁵ In the *Letter to the Missionary Theophilus* (SSW, p. 415), he understands that Jesus makes the apostolic missionary participate in his sending (cf. Jn 20:21). Therein lies the dignity of this vocation.

Jn 21: 4-11), he understands that it is in this way, by being sent out, that the fruit will be guaranteed.

According to the Constitutions (no. 32), obedience guarantees the freedom of the servant of the Word in the face of the range of places and possibilities that may make demands of his service. It is known that this universal openness is an element of vocational fulfillment for the Claretian, and it has to do with his spirituality.

It is good to remember that what Claret lived led him from *ministerial* obedience to an obedience professed *by a religious vow*. The risk and temptation for us today could be to move with an inverse impulse, which would consist of subtracting from obedience precisely in our apostolic actions and works, the field of our mission. To prevent us from this risk, *the community project* must renew the communitarian dynamism of the sending, allowing a more complete, creative, and vital integration of the missionary action of each one of us.

IX. THE PRAYER OF THE APOSTOLIC MAN

Our Constitutions before Vatican II did not have a chapter dedicated to prayer. This dimension of our life was taken care of within the domestic regulations. It was the post-Chapter Commission of 1967 that gave the present Chapter V its structure, in conformity with the criteria outlined by that General Chapter.⁶⁶ Successive redactions would, in turn, take on elements coming not only from the Council but also from other Pontifical documents.⁶⁷

The current text is characterized by a certain complexity of elements that does not facilitate synthesis. However, one can appreciate the way of prayer as experienced by our holy Founder...

Even here, the starting point and inspiration is the paradigm of the *missionary Jesus*, which is proposed to all those who follow the path of the mission for *imitation*. To emphasize this proposal with the message of the Gospel, it speaks (no. 33) of the teaching, the recommendation, and the example of Jesus, who prays without ceasing.

The spirit of prayer

From this evangelical, *unceasing prayer*, Vatican II (VC no. 6) deduced that consecrated persons should cultivate the *spirit of prayer and prayer itself*. In addition to the prayer practices that the Constitutions point out in this chapter, in no. 34 they introduce some interesting suggestions regarding the *spirit of prayer* and, in some way, tell us what it is.

⁶⁶ See the Decree on Religious Life of the XVII General Chapter (1967), nos. 114-115. A history of our practices of piety can be found in J.M. Lozano, *Mision y espiritu del Claretiano en la Iglesia*, Rome 1967, pp. 397ff. See *The Claretians. Their Mission and Spirit in the Church*, translated by J. Daries, Claretian Publications, Chicago, 1980, pp. 158ff. See also, *Mystic and Man of Action*, translated by J. Daries, Chicago, Claretian Pub. 1977.

⁶⁷ For example, from the Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI *Evangelica testificatio* (June 29, 1971).

It is a *harmony* with the Spirit (Spirit of Jesus) who dwells in our hearts, teaching us to address the Father with the same attitudes and feelings as the Son (cf. Rom 8:14-16). It is like an inner cord that, in everything we do, helps us to be in tune with the filial intimacy of the Heart of Jesus, the Heart of the Son, and the One Sent.

To use an expression of the classics, we could speak of *diffused prayer*, in which everything is a propitious occasion for an elevation to God. One prays *for the events* and about them. For this reason, it is very characteristic of the apostolic man, who is constantly involved in salvific events.⁶⁸ Always about these events, the prayer of the apostolic man is an instance of *discernment*, of reading the signs through which it is given to us to seek and find the will of God, which is what we are interested in realizing.

Being daily witnesses of the "*mirabilia Dei*," the missionary feels impelled to *praise and thanksgiving* since he experiences the glory of God and his presence amid the little ones of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 10:21-24; Jn 11:41-42). On the other hand, since he knows the needs and the sins of his brothers and sisters, he cannot but intercede for them with unceasing supplication, just as Jesus did. At the same time, while in his activities, he feels the overwhelming nature of the work of salvation concerning his capacity for action and initiative, he is *invited* to ask continually for that grace of God, which alone will make his ministry fruitful. For this reason, Claret spoke of prayer as the *maximum means* for apostolic work (cf. *Aut* 264) and invited persons, associations, and groups to join in this prayer ministry.

The nuclei of apostolic prayer

This unceasing prayer in the midst of missionary activity is possible starting from a nucleus, like from a vital tree trunk where all these branches find the sap that allows them to flourish and bear fruit. Attempting a pedagogical interpretation of the Constitution, we can say that this tree trunk is the Word of God, the liturgy, and the missionary charism.

a) *The Word of God*

There are many writings in which Claret taught prayer to all kinds of people, proposing to them what it is, why it is necessary, its different contents, its method, and its degrees or talents.

⁶⁸ This is the sense found in many spiritual elevations at the end of the chapters of Claret's Autobiography.

In this, as in other things, Claret has been more a communicator than an innovator, spreading teaching already quite elaborated by previous masters of the spirit. The Ignatian inspiration stands out above all, particularly regarding mental prayer. In addition, it can be said that this is the teaching passed on to the Congregation at that time and is presently in the Constitutions through three well-defined instances: *spiritual reading, meditation, and examination* (no. 37). The present text, in keeping with the personal experience of the Founder, rightly specifies that this spiritual reading should be "especially of the Sacred Books."

Although the constitutional text does not contain an organic proposal, it can articulate scattered elements (especially in nos. 34 and 37). These lacunae allow us to outline a *modality of "lectio divina,"* a prayerful expression that will help the Claretian to place the Word of God as the source of his spirituality, following the Founder's way.⁶⁹

The first step, *reading*, implies direct contact with the Bible, done with a religious attitude, seeking to understand the text. It is not a scientific study of what has been read. What the ancients called "studiositas" [short studies], a careful dedication and interior listening to grasp *what the text says*, is to be expected.

Meditation, the second step, starts from the conviction that what is read is a personal word that enlightens, questions, consoles, and convinces. It has a message for those who have approached it. It asks for a reflection applied to one's own present, perhaps with the help of the imagination (composition of place and other ways of feeling involved), as St. Ignatius of Loyola, for example, advised.⁷⁰ It is there that the Word while shedding light on the good things that the Lord makes us experience and recognize daily, helps us discover our failings: this is the most appropriate place for personal *examination*, which, in this context, ceases to seem self-finalized and negative. In connection with this second step, the Constitutions also introduce the *shared reflection* (no. 34), which today has so much application in moments of community prayer based on the Word.

The third moment is *prayer*. In the classical approach to *Lectio divina*,⁷¹ prayer here means our response to the Word that is read and meditated upon as a message addressed to us. It

⁶⁹ This is what the XXI General Chapter (1991) seems to point to in SW nos.13-16. On the subject can be usefully read J.M. Palacios, art *Lectura de la Palabra de Dios segun Claret: orientaciones formativas*, in *Studia Claretiana*, vol. XII (Rome 1994), pp. 7-56.

⁷⁰ Father Claret taught the Ignatian method of meditation to the seminarians using the text *Ratio meditandi* of Fr. Roothaan, SJ. See *El Colegio Instruido*, vol I (Barcelona 1860) pp. 61-123.

⁷¹ See in Guigo the Carthusian (12th century), *Scala claustralium*, PL vol 184.

completes the circle of the dialogue with God, where it can give rise to deep and involved attitudes and feelings through praise, thanksgiving, desires, supplication, repentance, and resolutions. It is a personal response to a word that has been addressed to us personally. Also, for this moment of dialogue, we have the instruction that Jesus has left us in the Our Father, a wonderful school of prayer: I learn what to say after listening to and meditating on the Word of God the Father. When meditation is shared, the praxis of the communities has accustomed us to translate this prayer into *celebration*, an intense moment rich in signs, which brings together filial attitudes and regenerates fraternal bonds in the community.

The last step proposed by Guigo the Carthusian is that of *contemplation*. It is like the fruit of all the above, the result of frequent visits to the Word of God. The Constitutions (no. 34) speak of "attentive meditation." This means entering into complete harmony with the Word of God, as if by a co-naturalization in thinking, feeling, announcing, and acting. It is a spirituality of apostolic action manifested in the capacity to discern the will of God among the daily vicissitudes (Ignatius of Loyola) and to perceive in everything that happens the paternal hand of God guiding our steps of mission (Claret). In this way emerges the so-called "*contemplation in mission*:" a particular way of relating to God that involves an intimate and operative implication in the plan which, in its heart, the history of humanity, our brothers and sisters, becomes a way of salvation.

b) The liturgy

The "uniting ourselves to Christ the Lord" (Const. no. 35) in his filial sentiments and attitudes has an eminent realization in the daily celebration of the *Eucharist*. There, the bread of his body and his word are broken for us in an act of communion. Participation at this table conveys to us the movement of Christ's work, making it possible for our lives to become "*a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God*" (1Pet 2:5) for the salvation of all. With the gesture of thanksgiving by Jesus, actualized in the Mass, we give glory to God, the main reason for our life. Breaking bread builds us as a church community profoundly unified in the Lord. It is as if, from this source, all our vocational categories are revived in our daily lives. They are truly alive. And, as the Constitutions suggest to us, we can have an amplifying echo of all this through intimate dialogue with the Lord in moments of visitation and Eucharistic worship throughout our day.

We also know that for our Congregation, one of the important benefits of the Council was to give new meaning and centrality to the *Liturgy of the Hours*, both in the personal and in the

communitarian piety, which previously was expressed in a rather devotional manner. It is to this liturgy that no. 35 of the Constitutions refers, when it calls its members to "faithfully offering daily prayer in the name of the Church." As in the Eucharist, the ministerial dimension of our prayer of the hours, both personal and communal, is made explicit here: our praying is also shared with others in this "*sacrificium laudis*."

More than the norms of the Constitutions or the Directory, it has been the praxis of the communities (with its corresponding schedule) that has been assuming the liturgy of the hours as the normal (and generally the only) way of our common prayer.⁷² It is assumed that something similar happens in the personal sphere, in light of the natural harmony that we have to cultivate daily with the prayerful language of Christ and of the Church,⁷³ pressed at the same time by the anxieties and aspirations of the world that our heart gathers throughout the day.

This same no. 35 urges us to diligently walk the path of the *liturgical year*, which is *the pedagogical proposal* by which the Church introduces us to the contemplation of the integral mystery of Christ: it is a mystery that we could hardly proclaim (cf. no. 46) if it were not occupying us in all our times and interior spaces. From this field, a challenge comes to us by way of the pastoral action with which we are urged to accompany the faithful people in the annual journey of the liturgical calendar: to make the pilgrimage of the believer through hours of sorrow, fall, and conversion, of reconciliation (no. 38) and feast. The liturgy offers us a thousand resources to sanctify our time and to be an invitation to holiness.

c) the missionary charism

The third nucleus and nourishing source of the Claretian's prayer is that mysterious reality that he carries within himself as *grace-enchancement*, from which he gives reason and unity to the things for which he lives. We usually call it our *charism*. Since it is always difficult to conceptualize, we need to identify it through *symbols*, living realities that say in a single stroke thing that would take a long time and be almost impossible to explain.

For us, the greatest symbol is the *Heart of Mary*: a unique place where the Word of God is received, the forge of the most complete response in following Jesus. She is the cenacle where

⁷² Note that our *Directory* (ed. 1999) no. 85, says that prayer in common is to be done "preferably with the recitation of the liturgy of the hours."

⁷³ *The Code of Canon Law* (ed. 1983), c276, 2, 3°, says that "priests and deacons aspiring to the presbyterate are obliged to carry out the liturgy of the hours daily according to the proper and approved liturgical books." This obligation extends to religious, in conformity with their own constitutions (cf. c 1174, 1).

the mission, a work of love, is assumed in apostolic fraternity and set in motion towards all the world's horizons. She is the new Jerusalem (Mary is the Daughter of Zion), where the new life is fully implanted and, as the hope of all people, is already the possessor of salvation.

We would dehumanize our piety if we tried to eliminate from it those elements of *devotion* that familiarize us with our charismatic nucleus, which is also linked to the piety of our people. For this reason, the Constitutions could not but incorporate, in a more incisive way than in the earlier text, the surging presence of Mary (no. 8) and the forms of Marian piety with which the Founder and his brothers nourished their missionary spirituality (nos. 35 and 36).

Together with Mary, there are also other emblematic figures who, since the same missionary passion touched them, are for us inspirers and protectors, our patron saints.

The times of our prayer

The command to "pray without ceasing" (Lk 21:36) bids us incorporate our prayer in our times, with a rhythm (and a certain space) that assures both personal and community continuity: daily times and special times. This command means, above all, to practice prayer as a differentiated act, avoiding the deception that "everything is prayer" in the apostolic life.⁷⁴ "Nor must we lose clarity: action is action; it is not prayer. ... In the same way we do not allow it to be said that "the poor" include the rich whose wealth has not brought them happiness."⁷⁵ Apostolic action has its own value and dignity as a work of theological charity. Prayer is at its service insofar as it keeps this theological fiber alive through moments of explicit and personalized contact with God.

a) "*Daily prayer* remains a primary need both for the community and for the individual Missionaries" (Const. no. 37). This daily rhythm of prayer is marked by this chapter twice in no. 35 and twice in no. 37, including the various forms in which the Claretian expresses his prayer: liturgical, vocal, and mental. Like food for the body, it is not so much in the category of obligations as in the elementary needs of the believer and the apostolic person. In this sense, with unusual force, the General Chapter of 1973 went so far as to say that a situation of habitual

⁷⁴ Cf. CICLSAL, Instruction: Essential Elements of the Church's Teaching on Religious Life (1983), no. 29.

⁷⁵ Casaldaliga-J.M. Vigil, *Spirituality of Liberation*, (Great Britain, Burns and Oats, 1994), p. 122.

neglect in this matter "would end up questioning the very existence of that community or individual as Claretians."⁷⁶

Prayer "must be given a priority place in our life" (Const. no. 37). On a *personal level*, it is inconceivable that a pastoral agent would not dedicate individual time each day to prayer, in addition to praying with his community or team.⁷⁷ That is why our Constitutions give the guideline of a daily hour of mental prayer (ib). For *the community*, translating the constitutional directives, the Directory (no. 85) says that we should dedicate at least half an hour daily to prayer in common. This guideline means that, according to the experience of more than one hundred and fifty years in our missionary fraternity, the Claretian community needs this daily nourishment to remain vitally focused on its mission. It is important that this time be rich in a celebratory quality, in an ecclesial sense, in intimate participation!

b) Along with this daily rhythm, the Constitutions also invite us to take care of the *special moments* of prayer that should not be lacking throughout our year. The guidelines are given to us by the liturgical year (no. 35), particularly in relation to the major celebrations of the mystery of Christ and, on the other hand, to the feasts most closely connected with our charism: the Heart of Mary, our Holy Founder, St. Joseph, the Apostles, etc.⁷⁸

The monthly retreat and the spiritual exercises, to which the Constitutions refer elsewhere (no. 52), should also be considered special prayer times. Both call for strong involvement of each one and the whole community, from the planning and animation of the superiors to safeguarding the most propitious environment for the encounter with God that keeps us on the path of conversion.

In this perspective of perennial conversion, we are invited (no. 38) to "frequently celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation." This word 'celebrate' seems to suggest one of the possible forms of communal celebration. But whichever option is adopted, the sacrament should effectively heal our sins in relation to the religious and ecclesial community, to the world, about which our mission has meaning, and to God, whom we continually call our Father, for ourselves and others.

⁷⁶ See the *Annex* to the document on *Religious Life*, no. 7.

⁷⁷ Cf. Father Casaldaliga, *El vuelo del Quetzal* (Panama, 1988), p. 56.

⁷⁸ Cf. Directory, no. 88. Our Congregations have their own *liturgical calendar*; it is important to take advantage of this to make our spirituality more explicit.

X. CONFORMITY WITH CHRIST

Conformity with Christ is the title of Chapter VI of our Constitutions, which includes several themes of importance in our missionary spirituality: apostolic charity, humility, meekness, *and identification with the patience of Christ. As pointed out in the second part of no. 39, this conformity with Christ presides in reality over the entire journey that, with the commitment of vows, the Claretian has proposed as a life plan. This means that, beyond the order in which these themes are proposed in the Constitutions, conformity with Christ has a very explicit priority in the Claretian experience. Hence, as is done in our General Plan of Formation (nos. 50ff), the theme of evangelical counsels flows from this conformity.*

With this same complexity, our commentary will dedicate two chapters on this subject.

Christ at the center

Christ animates the charismatic experience of the Claretian. As has often been affirmed, Claretian spirituality shows a clear Christological centrality. Already from the fundamental Constitutions, the concept of "our missionary charism in the Church" is developed in no. 2, and the text begins in no. 3 with the presentation of Christ the Son, the one who is sent, as one who presides over, as a historical reference and grace, this experience of life and mission.

The Claretian does not pretend other than to make his own "Jesus' way of life" with the program of virginity, poverty and obedience in his dedication to the proclamation of the Gospel (no. 5). If our vocation is an anointing to evangelize, it is so, insofar, as it is a participation in the fullness of Christ (no. 39): a fullness that must reach the point that it is he who lives in us.

This thought translates *to Claret's experience* and his vision of the consecrated life for the mission. Hence, he had no other pedagogy to initiate in the apostolic life than the presentation of the Christ of the Gospel. This pedagogy does not deal generically with virtues but precisely with the *virtues of Jesus*. Thus, in the *Well-instructed Seminarian*, he will devote ample space

to the "virtues of Jesus that the priest must study and practice."⁷⁹ It is the quotation referring to the spirituality of the Congregation, with which Claret marked our constitutional text already beginning in the editions of 1857 and 1865, where he introduced it himself.⁸⁰ In no other way did he propose these things to the co-founders during the spiritual exercises of the foundation.⁸¹

From this perspective, reading the Autobiography can be very instructive, taking into account, among other passages, nos. 340, 362-3, 372, 387, 425-7, 428-37. The same disposition, demonstrative of his intensely personal relationship with Christ, is perceived in other personal writings of Claret.⁸²

The proposal of the Constitutions

It can be illustrative to verify the *variants of language* with which the renewed constitutional text proposes this theme, expanding in a certain sense what the Founder expressed. The various concepts that were used bring us closer to the same nucleus, suggesting diverse dynamisms and, perhaps, successive moments in the process of identification with Christ.⁸³

a) *Imitation*. It is a perspective that Claret adopts very consciously, as seen in *Aut* 340. It is present in the updated constitutional text, nos. 10, 20, 23, 28, 33, 39, 43, 45.

It has been a classic theme of Christian spirituality since the *Devotio moderna* (XIV and XV centuries). We must consider the book *The Imitation of Christ*, attributed to Thomas à Kempis, and the current renewal that began at that time, whose influence would continue for many years, passing through St. Ignatius of Loyola and reaching our Founder. Although, in recent times, other expressions have gained ground, this one of *imitation*, which recognizes in Jesus the

⁷⁹ See in SSW, pp. 357ff. In this same volume, a similar proposal of Claret can be seen in chapter 5 of the work entitled, *The temple and palace of God our Lord*, in the section on the "imitation of the virtues of Jesus Christ" pp. 194ff.

⁸⁰ See in CCTT, pp. 205ff; 481ff.

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid*, pp. 563ff.

⁸² Some examples can be found in volume II of *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret: Volume II. Autobiographical Writings*. Translated by Joseph C. Daries (Quezon City: Claretian Publications 1995), pp. 184-186, 209-212, 217-219, 235, 259-261.

⁸³ Referring to our Founder's path of life and his expressive variants, J. M. Viñas has suggested that the different words used indicate different moments in the progressive identification with Christ.

splendid model and prototype of the new human being of the Kingdom of God, has not lost its validity. *Vita consecrata* (no. 14) proposed the "icon of the transfigured Christ" as the basis of the disciple's relationship with Christ, from which the disciple places himself at the service of the Kingdom, "leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life."

It is true that the Gospels do not employ imitation language, with the exception of the less direct phrase of Mt 11:29 ("learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"). However, imitation acquires a significant presence elsewhere in the New Testament, mainly in the writings of St. Paul, for example, in 1Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1-2, 1Thess 1:6.

b) *Following*. This formula is usually preferred today rather than in the previous one. In our renewed Constitutions, we find it frequently: thus, in numbers 4 (two times), 9, 23, 43, 52, and 159 (formula of Profession). With a certain ease, it was already found in our Founder, sometimes united to that of imitation, as it happens in the same Definition of the Missionary in a striking phrase (*Aut* no. 494): "his only concern is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind."

It is the one we find most frequently in the Gospels and other texts of the New Testament, placed on the lips of Jesus himself as an invitation (Mt 10:38; 16:24; Mk 8:34; 1Pe 2:21) or as a fact of the disciples' response (Mt 4:20-22; 19:27-28; Mk 1:18-20; Jn 10:4.27; 12:26).

While the idea of imitation runs the risk of proposing the model as an already fixed portrait and of suggesting adherence to it with timeless naivety and attachment to the materiality of his gestures, the following tends to assume more of the historical condition of our life as disciples and of the very existence of Christ on earth. For the same reason, it urges us to discern the path that, in the present circumstances, perhaps unprecedented, the follower of Jesus has to choose and follow. It helps the religious develop a sense of responsibility, leaving behind the propensity to be familiar and always identical (which, perhaps, could be related to the 'state of perfection').

c) *Representation*. It is a term not unknown in Christian spirituality, which our Constitutions use in nos. 3 and 5 are always about the form of Christ's life we profess to make our own. With it, we are making use of an expression used by the Council in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44c. This 'representation' cannot be understood here in a theatrical or fictional sense, nor can it be understood in the sense of a vicarious function or of acting on behalf of another. It means, rather, to represent, to make present and perceptible today before the world and before oneself

the way of life of Jesus. In no. 3 it speaks of "representing in the Church:" thus the value of the contextualization of our way of life (as when we speak of following), with the awareness that it is a question of something essential and rather decisive for the Church in every circumstance, which is the way of life of Jesus.

d) The *conformity*. In our Constitutions and as a synonym of this word, the word *conformation* (used in verbal form in the Latin text) is also used. Both appear in the renewed text; see nos. 8, 28, 34, 39, 41, and 43. This language can also be found about consecrated life in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42d. In all cases, it correlates to the "form of life of Jesus" (see Const. no. 5): this is the *form* that will inform and shape us.

The expression is already found in St. Paul with valuable accents, as can be seen in Rom 8:29 and Gal 4:19. It is particularly significant in the two passages of the letter to the Philippians in which St. Paul uses it: 3:10 and 3:21. In them, it concerns the supreme instances of Christ: his death and his glorification. These two dimensions go beyond the initiative of the disciple to mark the action of Christ himself, which takes place in him.

It is not strange, then, that in harmony with chapter 4 of the second part of the earlier Constitutions, the present text also records here this dimension of "being conformed" through the mystery of the cross, with all that this has of being unmanageable for the initiative of the disciple: something that we will have the opportunity to reflect on in the following chapter of this commentary.

e) *The association*. The conciliar decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 5e used this word actively to refer to the apostolic love by which religious "strive to be associated with the work of redemption." Our renewed Constitutions have taken inspiration in using this expression but emphasizing the Lord's initiative in no. 3b and 43a: places that have to do above all with the work of evangelization that the Lord himself has entrusted to us, without, however, leaving aside fraternal association in the life of the apostolic community.

The disciple's condition

It can be said that, with the variables of language that we have just analyzed, the Constitutions give us the profile of our *condition of discipleship*, of our personal relationship with Jesus. This condition arises from baptismal roots, including the call to grow to an age of fullness in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13.24), each with the strength of one's vocational gift. The

conformity cannot be understood in its full scope without considering the seal, which, rather than in gestures or activities, is translated into a *new nature*: that we have as children of God, with the imprint of Jesus the Son.

From there on, when we speak of discipleship, we, as Claretians, evoke our being "listeners and servants," which generates a permanent attitude of learning and assimilation, especially in Jesus' way of life. This attitude invites us to emphasize the need for a certain contemplative disposition in the life of the Claretian.⁸⁴ A contemplation that, as in Claret, has no other center than the words, the deeds, the signs of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. *Aut* 221-22; 428-37).

All this also proposes the characteristics of the disciple's growth that the Constitutions, through concrete guidelines for the personal and community, want to emphasize. Hence, in recent years, the urgency of ongoing formation in all its aspects has been perceived, together with the sense of personal and community projects, articulated from the central values of our vocation. And since, as in the experience of the Twelve, the following of the Apostles is not done alone, the community has the responsibility to favor the concentration of these dynamics around the person of Jesus.

⁸⁴ On the occasion of the first centenary of the Congregation (1949) and based on the *Litterae gratulatoriae* that the *Dicastery of Religious* had addressed to us, a circular letter of Father General Peter Schweiger spoke of the harmony with which, as an expression of the "biological patrimony" inherited from our Founder, the Claretian should integrate contemplation with action. Cf. *Annales*, vol 30 (1949-50), pp. 289-96.

XI. APOSTOLIC VIRTUES

We continue in Chapter VI of the renewed Constitutions. Within the framework of conformity with Christ, some virtues are proposed that are added to the evangelical counsels, giving a more specific profile of the apostolic man identified with Christ, according to the experience of St. Anthony Mary Claret.

Concretely, following the constitutional text, we refer to four important virtues: apostolic charity, humility, meekness, and acceptance of the cross of Christ. The old Constitutions proposed only a few elements of this set of virtues, which were moreover dispersed in various chapters.⁸⁵ During the General Chapters during the period of renewal, this matter underwent several steps of explanation, redistribution, and synthesis until it reached its current presentation, made more explicit in the Chapter of 1979.

These four features express the spiritual experience of Claret the *Apostolic Missionary*, as recorded in his autobiography. The Constitutional text has taken direct inspiration following the path traced by Vatican II, and thanks to this, it has been able to convey these themes in all their apostolic intensity to us.

As in the Founder, the inspiration is also taken here from *Jesus Christ* in the repeatedly evoked perspective of imitation and conformity, together with the invitation to contemplate him in his mystery and his acts of life and to follow him. We cannot forget that, in the end, the *anointing of the Spirit* conforms us to the Lord (no. 39).

Apostolic charity

"The virtue that the apostolic missionary needs most is love," says Claret in the Autobiography (no. 438) with fiery words worth rereading occasionally. The Constitutions take

⁸⁵ These were mainly the first chapters of the second part, which spoke of guarding the senses, modesty, interior mortification, and humility.

up this key thought here (no. 40). The theme that emerges in the Autobiography is an intimate relationship with the ministry of the Word. It embraces "the love of God and the neighbor."⁸⁶

The earlier Constitutions had a beautiful chapter on fraternal charity, with a fundamental projection towards the interior of the community. However, they did not directly develop the theme of apostolic charity, which the new text has found necessary to propose.

The *opus missionis* has its origin in love: "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16).⁸⁷ And in Jesus himself, it is energized by love: "he loved us and gave himself" (Eph 5:2,25), as the Constitutions point out (no. 40). In turn, this charity is expected from the Apostle ("Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (Jn 21:17) to face the sending, the fatigues, and the cross. This charity is what the pen portrait of the Claretian strongly interprets: a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary "is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set everyone on fire with God's love." (Const. no. 9). We usually call it *apostolic zeal*, not to be confused with the proselytizing spirit, which is nothing more than attracting followers for a group or doctrine. Apostolic zeal is personal love for the God of Jesus and one's neighbor, my brother, and sister, for whom one seeks the good even if it entails one's loss. It is *passionate love* with an ardor that gives no respite and generates tenacity and resilience in the face of difficulties. It is also an *effective love* because, with creativity, it puts all the means for what it intends. We must not forget the presence, constantly questioning, of this theme of "all means possible" both in the earlier Constitutions and the renewed text.

This is the *pastoral charity* that Vatican II and the Synod of 1990 emphasized at the time, addressing the presbyters.⁸⁸ It is the key to ensuring the unity of life of the pastor of souls in the midst of the many activities he is committed to. It is like a passion characterized by its capacity to unify objectives and efforts. It maintains the energy and perspective of the offer of one's actions and one's life. Hence, he is continually nourished by his intimate relationship with the Eucharist. On the other hand, *it is a gift* that, as a theological reality, must be asked for, desired, and sought after -also here- by every means, as suggested by the experience of our Founder (cf. *Aut* 442-7).

⁸⁶ See chapter 30 of Part II in the Autobiography.

⁸⁷ See in this regard the *Letter to the Missionary Theophilus* of Claret, in SSW, p. 415.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 14; and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, no. 23.

Humility

The renewed Constitutions dedicate no. 41 to humility in the framework of conformity with Christ. In the previous Constitutions, humility was mentioned in two places: in the chapter on the Novices (first part, no. 107) and Chapter V of the ascetical part (second part, nos.12-13).

When Claret begins to deal with "the virtues I know are necessary for any missionary to bear fruit." He says, "I knew that if I were to acquire the virtues I needed to become a truly apostolic missionary, I would have to begin with humility" (*Aut* 341). Among "the virtues of Jesus that the priest must study and practice," Claret will emphasize the "humility of Jesus."⁸⁹ He does so emphatically in writings addressed to apostolic men, stressing the importance of this virtue in missionary spirituality. The most definitive motivation is that humility has been the historical way of Jesus. Phil 2:5-9 synthetically proposes this path of saving kenosis instead of Adam's sin that originated in pride. Humility is the way to experience the gratuitousness of salvation about our sin and the world's sin.

In this sense, it can be said that humility "is the foundation of all the virtues" (*Aut* ib) and of Christian perfection, to dispose us to the grace of God, as the Constitutions say (no. 41). Claret's teaching also tells us that humility is the foundation because it means to assume the project of God -which is His *glory*- above any other project of the personal or social 'ego.' This virtue is experienced by the apostolic missionary who assumes the glory of God as the "objective" of his life.

Humility, then, is nothing other than internalizing in one's own life and attitudes the *condition of servant*, which was that of Jesus, according to Phil 2:5-9. The saving work that Jesus carries out is done with self-emptying, starting from the humble and their way of being in human coexistence. Far from being unaware of the goods and possibilities received from God, humility enters through them, into the dynamism of *gratitude* and enables them to be of service "for the common good" (1Cor 12:7). It adopts attitudes of service, being among others "as one who serves" (Lk 22:27), with the responsibility of one who is only a steward (cf. Mt 16:23-35). Since the Word of God is what the Claretian administers and serves, his risk may be in appropriating humility and turning it into an instrument of vanity or power over others.

⁸⁹ Cf. *El Colegio instruido (The Well-Instructed Seminarian)*, vol II, and also found in SSW as the *Priestly Spirit*, p. 361. Note that in this writing, the theme of humility is preceded by poverty.

For all this, the Constitutions suggest cultivating humility through acts of service and remembering our condition of sin, in which we experience the gratuity of God's gift.

Meekness

This is number 42 of the renewed Constitutions. Curiously, this theme was not proposed in the earlier Constitutions. This omission is surprising, considering the space the Founder devoted to it, both in his Autobiography (nos. 372-383) and in the Spiritual Exercises addressed to the Missionaries in 1849 and 1865.⁹⁰

Recalling an affirmation of the Founder (*Aut* 374), the Constitutions say that meekness "is a sign of apostolic vocation." In what sense? We must not forget that, for the prophets, meekness is a messianic trait. Whether in the figure of the Servant of Yahweh (cf. Is 42:1-4) or in that of the victorious King (cf. Zech 9:9), the Messiah is characterized by his meekness. This has to do with the introduction of the Kingdom into this world. In this sense, the Gospel of Matthew (12:18-21; 21:5) applies these prophecies to Jesus. Jesus will also say: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29).

According to St. Paul, meekness plays an important role in exhortation (ministry of the Word), fraternal correction, and the maintenance and cultivation of unity among believers (cf. Gal 6:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12). It is also the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23).

For our Founder, meekness is intimate with charity-apostolic zeal and humility. His thought is stated well in the Autobiography (no. 381): "Zeal is a kind of vehemence of love that needs to be wisely governed" in order not to be unruly.⁹¹ About this zeal, meekness is a humanization of charity: without it, "the earth is not inherited," the Kingdom is not established in this world, in the hearts of people. Thus, in the text of Mt 5:4, which Claret interprets in his Autobiography nos. 372-3. Claret says that humility is the root, while meekness is the fruit, which in the apostolic missionary is the source of his attraction to others (*Aut* 372).

⁹⁰ See in CCTT, pp. 570-1 and 587-90. The theme also has a relevant place in *The Priestly Spirit*, SSW, p. 363, which first appeared as part of *El Colegial Instruido, Vol II*.

⁹¹ It is a pity that this thought of Claret has remained in the Constitutions (no. 42) with unhappy wording.

The acceptance of the cross of Christ

In numbers 43 to 45 of the renewed text, a good part of the matter that the former Constitutions treated in three chapters of its 2nd part comes together. Without going into details about the successive elaborations that the theme has had in the post-conciliar process of renewal, it can be said that here, an important content of the spirituality of the servant of the Word has been preserved and formulated very well. Specifically, this is his relationship with the cross of Christ, without which it would be illusory to speak of conformity with the Lord. It synthesizes very intimate experiences of Claret the missionary, where, on the other hand, he has reflected many times in his meditations and his writings, sharing in some way his experience as a disciple of Jesus.⁹²

From the imitation-conformity with Christ that presides over this chapter of the Constitutions, another dimension is developed: the *association* with his redemptive work (no. 43; cf. PC no. 5) in the most significant instance of this, which is the cross of Christ. Based on this cross-passage from death to life, mortification and self-denial (cf. Mt 16:24) make sense in the disciple's choice: in Jesus, it is the way of salvation for all those destined or punished to death. Here, the discipleship reaches its total radicalism.

With a certain parallelism with the three degrees of humility of Ignatius of Loyola,⁹³ numbers 43 to 45 of the Constitutions marks the progressiveness with which the acceptance of the cross of Christ is proposed to the Apostolic Missionary. Of particular importance in the text, these steps' link with the *opus missionis* is made explicit. These are the steps of this discipleship experience:

a) First step: *life in austerity* (no. 43.2), in the condition of strangers and pilgrims. It is a path that the missionary *chooses* to follow Christ and to *bear witness* to him and his resurrection: "The body is Christ's, by whose power God will raise us up" (ibid, cf. 1Cor 6:14). We seek "to glorify and carry God in the body," making it a transparency of his Word and his presence before others: a necessary way of involving one's own life in the proclamation of the Gospel.

⁹² In addition to the Autobiography (2nd part, chapters 26, 28, and 31) and the Exercises to the Missionaries (cf. CCTT, pp. 573-7 and 592-5), one can recall other writings of Claret, such as *Imitating Jesus Carrying the Cross*, 1846 (in SSW pp. 209ff), *Solace for a slandered soul*, 1864 (in SSW pp. 245ff) and *The Priestly Spirit* (SSW, p. 368ff.) which first appeared as part of *El Colegial instruido*, Vol. II.

⁹³ See *Ejercicios Espirituales* (*Spiritual Exercises*) nos.165-168.

b) The *passion of the missionary in crosses that he did not choose* (no. 44). They will be adversities, hunger, thirst, calumnies, persecutions... In many cases, the people to whom he is sent and before whom he becomes a sign of contradiction. Whatever the origin of all this, the missionary makes of it with Christ, an expression of *solidarity* with the oppressed, who carry crosses that are not sought after but imposed. Like Jesus, he bears these crosses for them to obtain salvation, and he does it with attitudes capable of arousing hope.

c) *Self-oblation* (no. 45) in the face of God's mysterious plan, which can manifest itself in our sickness and even in death itself: realities that are accepted with the same filial attitude of Jesus (cf. Mt 26:39) and for *redemption*. The Constitutions recommend "offering one's life for the salvation of all." It is as if, at the end of our words (of our "*ministerium verbi*"), we were to accompany in his supreme solitude the Christ prostrated in the garden and then pierced and silenced on the cross.

XII. OUR MISSION

Chapter VII of the renewed Constitutions deals with the theme of *Our Mission*. According to the post-Synodal document *Vita Consecrata* (no. 72), every form of consecrated life becomes a mission, as was the whole life of Jesus. However, according to the same document, every institute has its own particular form of mission, according to the charism it has received from the Spirit.

According to the charism and the foundational experience, this analogical reality acquires different scopes and meanings. For this reason, the Constitutions cannot fail to make explicit the vital understanding of the Institute's mission, starting from the intuitions and organization shaped by the Founder. Beyond the generality of the mission as a reality of the Church, it is expected that the Constitutions leave a clear delineation of the charismatic profile of the Congregational mission.

The outline of this design has already been given in the Fundamental Constitution, especially in number 6. Chapter VII proposes a gloss and amplification of that synthetic outline in a manner quite different from that implemented in the former text. The earlier Constitutions contained in three chapters of the 2nd part (15 to 17) what came to be called our *pastoral rule*, which spoke of the impediments to the ministry, the means for the salvation of souls, and the rules for the time of mission. In the years of the post-conciliar renewal, this matter underwent various transformations until it acquired its present form in the General Chapter of 1979.

The missionary service of the Word

Without further reference to mission in general, the Constitutions have already told us, in no. 6, "We are to be the shepherds' helpers in the ministry of the Word." In addition, no. 46 confirms that "our special vocation among the people of God is the ministry of the Word."

The formula *ministerium verbi* was already in the earlier Constitutions with an (I, 2). However, it can be said that an integrated reflection on our mission based on it has been a rather recent development among us. The attention given to the "service of the Word" by the Special Chapter (1967) in its documents on the charism and on the spiritual patrimony of the Congregation is significant.⁹⁴ In the successive General Chapters, without disappearing missionaries completely, at times this formula would lose prominence in favor of expressions (some are more general) such as apostolate, evangelization, new evangelization, or mission, taken from the prevailing ecclesial context of the time. It would be the General Chapter of 1991 that, turning our eyes to the service of the Word as a charismatic key for the understanding of our way of being and evangelizers, proposes to energize from this perspective a new missionary and Claretian mentality, capable of animating also the revision of positions already in progress.

The Constitutions (no. 50) place our vocation and service within the framework of understanding the ecclesial ministry (prophetic, priestly, and royal), which expresses the whole ministry of Christ's salvation. Recognizing the importance and dignity of every ministry in the Church, the Constitutions make us aware that our special vocation is the *service of the Word* (no. 46).

b) This ecclesial service consists of faithfully *preserving* the Word and *transmitting* it to all people to the ends of the world. In the first place, the Church is not the owner but a *servant* and *handmaid* of this Word; by it, the Church is possessed and will be judged by it. Hence, internal prophecy cannot be lacking in her, simultaneously for consolation and judgment. On the other hand, the Word that the missionary received is good news that he must announce to all people. According to Paul VI, "the task of evangelizing all people is the essential mission of the Church" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14). It is good news that can also be a denunciation (Const. no. 46), always-announcing hope because it is a word endowed with the ability to transform the things of the world according to God's plan and is a response to the profound expectations of the human heart.

This word-good-news is Christ, the Word first *pronounced* and then bodily introduced into the world. Hence, there is an urgency to communicate to people "the whole mystery of Christ" to proclaim "his life, death, and resurrection until he comes again." The "fidelity and fortitude"

⁹⁴ See the 1967 XVII General Chapter *Declaration on the charism*, especially numbers 18-30, and the *Declaration on the spiritual patrimony* in numbers 6, 10, 33, 47-49, 119, and other passages from other Chapter decrees.

of which the Constitutions speak warns the missionary of the physical fatigues of his service and the resistance he will often encounter. These can go to the extreme of persecution and martyrdom: a reality that, even in our times, flourishes here and there in a variety of forms and even in countries that appear to be Christian and call themselves as such.

c) This Word *generates communities* and churches (Const no. 47). The book of Acts (2:47) says, "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." This growth in the community was the normal fruit of apostolic preaching.

According to our Constitutions, this generative capacity has a twofold form of realization: by *raising up new communities* through the conversion that follows the first proclamation of the Word -kerygma- or by *regenerating* devitalized *communities*, thanks also to a process of conversion starting from missionary preaching. Expressing themselves in this way, the Constitutions give the scope of the title "Missionary" for the Son of the Heart of Mary. It does not refer exclusively to the mission "ad gentes," as can happen in the charismatic reading of other missionary institutes.

It can be said that, in his peculiar experience, Claret redefined the title of *Apostolic Missionary*, for which he wanted to be recognized. It is about someone who is liberated for the service of the Word in the phase of its reestablishment *in the external and internal*⁹⁵ mission. Beyond his initial aspirations, Claret experienced, above all, the second form of mission. By "being for the whole world,"⁹⁶ he could not but incorporate the dimension *ad gentes*.

Means for this service

The renewed Constitutions twice mention using *all means possible* to fulfill our mission (nos. 6 and 48). This clause already appeared in the earlier Constitutions and always involved, in the Congregation's experience, a healthy but also costly tension.

⁹⁵ Certainly, this redefinition of the title of *Apostolic Missionary* also reaches other very important aspects of our Founder, as Fr. José M. Viñas has pointed out in the *General Introduction* to the volume that collects the *Escritos Autobiograficos del Santo* (ed. BAC, Madrid 1981), p. 26ff. For English translation, see *Works of Saint Anthony Mary Claret: Volume II. Autobiographical Writings*. Translated by Joseph C. Daries (Quezon City: Claretian Publications 1995) pp. 1-2.

⁹⁶ Cf. Letter to the Apostolic Nuncio of August 12, 1849, in *SL*, p. 179.

What is the meaning of this clause? a) First of all, the universality of means is understood about "spreading the Good News of the Kingdom of God throughout the world" (Const. no. 6). It is, therefore, a question of means for the service of the Word, not for any other purpose. b) It does not mean indifference or lack of definition of one or the other means, but a proposal to select what best leads to the missionary end. c) It calls for a discernment that assures the proportion and adequacy of the means to the concrete situations being addressed.

The earlier Constitutions proposed a list of works or means⁹⁷ considered valid for realizing our mission. Still, in the period of post-conciliar renewal, the General Chapters of 1967 and 1973 worked with the goal of updating that list. This path was abandoned, however, when we entered into the preparation of the renewed text and, above all, with the perspective that would be embodied in the document on the *Mission of the Claretian today*, during the Chapter of 1979. According to this, more than identifying means, it was more important to offer principles and criteria of mission that would be useful to discern what the Congregation would later have to carry out in the diversity of its work situations. Therefore, the Constitutions do not indicate concrete apostolic works.

By implementing this modality, the Constitutions introduce, in fact, with the urgency to discern, the invitation to take into account many of the analyses and guidelines that the Church is offering in different times and places in view of evangelization. This is what the most recent General Chapters have tried to do through their own documents. And we cannot forget what the guidelines of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, and *Deus Caritas Est*, among other pontifical texts, have meant for them and the Congregation.

Our attitudes toward missionary service

From this need for discernment, in no. 48, the Constitutions propose three *attitudes or active dispositions* that will help us manage everything related to the mission. They are called *senses*: intuition, availability, and Catholicity. For the subject, personal or communitarian, that approaches the mission, they represent a sensibility or harmony with the dynamism of the work of salvation.

⁹⁷ Cf. Part II, Chapter XVI, "De mediis ad salutem animarum adhibendis" (nos. 63-64).

a) *Intuition of what is most urgent, opportune, and effective.* This formula was taken up by the General Chapter of 1967 (cf. *Decree on the charism*, no. 12) and taken up again, among other Claretian texts, by the MCT that explains it when speaking of our "option for a missionary evangelization" (nos. 161-166). The important thing has been its incorporation into the constitutional text. For the discernment proposes, it is necessary to pay attention to the comparative *most*, which would have to mark the missionary difference in the context in which he tries to intervene, which, besides being changeable, can determine the demands of itinerancy.

The *most urgent* relates to the objective needs in terms of evangelization. This phrase can only be understood when it is in harmony with what is important for the Kingdom of God. The *most opportune* refers to the circumstances, both of the missionary subject (person or community) and of the reality in which one acts: one's own capacity, time, place, environmental dispositions, resources, etc. The *most effective* has to do with the means supposing the previous works that are usable: it must be those where greater fruit is possible in depth and scope.

b) *Availability.* It starts from a presupposition that the Kingdom of God is on the way and is always proposing new demands and initiatives to be implemented. These demands are part of sending and are given to individuals and communities. Moreover, it has two points of reference: "all that they have had up to now" and that the needs of our mission may ask us to abandon or hand over to other pastoral agents and then, the willingness to accept and adapt to the new (people, cultures, geographies...) that the missionary task entrusted to us carry. As a first step, there must be a readiness for dialogue, revision, and the proposal of new horizons without previous conditioning.

c) *Catholicity.* It emphasizes, in the spirit of what has just been said, an openness to new horizons, with the awareness that, as Claret, "we are for the whole world" and not only because of our mobility but mainly because of our will and capacity for personal enculturation, given the enculturation of the Gospel. To orient ourselves in this vast horizon of universality, the Constitutions propose two ways: the verification of the greatest evangelization needs and the promotion of multiplying agents of evangelizing presence, especially if they come from the cultural environment being addressed. Moreover, from this perspective, our rule of life incorporates the idea of association with others to realize these works.

Service of the Word and freedom of the one sent

Being 'servants' of the Word, missionaries are asked to be free from all other power. Remember the attitudes of Peter and John (Acts 4:18-20) and of Paul (2Thess 2:9). It is a freedom that, more than a social expectation and enforceable reality, is the inner courage of the envoy. It is a basic component of the apostolic identity, the fruit of the unconditional adhesion to Christ.

The Constitutions reveal to us a wide range of realizations of this freedom required of the Claretian to live in mission. At the proper time, they have referred to freedom concerning material goods. We must be aware that these are genuine, human, and even evangelical goods. This means that we are faced with an option for something that, in the perspective of the Kingdom of God, is better and of greater service, according to the Ignatian language. Ours, according to the Constitution, is freedom concerning

- * family ties,
- * the homeland (places, language, culture, customs),
- * political affiliation, which is not to be confused with solidarity with "those who seek the transformation of the world according to God's plan" (no. 46),
- * ecclesiastical functions other than the service of the Word.

XIII. CALLED TO GROW IN THE MISSIONARY LIFE

The first part of the renewed Constitutions concludes with this chapter, which somehow takes up all the themes of personal and communitarian spirituality from the dynamic key of *constant growth*. It is inspired, on the one hand (cf. Const. no. 51), by the awareness of our vocation to holiness, to be "perfect as your heavenly Father" (Mt. 5:48): a vocation that since baptism we share with all the people of God (cf. LG, nos. 39-40). On the other hand, as St. Paul says, our vocational gifts lead us to develop "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13).

In the earlier Constitutions, there was already a chapter (X of the 2nd part) on *the use of virtues* that, in conformity with the general characteristics of that text, was filled above all with ascetical guidelines, which the renewed text has tried to enrich with biblical and conciliar sources.

It is, moreover, a characteristic of the present Chapter VIII of the renewed text, the incorporation of another important perspective for the missionary: *ongoing formation*. There were some indications in the older text, especially in Chapter XII of the second part, entitled *De sacerdotum ordine*. Already in the post-conciliar period, the provisional text of the Constitutions, prepared by the General Chapter of 1973, included a special chapter dedicated to *Studies* that the subsequent edition of the Directory rightly interpreted in the key of ongoing formation.

Inspired by the experience of our Founder, for whom "study and prayer are the two wings of the missionary" (*Aut* 665), the present draft of our Constitutions has gathered in a single chapter these two great themes related to the cultivation and growth of the Claretian: progress in holiness and ongoing formation. Both aspects have been proposed, with their impact on the personal and community aspects of our lives.

Growing in the Spirit

The Council reminded all of us, members of the Church, of our vocation to *holiness*: a vocation that each of us must fulfill according to our way of life and that acquires particular significance in those who follow the path of the evangelical counsels through which they must express "a splendid witness and example of that holiness" (LG no. 39). Our Constitutions (no. 51) tell us that, in our particular missionary journey, we seek to reach the full maturity of Christ, where we will be able to "communicate more effectively to others the grace of the Gospel."

From the beginning of this chapter, the Constitutions want to emphasize that our sanctification or justification has as its beginning the call of God and the saving work of Jesus Christ. This gives us the confidence that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). Our spiritual growth, which will certainly involve our efforts, is primarily a *gift of God*. We can well call it our *vocational gift* because all the elements of our missionary life bear signs and resources so that we can walk in a new life.

a) On the *personal level*, this *journey in a new life* means daily nourishment with the *Word* and the *Eucharist* and frequent access to the sacrament of *Reconciliation*, as already proposed in Chapter V of these Constitutions (nos. 34-35.38). The sacramental life responds, on the one hand, to our need for permanent contact with the source of grace and, on the other hand, to the personal attraction with which the Spirit binds us to the person of Jesus.

Number 53 lists the human dispositions necessary to keep on the way, which start with a plan and orientation to one's life. *The right intention* of which we speak can be translated into the personality and constant adherence to the "objective of the Congregation" that presides over the life of the Claretian in all its dimensions. Another classic recommendation and of assiduous use in the life of our Founder is that of spiritual *resolutions*, which are instruments to verify and perhaps rectify the direction we are giving to our daily steps. This same motive gives reason for the strong moments that the Claretian needs every month (spiritual retreat) and every year (spiritual exercises) as times of balance and reaffirmation of his vocational fidelity.

Within the framework of the riches offered to us by the spiritual doctrine developed since Vatican II, it will undoubtedly be helpful for us to incorporate the data resulting from the experience of our Founder, a practical man who translated his convictions into the need for *means* of organizing his own time and resources. In times of self-help, recovering the ascetic dimension of the disciple's journey is good. The various editions of

Claret's *Autobiography* have been accompanied by many of his spiritual writings (resolutions of exercises, spiritual notes, lights, and graces) that transmit a sobering experience, a grounded and meaningful form of asceticism in the missionary life.⁹⁸

The eighth chapter of the renewed Constitutions could not but refer to the *critical moments* of our life's journey as in the earlier text. The earlier text began the second part by speaking of *temptations*. Since the Garden of Eden, temptation has entered into God's plans as proof of the validity of our freedom. Jesus himself went through this experience during his days in the desert and that night in the Garden of Olives. There, also, it called for maturity and the capacity to bear fruit, the fruit of the Passover. This was also the experience of the Apostle (cf. Rom 5:4-5), who became aware of God's faithfulness (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). Temptation is an *opportunity*. On the other hand, we cannot hide from ourselves the dramatic bias of struggle, which, because of the intervention of the Evil One, the Father of lies, acquires this human experience in the face of the one who seeks our ruin (cf. 1Pe 5:8; 1Jn 5:19). Hence St. Peter invites us to be vigilant (cf. *ibid.*) and St. Paul speaks to us of a struggle that must find us armed with *the armor of God* (cf. Eph 6:10-20). For this reason, in these situations, the Constitutions and the corresponding section of the Directory (no. 143) recommend that we remain united to Christ through prayer. We should not boast of our strengths but be aware of our weaknesses. We should not change the purposes that guide us, and we should manifest ourselves to those who can help us.⁹⁹

b) The *community* must have a relevant presence in the commitment to the *growth* of all its members in the Spirit. One of the things that qualify the consecrated community is to be an environment of *evangelical discernment*. It should be so in the face of the Christian community in general, but it is expected to be so above all in its interior life. This presence was from very early times, the search and, in many cases, the precious fruit of the coenobitic life. This environment is the most significant service of the Father Abbot and the dialogue in fraternity.

In no. 54 of the Constitutions it proposes that to "promote spiritual progress effectively," we should ask for help from our brothers, whether through spiritual direction, accompaniment, or community discernment. These are two different ways, though not necessarily interchangeable,

⁹⁸ Thus, the two editions of the BAC (Madrid 1959 and 1981) and the one published by Editorial Claretiana (Buenos Aires 2008). For English edition see ACW.

⁹⁹ In relation to *critical moments*, with their traits of temptation and opportunity, the experience of our Founder can also be useful. The Jesuit G. Randle has given an interpretation of it in his book *Discernir en el desconcierto, una experiencia: Claret (1807-1870)*, ed. Claretian Publications (Madrid 1993), 205 pages.

of seeking the will of God and the light necessary to make it a reality in daily life. Related to this is a *fraternal correction* (nos. 54-55), a guideline Jesus has left us in the Gospel to express genuine concern and love for our brother with a view of growing together as disciples (cf. Mt 18:15-18). On the one hand, it is a spiritual good that we are invited to desire for ourselves, to ask for and to be grateful. On the other hand, we are asked to be diligent and solicitous in offering it personally to our brothers who may need it. The constitutional text suggests ways to make this gesture fraternal since it is done with discretion, charity, humility, and meekness and remembering our fragility. These are the same attitudes with which, if necessary, we would have to pass the matter on to our superiors. In addition, in any case, it is up to us to welcome and support with love the signs of repentance of our brothers.

Ongoing formation

In no. 56 of our Constitutions proposes as a necessity to "progress at the same time in virtue and science." For our Founder, this was a very important line of action in his personal life (cf. *Aut* 764 and 801); he translated it into ongoing education for all who wanted to be involved in the service of the Word. He would not fail to include it in the earlier Constitutions when he addressed the formator of the missionaries (1st part, ch. 24).¹⁰⁰ For this reason, Father General Nicolás García, in a circular letter of 1933, was able to say, "Study is one of the great traditions of the Congregation."¹⁰¹ What is striking is that the expressions used by the 1967 General Chapter, emphasize that the level of excellence expected of our academic formation, is also proposed in terms of fidelity to our apostolic vocation.¹⁰²

The *suitability* for the ministry of the Word of which the Constitutions speak has to do with a personal familiarity with the Word itself and the deepening and illumination of its message. St. Paul firmly instilled this in Timothy as a permanent attitude toward his pastoral service (cf. 1 Tim 4:13-16). It is known how much weight was given in the life and ministry of Claret to this attachment to the reading and study of the Bible (cf. *Aut* 113). The guidelines he left to the

¹⁰⁰ Cf. CCTT, p. 457.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Collección de Circulares (Collection of Circulars)* ed. Cocusa, Madrid 1941, p. 305.

¹⁰² Cf. La Declaración sobre el patrimonio espiritual de la congregación [the Declaration on the Spiritual Patrimony of the Congregation], nos.136-140, in XVII General Chapter CMF, Documentos Capitulares, ed. Cocusa, Madrid 1968, pp. 121ff. For an English translation, go to the website of the Congregation: <https://www.claret.org>

students of the Congregation on the daily reading of Sacred Scripture¹⁰³ are well known, as well as the editions of the Bible that he prepared and disseminated for the benefit primarily of the clergy of his time.¹⁰⁴ Hence, we must consider as a current reading of the Founder's sentiments the decision that followed the General Chapter of 1991 that was proposed to all the missionaries of the Congregation in the project and the materials of *Word-mission*, to accompany their journey of ongoing formation. With this ongoing formation, understood as more than just information, we seek to express our vocational fidelity and our willingness to remain in an attitude of constant *conversion*.¹⁰⁵

In relation to the ministry of the Word, understood as a dialogue between human beings and their diverse cultural forms, the evangelizer is particularly urged by the *intellectus fidei*, the *theological science*, with its characteristic reflection on the divine attraction of the human condition, and its spiritual and pastoral derivations. All these include the *sacred sciences* of which the constitutional text speaks. Moreover, at his side those he calls *human sciences*, about which the Father Founder wrote beautiful paragraphs, understanding that they open the way to God and constitute a space of encounter with human beings, his searching, and his concerns.¹⁰⁶ Following the guidelines of Claret himself, the Congregation today encourages us to *learn languages* as an indispensable instrument, to face the globalized world, and to establish the dialogue that will allow the missionary to transmit the Good News to the peoples of the world.

Community planning and animation

It is a fact that, from the time of its foundation and the homogeneity that characterized the so-called *mission house*, our community organization has had to adopt important internal organizational variables precisely because of its almost exclusive dedication to the missions. Already, the XV General Chapter (1949), faced with the strong development of Claretian

¹⁰³ Cf. CCTT, p. 451.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. ACW, p. 235, note 2.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the document of the XVIII General Chapter (1973) on *Formation*, no. 27, p. 206.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *El Colegial Instruido*, [*The Well-instructed Seminarian*], vol I, sec 2a, chap XVI, art 7. Some parts of Vol. I and II are translated into English in SSW.

parishes and colleges, had adopted some renovating guidelines, especially in what was related to the practices of community piety.¹⁰⁷

Later, in the post-conciliar period, in the face of growing heterogeneity, not only ministerial but also cultural, the renewed Constitutions did not presuppose identical *planning* for all the communities of the Institute. The documents of the General Chapters of this period and the various editions of the Directory moved in the same direction. They preferred to transmit some basic *criteria* and point out those *elements* considered indispensable to express the proper profile of a community of life in consecration and mission. For this reason, no. 57 of the Constitutions begins by highlighting the criterion of "the demands of our missionary life." This means that, unlike other forms of coenobitic life, our community needs to articulate its times with a relevant *ministerial* presence, which can be different in some communities precisely because of their ministerial diversity or, as expressed in the Constitutions themselves, because of the "demands of the apostolic action" that each one has to carry out.

Another criterion is that it remains the responsibility of each community to give itself an "*internal regulation*" and planning according to its own reality, even if, according to the Directory (no. 431), this planning must be submitted for the approval of the Major Superior. These forms of organization must consider the *space* and *time* necessary for the harmonious development of community life.

Regarding spaces, the Constitutions do not transmit guidelines other than those indicated by Canon Law on enclosure (c 667, 1): "Some part of the house be reserved only for its members." This reserved place has to do with the values and the things that every community lives by, as it also happens in the family environment. In a certain sense, this space of ours evokes the desert experience of the ancient cenobites: they sought the favor of this environment for their intimate relationship with the Lord and to strengthen the bonds of fraternity. In a circular letter quoted above, Father Peter Schweiger reminded us of the contemplative dimension of our missionary way of life. Moreover, the service of the Word, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is understood as the transmission of what one has contemplated.¹⁰⁸ It is no surprise that there

¹⁰⁷ See *Annales*, vol 39 (1940-50), pp. 134-35.

¹⁰⁸ *Summa Theologica*, 2.2, q 188, a 6. St. Thomas himself, commenting on the third precept of the law, affirmed that every Christian must be contemplative in some measure; thus, in *III sententiarum*, d. 36, 1 q, a.3, 5m.

are many persons and apostolic groups that in their following of Jesus today seek to have days of a desert experience...

This space cannot be equivalent to emptiness. Nor is it the case that we fill it with things, comforts, distractions, noises, or indiscriminate media use. Therein lies the importance of the *times* that make up our day and our life: community and personal times, which are necessarily complemented by the time of pastoral services. The internal planning that the Constitutions speak of aims to ensure the rhythm of our community prayer and the faithful realization of the other meetings that our fraternity demands: studies, domestic and apostolic programming, revision of life, etc. This planning will mean incorporating times of work and rest, sharing, recreation, and personal and environmental silence. In addition, with these contents, the validity of the *community project*, annually revised and updated, will assure us the direction and impulse we need to grow in the spirit of our vocation.

Within this framework, the service of *animation* is made possible, a personal touch that makes our organization a rich fabric of human, fraternal, and ultimately evangelical relationships. It is a task entrusted in a special, but not exclusive, way to the superior, to whom in other places (see, for example, nos. 30 and 94b), the Constitutions suggest above all service, accompaniment, and love as the most genuine keys to his way of management. The Congregation, especially in the instance of successive General Chapters, has been offering contributions for the discernment of situations that are perhaps unprecedented in the experience of community living. Another help for the animation can be found by the superior in the collaboration of the community members, taking into account their experience and particular gifts or preparation. We should all feel actively involved in the growth of our community, guided by the grand project that Claret has left us in the "objective" of the Congregation.

El presente escrito propone solamente algunas notas que glosan o subrayan el mensaje espiritual de las Constituciones claretianas renovadas: mensaje condensado en la Constitución Fundamental y en los ocho capítulos de la primera parte. Con este límite y en esta perspectiva nacieron efectivamente estas páginas en momentos de retiro espiritual o de cursillos de formación, tanto inicial como permanente, de grupos de Misioneros de la Congregación.

