

DISCERNMENT OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

FOR REFLECTION AND REVIEW OF YOUR LIFE

Antonio Sánchez Orantos, CMF



CLARETIAN
MISSIONARIES
SONS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

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13



1. Christian discernment

I used to ask myself in every situation, and still do, how Jesus would have acted. How carefully and with what purity and rightness of intention He did everything: preaching, eating, dealing with all sorts of people, praying! Thus, with the Lord's help, I resolved to imitate Jesus Christ in all things so as to be able to say by my actions, if not in so many words like the apostle, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ (Fr Claret Auto 387).

Prayer and apostolate (mystics of action) are fundamental dimensions of our life: rooted in the experience of love generated by the contemplation of a Mother/Father God (who begets and sustains life: *Patris Mei*)), we are sent (experience of the Spirit: spirituality: *Spiritus Domini*) to engender paths of liberation for human poverty (apostolic zeal) by freely giving our lives (charity urges us: *Charitas Christi*). Vital convergence of prayer and action: charismatic path (gift of grace) that opens our lives to configuration with Christ Jesus to be witnesses of the Gospel in human history

So,

It should be noted that among the many tricks the devil uses to deceive spiritual people, the most common is to deceive them under the guise of good rather than evil, for he knows full well that they are unlikely to choose an evil that is known as such (St. John of the Cross , Cautelas 10).

It is characteristic of the evil spirit to take on the appearance of an angel of light. He begins by suggesting thoughts that correspond to a devout soul and ends by suggesting his own (St. Ignatius, EE. II week, rule 40).

How good you are, my Father. Let me serve you always with fidelity and love. Give me your constant grace to know what pleases you and the willpower to put it into effect. My Lord and Father, I want nothing more than to know your holy will, so that I may do it; nothing more than to love you with all my heart and serve you with all

fidelity. My Mother--Mother of Fair Love¹--help me! (Fr Claret, Auto 136).

That is, we tend to associate temptation with an explicit invitation to sin: an invitation to deliberately oppose God's will; opposition which we know radically damages the natural order (ecology and fraternity). However, people with a serious and stable spirituality usually overcome the temptation to deliberate evil without great difficulty: they recognize evil and reject it with strength.

There is also subtle temptation: the invitation to separate ourselves from God's will in the name of 'fidelity' (*pharisaism*). The well-known text from Revelation (3:19) refers to this form of temptation:

*I know what you are worth; you are neither cold nor hot, I wish you were one or the other. Unfortunately, you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, and so I will vomit you out of my mouth. **You think: I am rich, I have everything, I lack nothing. Do you not see how unhappy, poor, blind, and naked you are, deserving of compassion?** ... Finally, ask me for eye salve to put on your eyes so that you may see. I rebuke and correct those I love; come on, cheer up and convert.*

Well then, the temptation that ***under the guise of fidelity*** (under the guise of light, under the guise of good) separates us from God, however complex and subtle, and often unconscious, needs to be exposed, illuminated, identified, discerned.

But before beginning the process of illumination, let us briefly recall **what is discernment?**

- **Discernment:** a vital attitude that allows us to access the foundation of our decisions (motion: affective motivation) in order to **renew** our commitment to God and to men.
- **Discernment:** a process of enlightenment that **confirms and purifies our willingness** to love and serve God and

others generously.

- **Discernment:** a decision to **imitate Christ** (to occupy the historical places that Jesus occupied) so that the Spirit (freely) **may configure us to Him**.
- **Discernment: path of liberation**, external and internal, which confronts everything that obscures or conditions our fidelity (Ignatian “indifference”; St. John of the Cross’ “nothings”; ‘the desire of intimate identification’ of Claret).

And after this **great spiritual combat** (struggle for freedom: path of liberation), there is always **God’s consolation, because it is God’s nature to bring joy**. Consolation is peace, inspiration to goodness, affective prayer, intensity of faith, trust, apostolic zeal.

The good angel and the evil spirit can give consolation to the soul, although with very different purposes. The good angel comforts for the progress of the soul, so that it may advance and rise to the most perfect state. The evil spirit comforts with the opposite purpose, so that it may later drag the soul according to its own perverse intentions of evil. Thus it weakens the soul, or disturbs it, or destroys the peace, quiet and tranquillity it had before, causing turmoil in the soul (St. Ignatius, EE., Week II, Rules 3 and 4).

(The seemingly devout communications that come from the evil spirit) cause either agitation, dryness, and vanity or presumption in the soul. However, the communications of the devil are not as effective in doing harm as the communications of God are in doing good. For diabolical communications can only arouse the first movements without the ability to move the will. Divine communications, on the other hand, penetrate the soul, move the will to love, and leave their fruit in it (St. John of the Cross, Ascent, II, c. 11, 6).

O most loving Father, who never leaves your children orphaned, even when it seems you are absent from them, for you are never absent from watching over their welfare; I wish not to be troubled by my labours, sorrows and persecutions, for you will soon come to visit and comfort me in them. Grant me, Lord, that inner joy which neither demon, nor the world, nor any creature can take

away, and, possessing this joy, any trouble will be sweet to me (Fr. Claret, Spiritual Notes, BAC, p. 784).

Consolation, although not always accompanied by sensible comforts (of that which we like...; of that which we have planned or dreamed of and, therefore, desire) is always personal adjustment in fidelity:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. For those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live according to the Spirit, let us also walk according to the Spirit. Let us not seek vain glory, provoking one another and envying one another (Gal 5:22-26).

One last warning. Due to the deceptive nature of temptation and our lack of inner freedom, personal discernment runs the risk of ending in falsehood. Therefore, it is necessary to allow ourselves to be accompanied by competent people. Let us return to our teachers:



*When the enemy of humanity tempts a righteous soul with his deceits and seductions, he greatly desires that these be received and **kept secret**. But if one reveals them to a confessor or some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and evil designs, the devil becomes frightened. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil purpose once his obvious deception has been revealed (St. Ignatius, EE., Week I, Rule 13).*

*It is common for the devil to deceive under the guise of good. To do good and be safe in this regard, **one must seek appropriate advice** (St. John of the Cross, Caution 10).*

You will have a permanent confessor and spiritual director, without jumping from one to another, which is a trick used by Satan to lead young people into sin, by suggesting that they will simply go to confession to someone else, as St Philip Neri says; you will follow his advice; you will be frank and open with him; you will not apply for holy orders without his advice (Fr. Claret, The Well Instructed Seminarian, II, BAC, EE., p. 276).

2. The temptations of the apostolic life

Let us now move on to discerning our apostolic life Let those who are very active, who think they can conquer the world with their preaching and external works, take note here that they would make much more progress in St. John of the Iglesia and please God much more, leaving aside the good example they would set, if they spent even half this time with God in prayer, and having gained spiritual strength from it; because, otherwise, it is all hammering and doing little more than nothing, and sometimes nothing, and even sometimes harm (St. John of the Cross).

I was driven to work for God's greater glory and the salvation of souls, I shall now say something of the means that the Lord showed me were the best and most fitting to attain that goal. The first means I have always employed and still do is prayer. In my opinion, this is the greatest means that can be used for the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just and the relief of the souls in purgatory (Fr Claret Auto 264).

2.1. Fundamental of Mission: Apostolic charity

All human activity requires competence, the use of appropriate methods, convictions, appropriate attitudes

*My objective was always to seek God's greater glory and the salvation of souls; hence I chose to write in the form of books of advice to all classes of society. But two classes were dearest to my heart: first, boys and girls. For them I published not only the four catechisms I have already mentioned but several other booklets and leaflets. The other group that most claimed my attention was the clergy. If all those studying for service in the Church were men of **genuine vocation, virtue, and studiousness**, what good priests we'd have and how many converts we'd make! (Fr Claret, Auto 325-326).*

But the apostolate requires something more: **spiritual authenticity is essential because it is about being a real sign (sacrament) of God in human history.**

The theological reason is obvious: Jesus Christ is the only **one sent (Son, Messiah, Servant) who can save**; we are his witnesses to the extent that we respond to his call (to be with him and heal the sick, cast out demons). The apostolic mission is only possible in communion with Jesus, the Christ

The love of God and of one's neighbour has an effect very similar to that of fire. The fire of gunpowder causes any object that compresses it to explode, propels bullets and bombs upwards; the fire of steam drives the carriages of the and propels ships that plough through the waves of the sea; so, the fire of the Holy Spirit caused the holy apostles to travel the entire universe... Set ablaze by the same fire, the apostolic missionaries have reached, are reaching, and will reach the ends of the earth to proclaim the Word of God, so that they may rightly say to themselves the words of the Apostle St Paul: Charitas Christi urget nos. The charity or love of Christ spurs us on and urges us to run and fly on the wings of holy zeal (Fr Claret, Selfishness Conquered, BAC, pp. 416–417).

2.2 The first virtue off the apostolic missionary: humility

I knew that if I was to acquire the virtues I needed in order to become a truly apostolic missionary, I would have to begin with humility, which I regard as the foundation for all other virtues..... My God, forgive me; I am truly sorry for it. The memory of my vanity has brought many a bitter tear to my eyes (Fr Claret Aut 341).

Only the Word of God saves: Jesus, the only Messiah Saviour. That is why **the temptation of messianism** appears as the first and most radical. It is a temptation that invites us to usurp the place of Jesus: the apostle becomes the centre and end of all his action. It is a temptation that invites us to forget that the call includes the requirement to “be with Him”. It is a temptation that subtly penetrates life, and then there is no mission (sending): only self-affirmation and damages the huality demanded by apostolic charity.

Messianism is a deficient attitude towards the Lordship of God. Certainly, the apostle thus tempted can pray, turn to Him when problems arise, but... it is a matter of incorporating the Lord into his work in order to be more successful, to be more of a ‘messiah’, and not to join in God’s work, which is the proper task of **the** apostolate: **only God’s plan is salvific.**

This temptation is clearly manifested in the deficient relationship that the apostolic missionary establishes with the men and women he encounters on his path:

- Unable to delegate responsibilities and tasks...
- Increasing mistrust of others; and, progressively, only a few, usually faithful replicas of his personal desires, permanently surround the life of the tempted person.

Distrust of collaborators in the apostolate reflects distrust of God: the implicit content of the temptation of messianism. **Trusting in God means trusting others prudently. And this trust in others necessarily implies trust in the God who teaches that his saving plan is a plan for community.**

*I often repeated that prayer of St Augustine: *Noverim te, noverim me* (May I know myself and thus know You: such is my prayer" – *Solil.,* bk. 2, ch. 1–9) ... If I am anything, if I have anything, I have received it all from God. My physical being is not my own, it belongs to God; He is my Creator, He is my Sustainer, He is my driving force... I know that I cannot invoke the name of Jesus nor have a single good thought without God's help, that without God I can do absolutely nothing. Alas, how many distractions I have in spite of myself!... (Fr. Claret, Aut. 343–347).*

A faithful apostolic missionary reveals, through his life, that someone placed their trust in him by sending him to attend to the demands of the Kingdom and, for that reason, he places his trust in others.

Messianism also compromises the future of evangelisation. The 'messianic apostolic missionary' identifies with his work in such a way that when he disappears, it ends. The true apostolate that builds the Kingdom of God in the Church (community of communities - shared mission - synodality) always contributes to the renewal of ecclesial life.

The temptation of messianism bears fruit and manifests itself with great force in **activism**: an excessive increase in the distance between action and the life of the apostolic missionary. It is clear that we must accept an inadequacy between being and acting: it is a path to maturity, that is to say, we must ensure that our activity be an expression of our being, although we never achieve a complete identification. But in the case of activism, the inadequacy is acute and tends to grow, not diminish, as would be the ideal in any process of maturation.

Activism has many expressions. One of them is the lack of renewal in personal life.

- Prayer is systematically insufficient and deficient.
- There are no prolonged periods of solitude and retreat.
- Study is not cultivated. There is hardly any reading.

- There is not even time to rest sufficiently and recover.
- There is an excess of work and multiple activities. The schedule of commitments is usually full. All of this, of course, in the name of God and service to others. Let us not forget the subtlety of temptation: under the sign of light, under the sign of fidelity.

Thus, a vicious circle arises, the origin of which is not easy to pinpoint: the increase in activity makes it increasingly difficult to take the necessary steps to build a true path of inner renewal. And the (increasing) inability to renew oneself tends to be compensated for and disguised by a further increase in activities. A hellish circle that kills fidelity.

Activism, one of the most radical distortions of the evangeliser. The apostolic missionary becomes a professional who multiplies initiatives, usually good ones, but without discerning the will of God. Then, the so-called apostolic work obscures the meaning and



purpose of Evangelization. No one works at God's pace. And by accelerating processes, not only is the formation of people hindered, but they are also hurt and incapacitated for the Kingdom of God.

And then, when actions and programmes fail, there arises **the temptation of apostolic impatience the clear sign of the lack of humility, of the lack of listening, the fault of abedience (ob-audire: listening to the other, to others and to the Other)**. Negative expressions begin to accompany the life of the apostolic missionary 'nothing can be done with these people'; 'the culture today leads to the negation of God'; the youth of today are superficial and immature'. Impatience and discouragement always go hand in hand. Both are children of pride (self-sufficiency) and a radical forgetfulness that 'neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who makes things grow' (1 Cor 3:7).

Messianism, activism and impatience **turn trust in God into a farce**. The Lord takes second place. At best, he is called upon as a resource for serious and emergency cases. His presence in daily life is forgotten. And when it comes to the true fruits of evangelization (the Kingdom of Grace), and not psychological results - the need for self-affirmation - there can only be absolute trust in the Lord and absolute distrust in oneself.

I have recognized quite clearly that all that I can call truly my own is sin. If I am or have anything else, I have received it all from God. My physical being is not mine, it belongs to God. He it is who created me, keeps me in being, and, through physical concurrence, sets me in motion. Without water, not even the best-built water mill can turn; I have come to know that this is true of me even in my physical and natural being.....I realize that I cannot call upon the name of Jesus, nor have a single good thought, without the help of God. without Him I can do absolutely nothing. Yet, despite all I know, how many distractions I have! I have come to know that the virtue of humility consists in this: in realizing that I am nothing, can do nothing but sin, and depend on God in everything--being, conservation, movement, and grace--and I am most happy to be dependent on God rather than on myself. May I escape the fate of

*Lucifer, who clearly saw that his whole being, natural and supernatural, depended on God, and yet fell through pride. **For his clear knowledge was merely speculative**, and he set his will against it, desiring to be like God not through grace, but through his own power (Fr Claret Aut 344-347).*

In the apostolic life, these two types of trust cannot be on the same level: either one truly trusts in God or one trusts in oneself. Distrust and trust are theological qualities here, not psychological ones. In other words, it is not a question of personal insecurity, inferiority complexes, lack of self-esteem, or an inability to recognise the personal talents that God has given us, surely in abundance. Self-confidence, or self-esteem, is desirable in the apostolic missionary. The distrust we are talking about is distrust in the Spirit of the Lord. **And we must not forget that authentic trust in the God of Life gives the apostolic missionary a radical psychological confidence, one that may be lacking when human limitations are discovered, when failures must be faced.**

The evangeliser who has placed his trust in himself and not in the Lord, as a habitual and deep-rooted attitude - so deep-rooted that he often does not even perceive his attitude of self-sufficiency - reinforces this temptation with the successes that his human qualities engender: brilliant successes, but not always paths of grace, and grace is the only permanent work of God.

I bore in mind the old saying: "Pray to God and row for shore." Thus I took great care and worked energetically, as if everything depended on my work and, at the same time, I put all my trust in God because everything really does depend on Him, above all, the conversion of sinners, which is a work of grace and the greatest work of God (Fr Claret Aut 274)

And so, when the apostolic missionary ceases to trust in God, in the Word and also stops trusting in the power of truth: a variation on the lack of trust in God, but with such distinctive characteristics that **it appears as a new temptation.** Christian truth presents doctrinal and moral challenges so radical that they

are rarely accepted by the ideological currents of dominant cultures. Truths such as life after death, trust in God's loving providence, the value of suffering, of the cross, of austerity, the value of chastity, the defence of life... **Trusting in the power of the Spirit means having the conviction that the truth of faith coincides with the true humanisation (happiness) of the human being.** And when this trust is lost, the apostolic missionary is exposed to the temptation to waver, to not offer the truth of Christ and the Church, thinking that it will not be followed or accepted or that it is inconvenient...

Then truths are hidden or ambiguity arises: relying more on human prudence – not to be confused with proper teaching – than on the strength and power of truth. And so, ***problems rather than certainties begin to be preached***, confusing the different levels of the apostolate of the word. There are times and audiences that demand debate, conjecture, opinion, problems... But catechesis, homilies, and missionary preaching are about transmitting the essence of the Christian message: certainty of faith to renew life, not theoretical discussion or problematic proposals.

It is clear that there can be several causes for inadequacy in preaching: lack of judgement, experience or discernment. But it is also clear that often the fundamental cause is the projection of an inner state of undiscerned infidelity: 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks'. And so plausibility is sought, not truth.

The Christian community is built on faith, hope and charity, not on discussions, doubts and confusion. Critical theological reflection, which is necessary for the maturation of faith, does not belong to the realm of preaching, just as preaching cannot be the only criterion for critical theological reflection.

In line with what has been said, we must pay attention to a very peculiar temptation in the current cultural situation: ***the secularisation of Christian hope***. Christian hope is based on Christ's promises: resurrection after death, the certainty of his love

and grace in this life, which enable human beings to walk the path of holiness in all circumstances, to live with dignity and to be able to fight with unshakeable hope against all forms of evil and temptation in all its forms.

This is the hope that the preaching of the Word essentially promotes. It is a serious temptation to convey a message of human hopes to the detriment of fundamental Christian hope. Human hopes as conceived by people today (historical self-realisation) are not guaranteed by the preaching of Christ (surrender and martyrdom as the path to resurrection: the Paschal experience). To reduce Christian hope to legitimate human achievements (whether 'right-wing' or 'left-wing') is to dissolve the radical Christian vocation: the surrender of life, showing the supreme value of all human liberation.

For if the transcendent meaning of human life is lost, **the supreme value of personal dignity is lost.** And people become instruments of human and very human projects.

And from human and very human projects and only apparently evangelical ones, **appears a new temptation**, which is not easy to become aware of: the **acceptance of people**. Rejecting this demon requires a long journey of enlightenment of apostolic motivations which, like all enlightenment of motives, usually lasts a lifetime. The usual form of this temptation (except in cases of very serious failure) is not discrimination based on serious prejudices: racism, classism, nationalism, abuse... but **subtle discrimination** that reveals a lack of inner freedom: more interest and availability for some people; more pleasure and affection in dealing with them; the search for gratification; personal accompaniment as a resource in the face of experiences of loneliness...

The apostolate must bear witness to the primacy of fraternal charity, which is revealed preferentially to the despised and forgotten; and sacramentalise, with clarity, our vow of chastity: **a free heart, in love exclusively with Christ, to attend to all who require our presence.**

Very close to this, perhaps as a variant of the previous temptation, is **sectarianism**, which leads the apostolic missionary to shut himself up in his field of work, in his ideas, in his group... The sectarian apostolic missionary shuts himself up in his vision of things, within the limits of his experience, and from his closed-mindedness he judges all reality. Their vision is no longer Catholic: they lose their sense of belonging to the Iglesia, in which all Christians are united in their successes and failures, in their problems and achievements... Symptoms:

- inability to work in a group;
- isolation;
- disinterest in common criteria and projects;
- inability to engage in community evaluation and fraternal correction;
- reducing the apostolate to a single theme: prayer groups, human rights, liturgy, young people... everything else is of no interest.

The sectarian apostolic missionary: his things, his people, his own experience, his own vision. Everything different is questionable. Even the pastoral authority of the Iglesia is ignored or dogmatically confirmed depending on whether it denies or confirms his ways of seeing, of doing...

Let us not forget that it is the mark of a good specialist to always keep the big picture in mind and to carry out their activity in a way that promotes its growth. But the single-issue apostolic missionary has a single-issue congregation: they will always speak to the same audience, who share their limited vision and interests. **The result: sectarian communities.** And then the participants in the group come to think that they have the best truth, or the whole truth; that their orientation is privileged; that they have nothing to receive from other groups or movements in the Church: proselytism that ignores legitimate pluralism. Pastoral care (and theology) reduced to ideology.

2.3 The virtue of meekness

I knew that the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most, after humility and poverty, is meekness. That's why Jesus told his beloved disciples, Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Humility is like the root of the tree, and meekness is its fruit. St. Bernard tells us that we please God by humility and our neighbor by meekness. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land. --and not just the promised land of those living in heaven but also the earthly hearts of men (Fr Claret Aut 372).

And in this horizon of closed-mindedness, and especially for the apostolic missionary who is already beginning to have some pastoral experience, **there is the temptation to shut oneself off in one's own experiences**, a subtle temptation that consists in elevating one's personal apostolic experiences to the category of universal principle. Over the years, this temptation becomes more acute. There is a tendency to settle down and promote only what offers security.



It is worth remembering frequently that every experience is relative: it has its own circumstances, its own unique place and time. **True wisdom is not conditioned by successes or failures... True wisdom: the freedom to accept God's will at every moment.** True wisdom, then, does not engender violence, does not abandon peace, is always accompanied by meekness

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let them show it by their good conduct, through deeds done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast or deny the truth; for such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where there is jealousy and strife, there is turmoil and every evil deed. But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, kind, full of mercy and good fruits, without double-mindedness or hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

*O Christian soul, love by obeying and obey by loving so that you may be purified by this obedience of charity, and thus purified, may the Most Holy Trinity dwell within you continually! Thus you will obtain that peace which Jesus Christ gives: peace with God; peace with the angels and saints of heaven; peace with your conscience; peace which consists in finding rest and happiness **in God alone, even amidst the greatest adversities and trials.** This peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Fr. Claret, *The Temple and Palace of God Our Lord*, BAC, EE., p. 148).*

And that is why **becoming bourgeois, settling down, forgetting the pilgrimage of faith radically destroys apostolic zeal.** Lukewarmness, reluctance, stagnation... are not linked, in principle, to a deliberate acceptance of evil, although over time they can lead to it. **Mediocrity of life:** a temptation that is not explicit, but subtle. At first glance, it does not seem like a temptation, but it breaks fervour (affective prayer), apostolic zeal, and the process of Christian maturation. The apostolic missionary has found his little place, his rhythm, his way of working rooted in his unique

experiences. He is aware that new challenges and demands challenge the preaching of the Church, but he does not accept the demand for **ongoing formation**. He lets the younger people who work with him do their thing, but he does not allow them to question him. He may even attend renewal meetings, but he never questions his own life. He only desires tranquillity in his pastoral activity, which he usually carries out irreproachably.

This temptation slowly takes shape and becomes inevitable when the apostolic missionary loses his openness to the Spirit. It is often combined with a fixation on his own faults. Spiritual dynamism is stalled. Beneath an honest exterior, there is inner mediocrity. Discouraged, he does not have enough hope and trust in God to continue walking and has tacitly agreed to mediocrity. This demon leads one to think that, especially after a certain age, one has the right to seek compensation: the apostolic missionary ends up being content with minimal demands.

And perhaps all this happens because he has not fought one of the most subtle temptations of apostolic life: **the hope of a rewarding career**. It can tempt in many ways: positions, power, success... but the most subtle temptation is to expect recognition and praise from others. When these are not forthcoming, it is interpreted as ingratitude and lack of appreciation; the apostolic missionary begins to lose motivation and commitment. Similarly, when criticism arises, feelings of rejection and persecution appear. A little more and he will abandon his work. Temptation produces an excessive concern for image. All legitimate dissent or opposition is avoided. The true joy that comes from fidelity to Palabra is lost, transforming evangelisation into routine and duty.

Meekness is one sign of a vocation to be an apostolic missionary. When God sent Moses, he gave him the grace and virtue of meekness. Jesus Christ was meekness itself, and because of this virtue He is called the Lamb. The prophets foretold that He would be so mild that He would neither break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax; that he would be persecuted, calumniated, and cove-

red with reproaches and yet remain as one without a tongue and say nothing. What patience and meekness! Yes, by his labors, his suffering, his silence and death on the Cross, He redeemed us and taught us how we must act to save the souls He has entrusted to us (Fr Claret Aut 374).

The joy of working towards the coming of the Kingdom of God must be, for the apostolic missionary, the foundation of all his actions. Everything else is a bonus... The apostolic missionary finds his joy and the meaning of his life in the experience of the good that God does through him; he gives thanks to God, without vanity, because Christ chose him as an instrument, free and responsible, to 'bear fruit that endures'; he asks for forgiveness with humility because, through his failings and lack of fidelity, God has not been able to do through him all the good that He would have wished. *Therefore, his wisdom, which is from above, is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubt or hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace*

2.4 The virtue of poverty: the great richness of the apostolic missionary

I had observed that the holy virtue of poverty not only edified people and upset the idol of gold but also helped me greatly to grow in humility and advance in perfection (Fr Claret Aut 370).

The apostolic missionary must therefore constantly struggle against **a lack of fortitude**. This demon weakens the apostolic missionary's self-denial: softness and comfort begin to dominate his life; attachment to habits that take away freedom; he systematically seeks the most comfortable, the quickest way out, with the excuse of apostolic efficiency. Discouragement, then, appears more frequently: in the face of unjust criticism, corrections, failures... in the face of various forms of suffering for the sake of the Kingdom. The temptation can be more serious if the test of fortitude comes from within the Church or the apostolic community itself. One

of the worst sufferings of the apostolic missionary is that of the “contradiction of the good”, of his community, of his brothers and co-workers...

The apostolic missionary will always need fortitude in tensions and conflicts, in misunderstandings and suspicions... to remain faithful. Apostolic fortitude purifies, matures and prepares for the future. The demon of fragility keeps the apostolic missionary in a state of fatal adolescence: imaginary ideals (without reality); a fragile will (without fidelity). The aspiration to fulfil the last beatitude, so present in our charismatic lives: blessed are those who are persecuted (martyrdom...) cannot be improvised and is vain if it is not prepared and accompanied by the acceptance of the trials and crises that derive from evangelical fortitude.

And on the horizon opened up by fortitude, the joy that springs from holy poverty: ‘I need little, and the little I need, I need little of’ (Francis of Assisi).

We conclude with two temptations that reflect the lack of meekness and also subtly impede apostolic fidelity.

Envy. It is found in the tendency to immediately find and point out defects in all pastoral initiatives where personal protagonism is not emphasised. Cynicism is its most subtle expression. And its fatal consequences: rivalry, latent or explicit competition, rupture of the unity of the Body of Christ, concealment of the face of the only one who can save.

Sadness, or rather, a lack of humour. A demon that inclines the apostolic missionary to dramatise and assume the role of victim in the face of harsh reality. A sense of humor helps us to put situations that affect us into perspective, engenders equanimity, prevents fundamentalism and, above all, keeps us away from the acrimony and bitterness that make evangelical simplicity impossible. Schisms, heresies, dissensions, divisions, seemingly insoluble conflicts, lack of dialogue and communion are engendered where the sense of humour has been lost; the ability to de-dramatise: **the mercy that**

makes it possible to laugh at oneself and one's messianic pretensions. How many dramatic discussions in their time which, now, seen from a distance, make us laugh and, therefore, generate communion!!!)

We certainly live in a disenchanted world, which impoverishes and bores us. We need ideals to live by, but we must be careful with them. Because of our inability to understand Christian mysticism, our inability to accept God's actions: "he stripped himself of his rank, becoming one of many", (radical poverty: kenosis), every time we take an ideal too seriously, we end up finding a reason to exclude, to excommunicate, even to kill. All fanaticism – a sign of the absence of true prayer – shows its imposing and serious face. And in view of the excesses caused by "enlightened" people with apparent eternal truths, it is not surprising that our contemporaries prefer "twilight". This is something that all of us who must preach more certainties than we have should keep in mind.

So, humor, which is born of trust in the God who cares about the future of humanity, frees us from the "fury of seriousness" and opens us up to enthusiasm, which is the art of transforming effort into grace and gift. Humour puts things in their place. It frees us from fanaticism and conceit, without destroying enthusiasm, as mockery and irony do. And in our church communities, lately, we may have been sharing too much mockery and irony and experiencing too much of a lack of humour. Gravity kills and superficiality scandalises. We need to find a way out of this quagmire. **And a sense of humour, by giving everything its due value, is evangelical wisdom and should never be lacking in the life of an apostolic missionary.**

3. Discernment: a path that leads to the longing for a better life

And after much reflection, with the desire to discern our own apostolic life, it is worth returning to the beginning and applying our possible conclusions to daily life. Let us remember: 'Thus, in everything, I asked myself and I ask myself how Jesus Christ himself did this very thing, with what care, with what purity and rectitude of intention. How he preached! How he conversed! How he ate! How he rested! How he dealt with all kinds of people! How he prayed!...' (Fr. Claret, Aut. 306).

We will all have to seek our own path of fidelity, a unique, original and unrepeatable path: a path of freedom. But we should all bear in mind the sources of inspiration that our wise tradition offers us to renew our fidelity. Let us briefly recall them.

Two Pauline texts allow us to discover the inadequacy, often accepted, of our apostolic life:

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what God's will is— what is good, pleasing and perfect." (Rom. 12:2).



“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil 1:9–11).

“Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed, renew your minds...”: a fundamental condition for being able to “discern the will of God”. The criteria for discernment are not “human criteria”. It is the Word that provides the criteria for discerning our inner affections. The task of discernment therefore requires seeing as God sees, judging as God judges, desiring as God desires... In short, that our criteria be God’s, that our desire be aligned with God’s desire.

“May your love grow ever more”: the love of Christ urges us; without love there is no apostolic life. Therefore, an attitude that closes itself off to love, that closes itself off to encounter and surrender to God and our neighbour, renders itself incapable of fidelity. It is not, therefore, a matter of being highly skilled in the use of pedagogical methods. It is a matter of loving deeply and of responding in love to the One we know loves us freely, so that we may give our lives in love (the Paschal experience).

Do not lie to one another, for you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. In this there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, consecrated and beloved, clothe yourselves with tender compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; bear with one another; forgive one another if anyone has a grievance against another; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also do you. And above all, love, which is the crown of perfection. Let the peace of the Messiah rule in your minds, to which you have been called to form one body. Be thankful. Let the Word of the Messiah dwell among you in all its richness; with all skill instruct and encourage one another. With a thankful heart sing to God psalms, hymns and inspired songs. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do

it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:9–17).

Such is the beauty of the life of the apostolic missionary who, with fear and trembling, dares to bear witness to the Word. And so, to conclude, and also to guide our decisions in daily life, a brief reminder of the foundations of the new life that demands our fidelity:

- **Foundational principles** (principles that shape the
 - heart of the apostolic missionary):
 - The ‘imprint’ of God’s will on human affectivity – emotions, inclinations of the will.
 - God’s “will”, God’s plan, revealed in the Word, as the criterion for interpreting human affectivity (hermeneutical criterion of affectivity).
 - Following Christ, a natural inclination towards the way of life of Jesus of Nazareth, poor and humble, a criterion that guides the process of conversion.
- **Signs of conversion:**
 - A passion for finding the right path.
 - Love for the One Absolute, which translates into a progressive freedom from created things. Without anxiety, without anguish, without rejection... and always under the primacy of goodness and mercy (things are good and beautiful, created by God, but He is love first. People are good and beautiful, created by God, but He is love first. Never allow things and people to be judged as evil and conclude that, for that reason, we should concern ourselves only with God... ‘because there are many who think they love God because they have never loved anything or anyone’).
 - The innate inclination to occupy the historical places that Jesus occupied. The innate inclination to take up his cause.

- The constant commitment to adopt a way of life that allows me to discern the will of God.
- Acceptance of mediation (companion, superior, community, Church), as opposed to secrecy and as a clear sign of moving away from narcissism and seeking transcendence. The personal encounter is the meaning of human life and the condition of possibility for the encounter with the Absolute Thou.

And, finally, the Word, lamp that should always illuminate our path:

2 Cor 5:14-21

For the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again for them. So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Even though we once regarded Christ from a worldly point of view, we no longer regard him in that way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. And all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. For in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them, and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Cor 3:1-23

I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but only as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Even now you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving like ordinary men? When one says,

"I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not acting in a human way? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, each one as the Lord gave him. I planted, Apollos watered, but it was God who gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour, for we are God's fellow workers, and you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. But if anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Let no one deceive himself. If any of you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile. Therefore, let no one boast in men, for all things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

INDEX

1. Christian discernment	5
2. The temptations of the apostolic life	9
2.1. Fundamental of Mission: Apostolic charity	10
2.2. The first virtue off the apostolic missionary: humility	11
2.3. The virtue of meekness	19
2.4. The virtue of poverty: the great richness of the apostolic missionary	22
3. Discernment: a path that leads to the longing for a better life	25



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