

**COMMENTARY ON THE
LAY CLARETIAN SOURCEBOOK**

Antonio Vidales, C.M.F.

**English Translation
Joseph Daries, C.M.F.**

**LAY CLARETIAN MOVEMENT
ROME - 1994**

CONTENTS - OUTLINE

CONTENTS - OUTLINE	i
COMMENTARY ON THE LAY CLARETIAN SOURCEBOOK	v
PRESENTATION.....	x
FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS	xi
Commentary on the Lay Claretian Sourcebook	- 1 -
INTRODUCTION	- 1 -
< WHAT IS THE SOURCEBOOK? >	- 1 -
1. INTENTION OF THE SOURCEBOOK	- 1 -
1.2. The Sourcebook and Statutes.....	- 2 -
1.3. The Sourcebook as a Formative Instrument.....	- 3 -
2. THE THREE PARTS OF THE SOURCEBOOKHOW THEY INTERLINK...	- 4 -
2.1. Vocation.....	- 4 -
2.2. Mission.....	- 4 -
2.3. Spirituality.....	- 5 -
2.4. Dovetailing vocation, mission, spirituality	- 6 -
3. IDENTITY AND KINSHIP	- 7 -
3.1 Identity	- 7 -
3.2. Kinship.....	- 8 -
PART 1 VOCATION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN	-11 -
I- DIFFERENT VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH	-11 -
1. THE SOURCEBOOK AND VOCATION	-11 -
2. DIFFERENT VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH	- 12 -
a. Charisms	- 12 -
b. Natural gifts	- 13 -
3. THE THREE PRINCIPAL VOCATIONAL CATEGORIES	- 14 -
a. The priestly vocation	- 14 -
b. The religious vocation	- 15 -
c. The secular or lay vocation	- 15 -
A. <u>WE ARE CLARETIANS</u>	- 17 -
COMMENTARY	- ii -

I - DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK	- 17 -
1. WHAT MAKES US CLARETIANS?	- 17 -
a. An inadequate response	- 17 -
b. A realistic response	- 18 -
(1) <u>Spiritual basis</u>	- 18 -
(2) <u>Historical Basis</u>	- 18 -
II - COMMENTARY	- 20 -
1. THE VOCATION OF CLARET	- 20 -
1.1. God's Call to Claret - Vocation as Gift	- 21 -
a. Claret felt identified with Christ, the Son, concerned with the affairs of His Father.....	- 22 -
b. Claret felt identified with the Son anointed by the Spirit and sent to evangelize the poor	- 22 -
c. Claret felt identified with Christ as the Son of Mary	- 23 -
d. Claret felt identified with Christ the itinerant missionary who has nowhere to rest his head.....	- 23 -
e. Claret felt identified with Christ, the sign of contradiction	- 24 -
f. Claret felt identified with Christ who shared his life and mission with the Apostles.....	- 24 -
1.2. Claret's vocational response	- 26 -
a. Claret's missionary obsession.....	- 26 -
b. His vision of reality - alert to the signs of the times	- 26 -
d. He evangelized by means of the itinerant service of the Word.....	- 27 -
e. Claret's Availability for the most urgent needs in missionary evangelization-	28 -
f. Missionary character of his Marian experience	- 28 -
g. His life in communion "with those who had received... the same Spirit that animated him"	- 28 -
h. Claret multiplied evangelizers.....	- 28 -
2. THE VOCATION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN	- 29 -
2.1. Vocation as a gift	- 29 -
2.2. Vocation as a response	- 30 -
B. <u>WE ARE LAYPERSONS</u>	- 31 -
I - DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK	- 31 -
1. WHO IS A LAYPERSON?	- 31 -
> <u>THE SOURCEBOOK AND VOCATION</u> <	- 31 -
1.1. Recovering for Laity the common heritage of the people of God.....	- 31 -
a. Previous to Vatican II.....	- 31 -
b. Vatican II tells us.....	- 31 -
c. Religious and the following of Jesus	- 31 -

d.	Recovering for the laity that which is common to the whole people of God-	32 -
(1)	The fundamental equality of all Christians	32 -
(2)	The laity also have a vocation	32 -
(3)	Active co-responsibility in the life and mission of the Church	32 -
1.2.	Discovering the Specific Character of the Laity	33 -
1.2.1.	Within the secular dimension of the Church.....	33 -
a.	Church/World before Vatican II.....	33 -
b.	Church/World with Vatican II.....	33 -
(1)	The Christic dimension of creation	34 -
(2)	The cosmic dimension of the Incarnation	34 -
c.	A Church for the World.....	34 -
d.	The Church and "Secularity"	34 -
d.	Christian Lay Persons and Secularity.....	34 -
1.2.2.	Within the charismatic dimension of the Church	35 -
1.3.	A some important points regarding charisms and Gifts.....	35 -
a.	The Holy Spirit and Charisms	36 -
b.	Charisms and God's plan	36 -
c.	Each person has many charisms.....	36 -
d.	Every charism is for a service in the Church	36 -
e.	Charisms are actual and historical	37 -
f.	Charisms essential for the Church	37 -
g.	Charisms and laity	37 -
1.3.1.	Which charisms are most characteristic of the laity?	38 -
a.	Kerygmatic	38 -
b.	Diaconal	38 -

II -COMMENTARY

1. THE LAY PERSON IN THE CHURCH

1.1.	The Two Spheres of the Lay Vocation.....	39 -
a.	Christians called to follow Christ	39 -
b.	The Lay Vocation	40 -
c.	The "lay" way to build the Kingdom	40 -
d.	Laity following Jesus	40 -
1.2.	A Distinctive Way of Being Church.....	41 -
a.	Consecration: Anointed and Sent as Laypersons	41 -
(1)	Consecration	41 -
(2)	Mission	41 -
b.	The priesthood of the faithful or common priesthood of all Christians	42 -
1.3.	Anointed and conformed with Christ, priest, prophet and king.....	44 -
1.4.	Priestly Function of laity.....	45 -
a.	Source of nourishment	45 -
b.	The content of this priestly function	46 -

c. The way of consecrating our person	- 46 -
d. The celebration of Eucharist - culminating moment	- 46 -
1.5. Prophetic Function	- 47 -
a. We, like Christ, must be prophets in words and works	- 48 -
(1) Prophets by the word	- 48 -
(2) Confess the faith	- 48 -
(3) Denounce evil	- 49 -
(4) To announce the what is good	- 49 -
(5) Prophets are above all women and men of God	- 50 -
1.6. Kingly function	- 50 -
a. In ourselves	- 51 -
b. In our sisters and brothers	- 51 -
c. In society	- 51 -
d. All creation	- 52 -
2.3. A distinctive way of being in the world at the service of the Kingdom.....	- 53 -
2.3.1. What do we mean by "world"?	- 53 -
2.3.2. The laity and the world.....	- 53 -
III. <u>WE ARE CHRISTIANS</u>	- 56 -
LIVING THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION AS CLARETIANS AND LAITY	- 57 -
I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK	- 57 -
1. DIMENSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION	
GOSPEL RADICALISM	- 57 -
1.1. The Following of Jesus	- 58 -
a. What does following Jesus mean?.....	- 58 -
b. Following Jesus is not imitation of Christ.....	- 58 -
c. Following is not copying Jesus.....	- 59 -
e. Following Jesus means conforming our lifestyle to His	- 59 -
1.2. Gospel radicalism.....	- 59 -
a) Gospel radicalism in the subjective sense	- 59 -
b) Gospel radicalism in an objective sense	- 59 -
c) The three demands for following Jesus	- 60 -
(1) The person of Jesus	- 60 -
(2) The Reign of God	- 60 -
(3) The love of neighbor.....	- 60 -
(d) Gospel radicalism only for the elite?	- 60 -
(e) Religious and gospel radicalism	- 60 -
(f) Married folk and gospel radicalism	- 60 -
1.3. The Beatitudes as a Proposal for the Radical Following of Jesus.....	- 61 -
II. COMMENTARY	- 62 -

1. ORIGIN AND TRINITARIAN DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION.....	- 62 -
1.1. The Initiative and Plan of the Father.....	- 63 -
1.2. Baptism: moment of trinitarian action in our being and life	- 63 -
a. In relation to the Father	- 63 -
b. In relation to Christ	- 64 -
c. In relation to the Spirit	- 64 -
(1) Dwells in us	- 64 -
(2) Acts in us	- 64 -
d. In relation to the Church	- 65 -
1.3. The Christian vocation as a task to be realized	- 65 -
2. TAKING THE BEATITUDES AS A RULE OF LIFE.....	- 66 -
2.1. Recovering the Beatitudes for the Laity.....	- 66 -
2.2. The beatitudes as a Rule of Life.....	- 66 -
2.3. Life according to the Beatitudes supposes an option for Christ and for the Kingdom.....	- 67 -
2.4. The Beatitudes as a rule of life demand putting everything at the service of Christ and of the Kingdom.....	- 67 -
a. Opening ourselves to Christ and the Kingdom	- 67 -
b. The power of Christ and the Kingdom.....	- 67 -
2.5. Life according to the Beatitudes demands renunciations.....	- 68 -
3. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF GOSPEL RADICALISM.....	- 68 -
2.1. Poor in the eyes of God - Creaturely Poverty	- 69 -
2.2. In Solidarity with the poor and the marginalized	- 69 -
a) "Sharing of our goods with those who suffer misery and injustice"	- 70 -
b) "and to help them find a way out of such conditions by promoting human advancement"	- 70 -
2.3. Being open in using our goods for our neighbors and the work of evangelization	- 70 -
a) "To carefully administer our goods"	- 70 -
b) Simplicity and austerity of life in order to be able to share more	- 70 -
2.4. Not allowing ourselves to be possessed by our possessions	- 70 -
2.5. Witnesses to the primacy of God and of absolute goods	- 71 -
2.6. Opening the gates of our affective world to the liberating power of the Kingdom	- 72 -
a. Letting the Kingdom to be a part of our affective world	- 72 -
b. Our affectivity and God's plan for us	- 73 -
(1) God's plan for us is related to love	- 73 -
(2) Oblative love	- 73 -
c. Oblative love and our growth as persons	
e. Oblative love as prophetic denunciation	- 74 -

2.3.7. "Here I am; I come to do your will" (Heb 10:9).....	- 75 -
a. The ceaseless search to know and do God's will	- 75 -
b. There are many ways and means to seek God's will	- 75 -
(1) The Word	- 76 -
(2) The signs of the times	- 76 -
(3) Prayer	- 78 -
(4) the Church's teachings	- 78 -
(5) Dialogue with our brothers and sisters	- 78 -
(6) The Group Project	- 78 -
c. Obedience to the Father and mission	- 78 -
d. The will of God and family and professional commitments	- 79 -
2.4. Following Jesus in Community	- 80 -
Community	- 80 -
Life in communion, and essential dimension of Jesus	- 82 -
2.4.1. The Community of Lay Claretians	- 83 -
2.4.2. Channels of Communion	- 83 -
2.4.3. Group or Community?	- 84 -
2.4.4. Communion toward outside the group	- 86 -
Other Groups of Lay Claretians	- 86 -
The Claretian Family	- 86 -
The Local Church	- 86 -
Other Christian Confessions	- 86 -

PART 2 MISSION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN	- 87 -
I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK	- 87 -
1. "OUR MISSION"	- 87 -
2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS MISSION OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH	- 89 -
2.1. How was the "Kingdom of God" understood in Jesus' times?.....	- 90 -
a. Some were awaiting a lightning-like coming.....	- 90 -
b. Others were awaiting the coming of the Kingdom in two stages.....	- 90 -
2.2. The Kingdom that Jesus Proclaimed.....	- 91 -
2.3. Christ and the Kingdom of God	- 92 -
a. The Kingdom constitutes Jesus' mission.....	- 92 -
b. Jesus personifies the Kingdom.....	- 92 -
c. Christ is the point of encounter with the Kingdom for all creation.....	- 92 -
2.4. The two dimensions of the Kingdom of God.....	- 93 -
a. The vertical line of filiation, God's love for us	- 93 -
b. The horizontal line of fraternity, one in solidarity with Christ	- 93 -
2.5. The Kingdom of God is both a gift and a task	- 94 -
2.6. The Church and the Kingdom of God.....	- 95 -
3. EVANGELIZATION	- 96 -
3.1. What is evangelization?	- 96 -

3.2. How the Church carries out its evangelizing mission (Mediations)	- 98 -
3.2.1. Proclaiming the Gospel - The service of the word.....	- 98 -
a. First is " <i>kerygma</i> "	- 99 -
b. Second is catechesis	- 99 -
c. Third is theology	- 99 -
3.2.2. Living the Gospel - Being a community of the Kingdom.....	- 99 -
3.2.3. Doing/Living the Gospel - Creating a more just and fraternal society	-100 -
3.2.4. Celebrating the Gospel - The Liturgy	-100 -
3.3. The Lay Claretian's Place in the Church's Evangelizing Action.....	-101 -
II. COMMENTARY	-103 -
1. ECCLESIAL THRUST OF THE MISSION OF LAY CLARETIANS	-103 -
1.1. How we participate in the Church's mission.....	-104 -
1.2. Trinitarian and Christological origin of the Church's mission.....	-104 -
1.3. Content of the Church's mission	-105 -
2. THE MISSION OF CLARET AND OF THE CLARETIAN FAMILY	-106 -
2.1. The mission of Claret.....	-107 -
2.2. The mission of the Claretian Family	-108 -
2.3. Key content of the Claretian mission	-109 -
2.4. The Leading Role of the Word	-109 -
3. THE MISSION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN	-111 -
< <u>The two great spheres of the mission of the Lay Claretian</u> >	-111 -
3.1. Evangelizing action of the Lay Claretian in the World.....	-112 -
3.1.1. Christian influence on temporal realities	-112 -
a. How to Influence Temporal Realities.....	-112 -
b. Fields or Areas of Action for the Lay Claretian	-113 -
(1) The vast and complex world of politics	-113 -
(2) "The social order"	-114 -
(3) The world of economy.....	-115 -
(4) Culture	-116 -
(5) Work.....	-116 -
(6) The Family	-117 -
3.1.2. Action aimed at Transforming the World.....	- 118 -
< <u>WHAT IS TRANSFORMING ACTION?</u> >	- 118 -
a. Action on behalf of human justice	- 120 -
b. Human Advancement	- 121 -
c. Liberation	- 122 -
3.2. In the Church - building and animating the Church community.....	- 123 -
3.2.1. By promoting a new model of Church.....	- 123 -
a) Incarnated in the people	- 124 -
b) Community-oriented and participative	- 124 -

c) Secular	- 125 -
3.2.2. By means of pastoral action	- 126 -
4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAY CLARETIAN MISSION	- 128 -

PART 3 SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAY CLARETIAN..... - 131 -

I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK..... - 131 -

1. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY	- 131 -
1.1. Reductionist notions of spirituality	- 131 -
1.2. Toward a Concept of Christian Spirituality	- 133 -
1.3. The two dimensions of spirituality.....	- 134 -
1.4. Sources of Christian Spirituality	- 135 -
1.5. A Spirituality incarnated in reality and in history	- 135 -
1.5.1. Foundation of this Incarnation	- 135 -
1.5.2. Experiencing God in history and in our brothers and sisters	- 136 -
1.5.3. Reality as a key to live all the elements of Christian spirituality	- 137 -
2. CAN THERE BE A LAY AND CLARETIAN SPIRITUALITY?.....	- 138 -

II. COMMENTARY

1. THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY PRESENTED IN THE SOURCEBOOK	- 141 -
1.1. Concepts of Spirituality.....	- 142 -
2. CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR SPIRITUALITY	- 143 -
2.1. All-embracing	- 143 -
2.2. Integrating	- 144 -
2.3. Humanizing.....	- 145 -
2.4. A prophetic - liberating spirituality/entails solidarity - conflict.....	- 145 -
2.5. Four aspects of a Lay Spirituality.....	- 147 -
a. Experience of God in Temporal Affairs	- 147 -
b. Actions for world transformation	- 147 -
c) A new focus to spirituality	- 147 -
d) Our professional status shapes our spirituality.....	- 148 -
2.6. And a Claretian Spirituality.....	- 148 -
3. DIMENSIONS OF OUR SPIRITUALITY	- 150 -
3.1. The two dimensions: mystical and political.....	- 150 -
a. Our spiritual life, two points of reference: God and human beings.....	- 150 -
b. The mystical dimension	- 151 -
c) The political dimension.....	- 151 -
3.2. The mystical dimension.	- 151 -
3.2.1. The Father: Loving Him who first loved us.....	- 152 -
3.2.2. Christ: Following Jesus of Nazareth.	- 153 -
a. Union with Christ is a gift of the Father.....	- 154 -

b. "Called by Jesus to follow Him.....	- 154 -
c. "He who remains in me bears much fruit"	- 154 -
3.2.3. The Holy Spirit: the power that guides and sustains us	- 155 -
3.2.4. Mary: Imitating the First Follower of Jesus	- 156 -
3.2.5. The Church: Following Jesus in Community	- 158 -
3.3. The Political Dimension	- 159 -
3.3.1. The Christian animation of temporal realities	- 160 -
3.3.2. Action to Transform the World.....	- 160 -
4. SOURCES OF OUR SPIRITUALITY	- 163 -
< <u>Keys to Understanding this section of the Sourcebook</u> >	- 163 -
a. The Word of God	- 163 -
b. Prayer	- 163 -
c. The Sacraments	- 164 -
d. God revealed through our sisters and brothers.....	- 165 -
4.1. The Word of God	- 165 -
4.2. The Sacraments	- 168 -
(1) Baptism.....	- 168 -
(2) Eucharist.....	- 169 -
(3) Matrimony	- 169 -
(4) Confirmation	- 169 -
(5) Reconciliation.....	- 170 -
4.3. Prayer	- 170 -
4.4. Our Brothers and Sisters	- 174 -

COMMENTARY ON THE
LAY CLARETIAN SOURCEBOOK

PRESENTATION

Some Lay Claretians found it difficult to grasp the language and concepts dealt with in the Sourcebook. This Commentary aims at making it easier for them to understand the Sourcebook and, above all, to help them live it.

The structure of the Commentary is simple and straightforward. First, it offers a Doctrinal Framework in which each part of the Sourcebook can be better understood. Second, it offers a Commentary on corresponding numbers of the Sourcebook. Here and there it offers some outlines summarizing reflections or focuses, in order to help the reader grasp the themes dealt with in the Sourcebook.

While it is true that theoretical reflection on the vocation, mission and spirituality of the Lay Claretian is very important, but whatever small expression by which we realize our mission of announcing, showing and opening up ways to the Reign of God, is much more important. God grant that this Commentary may spur you on to multiply such expressions. Theoretical reflections are useless, if the way we live our lives does not change.

Cochabamba, May 1991.

FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

1. Documents of Vatican II.

AA	Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity
AG	Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church
CD	Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops
DV	Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
GS	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
LG	Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

2. Other Documents.

CL	" Christifideles Laici " (1988) document of John Paul II on the vocation and mission of the laity.
EN	" Evangelii Nuntiandi " (1975), apostolic exhortation of Paul VI on the modern world.
DP	" Puebla Document " (1979), document of the Latin American Bishops at assembly of Puebla.
PP	" Populorum Progressio " (1967), Encyclical of Paul VI on the progress of peoples.
SRS	" Sollicitudo rei socialis " (1987), Encyclical of John Paul II on the social concern of the Church.
RM	" Redemptoris Missio " (1990), Encyclical of John Paul II on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate.

Commentary on the Lay Claretian Sourcebook

INTRODUCTION

< WHAT IS THE SOURCEBOOK? >

1. Intention of the Sourcebook

After a varied history of obstacles, different difficult circumstances and the encouragement to laity in the Vatican II documents, Lay Claretians began a new epoch in 1979. Ideas about their identity needed clarification. With this the first draft of the Sourcebook began. The methodology and outline was proposed by the then director of the General Secretariat for Lay Claretians, Rev. Antonio Vidales, C.M.F.¹

The Spanish title for the Sourcebook is Ideario. It brings together ideas and ideals. It brings together the basic concepts on which the Lay Claretian Movement is based. These principle ideas give the Movement stability, however, these ideas are not etched in stone, they have life and freedom. They are ideas from which the Movement can launch out into the future. Besides lending a foundation and stability, they give it life, energize it and mobilize it to move towards higher goals of Christian living and making an evangelizing commitment. In this way the Sourcebook relates to what is ideal. It sets out what utopic, an ideal for Christian living.

From a theological viewpoint it is understood as part of God's design for members of the Movement. The Sourcebook is an interpretation of God's plan for Lay Claretians. It describes the life and mission of members of the Movement. It is what God has foreseen they should be and do in the Church and in the world.

¹ Vidales, A., "Ideario del Seglar Claretiano," Col. subsidios n. 12

This plan of God which is, so to speak, inscribed in our genetic code as children of God, finds life in one's baptismal consecration through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit who has been sent by God into our hearts (Gal 4:6).²

! vocation:

call from God to carry out His plan.

! mission:

empowerment and sending by the Spirit to be and to do what God wants and individual to be and do.

! spirituality:

striving to live our vocation and carry out our mission of following Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

Thus the Sourcebook is a rule of Christian life for a Lay Claretian. The intention is not to impose a rule on anyone, but rather to point out a path persons can freely choose.

For any follower of Jesus the supreme rule of life is the Gospel. The Sourcebook is nothing more than a reading of the Gospel and its radical exigencies in light of the Lay Claretian vocation and mission. It is a reading of the whole Gospel in which special significance is given to the those aspects most directly related to the mission of the Lay Claretian. It is what God wants a Lay Claretian to be and do in the Church and the world in order to accept the reign of God and witness it, to announce it and to open avenues for it in the world.

1.2. The Sourcebook and Statutes

The Lay Claretian Movement also has a second small book entitled "Statutes." Second is emphasized not only because it appeared later in time but also because it is secondary in value as compared to the Sourcebook.

² "Because you are sons and daughters, God has sent into your hearts the spirit of His Son which cries out: Abba! That is: Father! You yourself are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and yours is the inheritance by God's grace."(Gal 4:6-7)

The Statutes are a document of a normative character. "While the Sourcebook is a reading of the Gospel within our charism and a presentation of our way of following Jesus, the Statutes refer to the organization of the Movement."³ These Statutes are very brief, they are limited to gathering together only the indispensable norms for clarification and the coordination of the Movement. They are at the same time very limited and open so as not to "restrict the freedom and creativity of the gift of the Spirit, and stifle the distinctiveness of each group or community of Lay Claretians."⁴

1.3. The Sourcebook as a Formative Instrument

The Sourcebook is a very important tool for the formation process of a Lay Claretian from the very first steps of his or her vocational discernment.

Bearing in mind the great pluralism that characterizes the Lay Claretian Movement, it should not be thought that this Movement is a catchall for just anybody, it is especially not for those whose aspirations, plans, and activities are not in line with those of the Movement.

The Sourcebook is sort of a "identity kit" for the Lay Claretian. This image is not just a fictitious ideal. It is rather what has been gathered from the very reality that Lay Claretians offer, albeit an idealized reality. It has been drafted with the collaboration of all Lay Claretians, it is they who have projected what they are and, above all, where they want to go as Christians.

The Sourcebook offers us the profile of the Lay Claretian. A tool for discernment and vocational growth, it is an indispensable element in the process of formation. It acts as guide and a constant point of reference. The Sourcebook presents us with the overall goals and partial goals of the process of formation, articulated into a grand Utopia that gives meaning and orientation to the whole process and to each of its goals, and leads us to concentrate all our efforts on achieving them.

³ Statutes, Introduction.

⁴ Statutes, Introduction.

2. THE THREE PARTS OF THE SOURCEBOOK HOW THEY INTERLINK

The contents of the Sourcebook are divided into three parts: **vocation, mission and spirituality**. This involves three dimensions which in real life form an indivisible whole. In order to facilitate analysis and comprehension in describing what a Lay Claretian is, it is convenient to distinguish these three dimensions of his or her being. However, one should never forget that this is just a methodological procedure. In the person and in real life, they cannot be separated. From the very outset then, we must reject the oversimplified conception that equates being with vocation, doing with mission and praying with spirituality. These three dimensions indivisibly constitute our Christian being.

2.1. Vocation

All human beings have a vocation, even before we are born, God has a life plan for each one of us (**the human vocation**). He calls each one of us and gives us the necessary powers to make this life plan a reality.

The **Christian vocation** takes this human vocation in order to carry it out in Christ and like Christ by following Him. The Christian vocation is our concrete way of fulfilling our human vocation.

For the followers of Jesus the fundamental and only vocation is the Christian vocation. It is the call of God to union with Christ. It is to follow Jesus, to pursue His mission and the practices by which means He announced, embodied and spread the reign of God. The other vocations within the people of God are simply ways of carrying out this single vocation.

2.2. Mission

Vocation is always for mission. God calls us and empowers us with His gifts so that we can provide, both in the Church and in the world, a service to His reign. Because vocation is for mission, both coincide perfectly. Everyone who is called is also sent. We are called and sent at the same time and in the same act. Both dimensions, being called and being sent, form part of God's plan for us, and as such they form part of our Christian being. God's intervention in our life, which is an election, a call and a consecration, also empowers us for mission and sending. Consequently, mission is principally a gift and work of God in us; it is not our work alone.

Not only do we have a mission, we are for mission. Hence we are missionaries. Our being missionary is expressed and realized in actions through which we provide the service to which God has destined us. As said before, mission is not just the services and actions by means of which we carry it out. It is a far deeper reality. It is rooted in and belongs to our Christian being as such.

2.3. Spirituality

One notion still rather widespread is that spirituality is identified with prayer, receiving the Sacraments and reading the Word of God. However, spirituality has much broader dimensions.

Spirituality is a response to the call of God. A response to vocation and mission. It is an endeavor to carry out God's plan for us. But we must at once note that it is not just "our" endeavor. We are not alone in this task; the Holy Spirit is present in us. The Spirit is the light that illumines us and the force that empowers us, spurs us on and helps us carry out God's plan.

Spirituality consists in living according to the Spirit. It embraces all that we are and all that we do. We can say that spirituality consists in following Jesus and pursuing His mission in the power of the Spirit.

To understand these three dimensions and their indestructible unity better, it is necessary to take God's plan as our starting point.

Even before He called us into existence, God had a precise plan for each one of us. As St. Paul says, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be His sons and daughters in Jesus Christ, according to the sheer purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5).

God's plan for each one of us is not something external to ourselves; rather it is inscribed in the deepest depths of our being. When we are born we are already, in germ, all that we are called to be. With the help of God's grace and with the enlightenment and power of His Spirit who acts in us, we keep on discovering the plan of God that lies within us. We strive to develop it and not allow it to remain in an embryonic state.

2.4. Dovetailing vocation, mission, spirituality

The outline offered below illustrates how vocation, mission and spirituality are different aspects of one and the same reality: that of being Christian. They have one and the same origin, the Father; one and the same essential content, the following of Jesus; one and the same objective: announcing, embodying and building the Reign of God; and one and the same final aim: the glory of the Father.

VOCATION

The Father calls us follow Jesus, who announced, embodied and opened up pathways to the Reign of God, even at the cost of his life. The Father, through His Spirit, conforms us with Christ, a "prophet powerful in words and deeds" (Lk 24:19),

MISSION

so that we may follow Him and pursue, in community, by words and deeds, His striving until death to announce , embody and open up pathways to the Kingdom.

SPIRITUALITY

We respond to the Father's call by following Christ crucified and by living, through the power of the Spirit, our mission of accepting, announcing, embodying and opening up pathways to the Reign of God.

And we do all of this united and enlivened by the witness and missionary spirit of Saint Anthony Mary Claret.

3. IDENTITY AND KINSHIP

The three parts into which the Sourcebook systematically divided are preceded by two brief presentations entitled "Identity and Kinship." Identity is that which serves to identify a person. The first paragraphs of the Sourcebook are a kind of identification card for a Lay Claretian, stating who she or he is (identity). It then addresses kinship, those who are the next of kin - parents, brothers and sisters - (filiation).

SOURCEBOOK



Lay Claretians are Christians who are striving to make our own the mission of Jesus in the world, living the demands of the Kingdom, and, always within the framework of our lay identity, offering a service of evangelization in the Church, according to the charism and spirit of St. Anthony Mary Claret.

3.1 Identity

The first chapter of the Sourcebook offers a very summarized description of the aspects of vocation, mission and the spirituality of the Lay Claretian. All of these aspects are further developed in the body of the Sourcebook. It speaks of vocation, stating that Lay Claretians are Christians, Claretians and Laypersons. These points are further developed in numbers 3-18.

Even in this first chapter there is an allusion to the Gospel radicalism of living according to "the demands of the Kingdom," a theme developed in numbers 12-18. It also alludes to the Claretian evangelizing mission to be found in 19-27.

In this first chapter of the Sourcebook the word spirituality is not mentioned, however its contents are present since, as mentioned in the introduction, spirituality is our way of living the Lay Claretian vocation and mission. Quoting from above we can say that spirituality is "to make our own mission of Jesus in the world," by "living the demands of the Kingdom" and by "offering a service of evangelization" according to the charism of Claret and according to the lay vocation. This theme of spirituality is further developed in numbers 28-40.

We take St. Anthony Mary Claret as our inspiration and father and, together with the institutes he founded, make up the Claretian Family.

3.2. Kinship

Number 2 of the Sourcebook identifies our father as: Saint Anthony Mary Claret. It alludes, without naming them specifically, to our brothers and sisters, that is: "the Institutes founded by Claret. Together with them the Lay Claretians form the Claretian Family."

In the text of the Sourcebook approved in the First Lay Claretian Assembly (1983), the names of the institutes are specified: the **Claretian Missionaries** (founded in 1949), the **Claretian Missionary Sisters** (founded in by Claret together with Mother Antonia París in Cuba, 1955) and the **Institute of Cordimarian Filiation** begun in 1943 using as its founding statues the book "Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary," (written by Claret in 1850).

These three institutes and the Lay Claretians make up the nuclear Claretian Family. However, the first-born of these four children of Claret are the Lay Claretians. He started the first groups of laity in 1847.

Even though the Lay Claretians are the first-born, they have by no means reached their maturity. They have had their times of turmoil, crises and at times their objectives were out of focus. All this retarded their growth. We can say that they were in a state of hibernation for 60 years (from 1878 to 1938) during which the lay groups organized by Claret disappeared. When they came out of hibernation, they felt disoriented in a world they didn't know, they clung to the hand of the Congregation of Missionaries to be able to walk alongside it, depending on it as a type of Claretian "third order." In 1979 the Claretians invited them "to walk under their own power, alongside the other Claretian groups, whose history has been purified, fortified and, in a certain way, consecrated."⁵

⁵ Message to the Lay Claretians, 19th General Chapter, n.6.

Today the Claretian Family is made up not only of these for groups that arose directly from Saint Anthony Claret, but also of other institutes which the Sons of Claret founded. They are groups which feel animated by the same missionary spirit that Claret had. Besides those mentioned above, the following are the institutes that make up the Claretian Family in a broader sense:

- ! The Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate, founded by Fr. Armengol in Equatorial Guinea in 1909.
- ! The Cordimarian Missionary Sisters, founded by Fr. Julián Collell in Mexico in 1921.
- ! The Claretian Institution, founded in Vic (Spain) by Fr. Luis Pujol in 1951.
- ! The Missionary Sisters of St. Anthony Mary Claret, founded by Bishop Geraldo Fernández in Brazil in 1958.

Part 1

VOCATION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

I- DIFFERENT VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

1. THE SOURCEBOOK AND VOCATION

The Sourcebook describes the vocation of the Lay Claretian in three parts: (1) "We are Claretians," (2) "We are Laypersons" (3) "We are Christians."

One may be surprised at the order of these three parts. It would seem that the inverse order would be more logical: We are Christians, Laypersons and Claretians. Beginning with what is general and more essential and proceeding to the particular or the secondary. We are first of all Christians and properly speaking we are only Christians.

In number 1 of the Sourcebook these three points are in yet another order: Christians, Claretians and Laypersons. This also is not altogether logical. Both in the first draft of the Sourcebook (Assembly of 1983) and in its revision (Assembly of 1987), there were those that proposed adopting an order that they considered more logical. However this idea did not prevail.

The "illogical" order was kept because it seemed easier to explain things. To describe first the Christian vocation, then the lay vocation and, finally, the Claretian vocation, might lead one to understand the lay and Claretian vocations are different from the Christian vocation. It could possibly lead one to imagine that the "lay-ness" and "Claretian-ness" are not part of being a Christian but something that may be added to being a Christian and detachable from being a Christian.

The Claretian charism is not gift that comes to us from Claret and adds something new which is not already contained in being a Christian. The Claretian charism is, first and foremost, part of being a Christian, a dimension of Christ and of Christ's mission. Claret and all Claretians have been especially patterned after Christ the Missionary through the gifts of the Spirit. The Claretian vocation therefore is a mode of following Christ whereby we live the fullness of the Christian vocation. Hence, it is not something added to our being Christian but rather a focus, a dimension of that Christian being. Through the action of the Spirit the Christian acquires a special focus and the charism becomes the vision through which we see and live all the other dimensions of our Christian being.

Thus to follow some type of method, what is first described is the key focus whereby we live as followers of Christ. This does not mean the Claretian dimension or the lay dimension is more important than the totality of the Christian vocation. Both of these are included in the Christian vocation.

Since it is God's will that a Lay Claretian live his or her Christian vocation as a lay person and Claretian, it is logical to begin the description focusing on what we call "Claretian." It is not because it comes from Claret, but because Claret lived the Christian vocation in a special way.

If we started by first describing the Christian vocation and then added the description of the lay and Christian vocation, the impression might be created that the latter were something superficial and some type of veneer applied to the real core of the Christian vocation. This is by no means true. **Being Claretian is our concrete way of being Christian.**

2. DIFFERENT VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

As we said above, our fundamental vocation is the Christian vocation. It is the call of God to follow Jesus and carry on His mission of announcing, embodying and spreading the Reign of God. Other vocations found in the Church are simply different ways of realizing the Christian vocation. These ways do not arise from the free initiative of the individual, they originate from God's plan and from His specific call to carry it out. God not only has a plan for us, He also equips us for that plan.

What lies at the origin of these different vocations are God's gifts, both those we call gifts of grace (charisms) and those that are natural gifts.

- a. **Charisms** are gifts that God gives us through the Holy Spirit. These gifts transform, enable and destine those who receive them to perform a special service in the Church and in the world.

There is an immense variety of charisms and hence, of vocations:

- ! There are charisms that destine those who receive them **to perform lasting services** in the Christian community such as the ordained ministries - bishops, priests, deacons.

- ! Other charisms lead those who receive them **to determine forms of life and service** - matrimony, celibacy, etc.
 - ! There are gifts of the Spirit that equip and destine their recipients **for determined ways of announcing and spreading the Reign of God** - by means of Service of the Word, human promotion, attending the sick, etc.
- b. Natural gifts** also come from God. They lead persons who might be better endowed with them to perform determined professional or work-related services (medicine, teaching, politics, etc.). Through these services to others we can also build up the Reign of God.

The charism which each person receives along with his or her natural qualities and gifts leads one to a determined type of work or profession. It is a way of being, doing and relating in a group and in society. It shapes the persons total vocation, position and service in the Church and in society for the upbuilding of the Kingdom. Thus, for example, a person can have a vocation to lay life, to matrimony, to the work of evangelization by means of the word, to the practice of medicine, etc. Each person is unique, and his or her vocation is also unique.

As said earlier, there is but one vocation: the Christian vocation. Now we are saying that there are as many vocations as there are persons. That in each person this unique Christian vocation takes on different facets, thanks to their charisms, their natural gifts, their heredity, their education and their own personal history.

Bearing in mind these two statements: (1) That there is but one vocation and, (2) that there are as many vocations as there are persons, what do we mean by speaking of the Lay Claretian vocation?

This Lay Claretian vocation refers to the common elements that Lay Claretians share through the charism they have received. My vocation is personal, but it has elements in common with the vocation of other persons. These elements put us in tune with each other, to seek one another out and come together in order to share our vocation and mission. The Spirit and the pathways of our own lives have led us to meet one another and to be a community and Movement of Lay Claretians.

3. THE THREE PRINCIPAL VOCATIONAL CATEGORIES

Traditionally, the Church has distinguished three principal categories of vocations: priestly, religious and lay. These are not water-tight compartments, because we know, for example, that there are priests who are also religious.

Nor are the groups and persons within each of these categories homogeneous, for as was said earlier, each person has his or her own unique vocational profile. The existence of fundamental common elements allows us to speak of the priestly vocation, although there are different ways of living the priestly vocation. Likewise, the religious vocation is not unique. There are many communities or congregations whose vocation and mission are different. For example, the difference between those who live a life of a hermit as the hermits of Charles de Foucauld, and the very active La Salle Teaching Brothers. Nevertheless, by virtue of the common fundamental elements that the different religious institutes share, they are grouped into a single category - the religious vocation.

We must say the same of the lay vocation. It is a very broad category made up of manifold vocations that differ greatly one from another. This reveals the inexhaustible riches of the gifts of the Spirit.

Vatican II, speaking precisely of the laity, with a view to describing the specific distinction of the lay vocation, clearly stated the three principal categories of vocations.

- ! "Those in sacred orders (bishops, priests and deacons)...,are chiefly and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry" (LG 31b).
- ! "Religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes" (LG 31b).
- ! "The laity, by their very vocation, seek the God's Kingdom by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God" (LG 31c).

The Council pointed out what was characteristic of each of the vocational categories in the mission they have within the Church. Thus mission is the visible face of vocation. Behind mission is vocation, the call of God, which is a grace enabling one for mission.

Taking the Council's statements as a basic point of reference, we can affirm:

- a. The priestly vocation** (bishops and priests) is gift and call of God to live, announce and build up the Kingdom through the service of bringing together, forming (by word and sacraments) and leading the Christian community. The Holy Spirit has equipped these persons for this function. The Church has destined them for it by means of ordination.

Both things are necessary: charism (gift) and ordination. When one is lacking, imbalances are created in service to the community, for example, one can be ordained without having the corresponding charism, thus he is ordained not by vocation but by some other motivation or influences. Thus the imbalance.

By means of the Sacrament of Orders, the Church integrates those who have received ordination into the ministerial structure of the community, thus they have the apostolic mission of vigilance for the purity of the faith, administer or preside at the sacraments, plan and coordinate the Church's mission.

"In these ministerial functions they act in the name of Christ the Head (cf. PO 2, 12) anointed by the Spirit, they actualize the priesthood of Christ in and for the community by being His instruments for the forgiveness of sins, celebration of the Eucharist and the formation of the community which is the seed of the Kingdom of God."⁶

- b. The religious vocation** is marked by public profession of a special, Church-recognized way of Christian life. This way of living signifies and prophetically witnesses to an intense search for God and a closer following of Christ. It also gives an eschatological dimension to Christian faith, which, in a way anticipates what men and women will be in the future, when the Kingdom reaches its fullness beyond history.

These three elements are common to all Christian vocations. However, the religious vocation makes them more visible and more apparent in society. For example, all Christians are called to follow Jesus, but the lifestyle religious publicly assume is closer to the one Jesus chose for Himself. Religious, like Jesus, leave parents, brothers, sisters, wife and children and practice a more literal following of Jesus. This doesn't mean that this is a more radical following since that all depends on the degree of each one's commitment. A married person can live the Gospel more radically than a religious. However, speaking objectively, the lifestyle of a religious because of its make up, more closely resembles that of Christ.

- c. The secular or lay vocation** is characterized by announcing, living energizing and transforming temporal realities while blazing trails for the Kingdom in a "hands-on" way. "The laity...seek God's Kingdom by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God" (LG 31b).

⁶ Estrada, J.A., *Identidad de los laicos*. Ed. Paulinas, Madrid 1990,p, 192.

Perhaps these three categories (priestly, religious and lay vocations) will disappear in the future and be replaced by others based more directly on the diversity of charisms that the Spirit grants to the members of the Church.⁷

Let me repeat, we must be careful not to create water-tight compartments. Each Christian has various charisms. Hence, while a priest has the charism of priestly ministry, he may also have others that equip him to intervene "hands-on" in the transformation of temporal realities. And laypersons can also have charisms that equip them to come together, energize and direct Christian communities. No charisms should remain unused. This would be a sin against the Holy Spirit who gives charisms for the good of the whole community so that the Church may better realize its mission.

Pope John Paul II document on the laity quotes "Christifideles Laici" (1988) highlights the diversity and complementarity of these three vocations. It points out how each is related to the other and is at each others service (CL 55d).

⁷ Forte, B., *Laicidas y laicado*. Ed. Sígueme, Salamanca 1987, pp. 45-50.

VOCATION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

A. WE ARE CLARETIANS

I - DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

1. WHAT MAKES US CLARETIANS?

In numbers 3-5 the Sourcebook describes the Claretian dimension of our Christian vocation. After reading these numbers we may ask: "What is it, finally, that makes us Claretians? Why are we Lay Claretians and not Salesian Collaborators?"

- a. An inadequate response** to this question could be: Because we have received the Claretian charism. Some may think the best answer to these questions is to say that what makes us Claretians is the fact that we've received the Claretian charism. However this is an answer that requires some explanation.

What does it mean to speak of a "Claretian" charism? To modify a gift of the Spirit with the adjective "Claretian" may lead to some problems.

- ! Some might believe that Claret transmits this gift to us. However, charisms are gifts which the Spirit gives to each of us directly, in the historical here and now in which we are living.
- ! Others might think that this charism appeared for the first time in the Church in the person of Claret enabling him for a definite mission in the Church. And that after him, it appears in his successors, the Claretians.

If our understanding is such, only the one who receives this charism can be Claretian and must be a Claretian if he wants to follow his calling in life. However this is not the common understanding. We believe our charism is not the same as Claret's. Charisms are personal, yet we can say that our charism is similar to his. Vatican II highlighted the personal character of charisms when it stated that the Spirit "gives his gifts to each one and He wills" (LF 12).

We Claretians do not inherit the charism of Claret. Charisms are not transmitted by heredity. They are helps which the Spirit gives each of us here and now, leading us to a way of following Christ and pursuing His mission. This all happens in the life we are living here and now and it is in communion with others who are moved by

the same Spirit in the same direction. Rather than speaking about a common charism, it seems better to speak of a harmony of personal charisms. This charismatic harmony leads us to share life and mission, that is, to be a missionary community.

Without this charismatic harmony we couldn't be Claretians. It is not then the "Claretian" charism that makes us Claretians, that is, evangelizers. There have been many others both before and after Claret who received the charism of evangelization and have not been Claretians.

b. A realistic response - Then what does make us Claretians? It is reference to Claret, to his person and to his lifestyle as a follower of Jesus and one who continues His mission. This reference to our relationship with Claret has both a spiritual and historical basis.

(1) Spiritual basis: When we speak of a spiritual basis we refer to the fact that we have received a gift of the Spirit (charism) which equips and destines us to make real today a service of evangelization. It is a service similar to the one that St. Anthony Mary Claret realized in his time. The likeness of our charism to his is the basis of our being in tune with him.

(2) Historical Basis: When we speak of an historical basis, we refer to the paths and events that are milestones in our personal history. These events, together with the action of the Spirit, have led us to know Claret directly or through Claretians to whose style of life and evangelization we feel attracted.

The fact that we are led by this charism and by this encounter with Claret has led us to discover that our place in the Church is the Claretian Family and more concretely, the Lay Claretian Movement.

If history and the Spirit had not offered us this encounter with Claret and the Claretians, we could have become part of another family in the Church to which we felt charismatically attuned. This would not have frustrated our lay missionary vocation since a person with the same charisms can join one or another Church family so long as he or she feels charismatically attuned to it.

The Sourcebook rightly presents the Claretian dimension of our vocation, since it does so through reference to Claret. In Claret's person and life, the charism and evangelizing mission he received are manifested in an exceptional and exemplary way. However, besides this, God granted him another charism, that of founder. It is the grace to call together others who have a charism like his and unite them in living the missionary commitment to which this gift destines them.

During his lifetime, Claret personally called together those whom God had given the same spirit, namely the first Claretian Missionaries with whom he founded the Claretian Congregation (Aut 489). He also called together many laypersons who felt an eagerness to evangelize. This gave rise, even in Claret's own lifetime, to an ecclesial family.

Today, he still calls people together by the witness of his life and through the members and communities of the Claretian Family in which the spirit of Claret is still alive. This vision demonstrates the importance of making Claret and his work known as a means of calling together people who have received a gift similar to his. Most important in all this is our witness as true Claretians.

PERSONAL NOTES:

II - COMMENTARY

1. THE VOCATION OF CLARET

As was said, the charism (vocation and mission) of missionary evangelization, which we have received, was manifested in an exceptional way in Claret. He received it as a priest, and we, as laypersons. To know our Claretian vocation better, we should look at the model that we have in Claret.

(Numbers 3 and 4 of the Sourcebook describe the vocation of Claret. Each of these numbers has a different focus. Number 3 presents vocation as a gift, that is, as God's call to Claret and as the Spirit's work in Claret making him an "Apostolic Missionary." Number 4, in contrast, presents Claret's vocation in practice, that is, as his response to the gift he received.)

SOURCEBOOK

3

Within his broad conception of evangelization, Claret identified himself as an Apostolic Missionary,⁸ a reality which was above all a gift of the Spirit, which conformed him in a special way with certain aspects of the unfathomable mystery of Christ.

In virtue of this gift, Claret felt identified with Christ as:

- the Son, concerned with his "Father's business",
- the One anointed by the Spirit and sent to bring glad tidings to the poor,
- the Son of Mary,
- the itinerant missionary, who had nowhere to lay his head,
- a sign of contradiction, persecuted to death, which was his victory,
- who shared his life and mission with his apostles.

⁸ Cf. Mystic and Man of Action, pg.88-90, 207-210; Mission of the Claretian Today, #56 (MCT).

1.1. God's Call to Claret - Vocation as Gift

Claret discovered his vocation by reading the Bible under the impact of the missionary yearnings that were stirring within him. On discovering his vocation he realized that God had made him an "apostolic missionary." He was to be like Jesus, an itinerant herald of the Good News of the Kingdom. He was to be like the Apostles, who were sent to proclaim the Good News and to be witnesses of Christ "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Sourcebook points out that Claret's vocation to be an "apostolic missionary," was not a personal desire but it was rather a "gift of the Spirit." When we speak of the gift of the Spirit or a charism, we should not think of something prefabricated, or something given like a present, it is, rather an action of the Spirit that begins working immediately in the person who receives it. This action of the Spirit conforms a person with Christ, makes a person into another Christ - a Christ with a face all his own, since the Spirit makes certain traits of the inexhaustible figure of Christ stand out in each Christian. The Sourcebook expresses this by saying that, in the case of Claret, his being an "apostolic missionary" was "a gift of the Spirit that conformed him in a special way with certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Christ" (n. 3a).⁹

As we have just indicated, the gift of vocation conforms a person in a special way with certain aspects of the mystery of Christ. It empowers him or her to unfold the mission that corresponds to these aspects. Thus, the gift that St. John of God received conformed him with Christ the Good Samaritan. It empowered him to be a good Samaritan in his day by committing himself without reserve to the sick and to the outcasts of society. In contrast, the gift Claret received conformed him with Christ, the itinerant evangelizer, so that he might go about today, as Christ did yesterday, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom through all the villages and towns (Mk 1:38-39) and calling people to conversion (Mk 1:15).

Claret discovered the traits of his own vocation by looking at Christ. The gift he received led him to highlight above all the missionary traits in the person of Christ. The Christ that Claret admired and felt called to follow, was a Missionary Christ. In his Letter to the Missionary Theophilus, Claret wrote: "In nothing else has God our Lord so shown His love for us..., as in sending His only Son to redeem and to save us, making him the head and the model of all other missionaries" (LMT ch. 1, n. 2).

The Sourcebook enumerates six traits of this Missionary Christ whom Claret admired and followed. Those acquainted with the document of the 1979 General Chapter of the Claretian Missionaries, "The Mission of the Claretian Today," will be aware that the

⁹ Bermejo, J., *Claret, Apostolic Missionary*, Study Guide n.5.

Sourcebook derived these six traits of Claret's Missionary Christ from it (MCT nn. 57-62). The Sourcebook does not cite this source, but it cites the biblical texts through which Claret discovered his own Christ and his own vocation. It also cites the echo of these texts in Claret's life as he set them forth in his Autobiography.

In fact, the list of these six most characteristic traits of Claret's Christ and of Claret himself as a follower of Christ, was not original with the MCT. This document took them from the book The Lay Claretian Apostle (Barcelona 1979), prepared by Fathers Bermejo and Viñas for the congress of Lay Claretians held that year in Rio de Janeiro.

We are now going to offer a brief description of each one of these traits.

a. Claret felt identified with Christ, the Son, concerned with the affairs of His Father

The affairs of the Father with which Christ was concerned are summed up in this one - His glory. It is that the Father be known and loved, that His will be done. These are also Claret's main concerns, that which gave meaning to his life. Claret had but one missionary obsession: the glory of God. He strove to achieve this by knowing and loving Him, doing His will, and seeing to it that all people should know and love Him and be saved.

This concern for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls became manifest in Claret before he reached the use of reason (Aut.15, 16; also read numbers 494 and 572).

b. Claret felt identified with the Son anointed by the Spirit and sent to evangelize the poor

The biblical text which had the greatest impact on Claret and most vividly highlighted his vocation was Isaiah 61:1. It was also the text whereby Jesus presented His own mission (Lk 4:18). Claret states in his Autobiography: "And in a very particular way God our Lord gave me to understand those words, `The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore He has anointed me to proclaim the Good Tidings to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted'" (IS 61: 1, cited in Aut 118b)¹⁰. Claret cites this text again, applying it to himself and to his Missionary Sons, in n. 687 of the Autobiography.

For Claret, Christ is the Prophet-Servant, anointed by the Spirit to preach the Good News. The prophetic mission of Jesus constitutes the core of Claret's apostolic experience and is the source of his inspiration" (MCT 58; cf. Aut 238, 448-452).

¹⁰ NB 118b omitted in 1976 Eng. ed.;cf. footnote #123,Lay Claretian Sourcebook,'94 ed.

In this Isaian text two traits of Claret's vocation appear: his call to evangelize and his preference for the poor. This "option for the poor," as we say today, is not an opportunistic trait of present-day Claretians. It is a trait of Claret, who always preferred the humble folk. This trait has been further highlighted in the context of the Church's current sensitivity to the poor.

c. Claret felt identified with Christ as the Son of Mary

Claret sees Mary in a missionary perspective. For him Mary is above all the Mother of Jesus the Missionary. She is the mother of all missionaries who continue the work of Jesus.

For Claret, Mary:

- is at the origin of his own missionary vocation. She freed him from all the dangers and temptations that might undermine his vocation (Aut 71, 72);

- forms him in the furnace and forge of her Heart (Aut 270). She forms Claret by helping to conform him with her Missionary Son;

- sends him to evangelize (Aut 161, 687). In n. 687, Claret changes the biblical text he cites (Mt 10:20) by introducing Mary our Mother into it;

- is the one who evangelizes through Claret, by influencing him and his listeners so as to bring individuals to conversion (Aut 160, 161).

d. Claret felt identified with Christ the itinerant missionary who has nowhere to rest his head (Lk 9:58)

In this trait of Christ Claret sees a call to live in detachment from everything and to be ever available for the work of evangelization. He stresses three essential characteristics of the "apostolic missionary": poverty, itinerancy and availability.

- Poverty: see Autobiography nn.357, 359, 431.

- Itinerancy: Aut 193, 221, 224,460.

- Missionary availability: Aut 194-198.

Claret lived poverty as something that was necessary for the following of Jesus. He saw it also as something valid and effective in response to the idols of his time which was above all the love of riches: "In our day the thirst for material things is drying up the heart and bowels of modern societies (Aut 357).

e. Claret felt identified with Christ, the sign of contradiction (Lk 2:34)

He writes in his Autobiography: "He was a sign of contradiction, persecuted for his teaching, his works, and his very person. Finally, they took his life amidst affronts, torments, and insults, making Him suffer the most shameful and painful death imaginable" (Aut 222).

Claret felt identified with Christ the sign of contradiction because he, too, was a sign of contradiction in the milieu in which he evangelized. He was a target of persecution, slanders and attempts on his life. But, as he writes in the definition of the missionary: "Nothing daunts him; he delights in privations, welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander and rejoices in suffering" (Aut 494). "I have endured great sufferings, slanders and persecutions: all hell has conspired against me" (Aut 689).

f. Claret felt identified with Christ who shared his life and mission with the Apostles

In this trait the stress is on communion. Jesus did not want to carry out his mission alone, but rather in community with the Apostles. After the resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles and all believers formed a community around the Risen Lord (Acts 4:32). When the Apostles dispersed throughout the world to preach the Good News and spread the Reign of God, they created communities of believers as they went along.

Very early on, Claret understood the mission to which he was destined by the gift of the Spirit, must be welcomed, lived and realized in community (Aut 491, 849, 609-613).

Even in its secular branch of the Claretian Family communion of life and mission is an outstanding characteristic (cf. Sourcebook, nn. 17-18).

Claret responded to the gift he received and made it the key whereby he lived the whole gospel, placing himself without reserve in the service of God's plan of salvation. In this way, he converted the gift he had received into his own style of life.

- His only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate Him in working, suffering, and striving constantly and single mindedly for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls"
- With great sensitivity to the signs of the times, he committed himself to combat social evils by practicing poverty and renouncing all power, especially the power of money and ambition
- He set his missionary service in line with the redemption, promotion and liberation of his neighbor, even at the risk of his own life, thus continuing in time the saving love of God and Christ.
- He felt called to evangelization rather than to other forms of ecclesial service and, moved by the irrepressible passion to evangelize, which the Spirit had unleashed in him, he committed himself to missionary evangelization through the ministry of the Word, never letting himself be held back by tiredness, difficulties or persecutions.
- Like Jesus, he was itinerant and poor, and so was ever-ready to respond to the most urgent needs of evangelization.
- He experienced the maternal presence of Mary, by whom he felt that he was sent as an instrument of evangelization.
- He lived in communion with those who had received from the Lord the same spirit that animated him.
- He raised up new apostles, especially among the laity, who could complement his own broad vision of evangelization.

1.2. Claret's vocational response

Number 4 of the Sourcebook speaks of Claret's vocational response. In the eight points mentioned it reminds us of the mettle, daring and generosity with which Claret answered the call of God in the following of the Missionary Christ.

As is only logical, the greater part of the eight points correspond to the six traits of Claret's Christ mentioned above, the call and response are similar. There, they were presented as a gift; here, they are represented as Claret's response.

a. Claret's missionary obsession

The Sourcebook literally cites a paragraph from the "definition of the missionary," a faithful self-portrait which Claret left us in his Autobiography (and in another separate manuscript), and applies it to the Lay Claretian: "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 souls."

b. His vision of reality - alert to the signs of the times

During Claret's time they didn't use the terms "signs of the times" or the "analysis of reality." This is present day language. However, when it came time for him to evangelize, Claret in his own way, made a kind of analysis and diagnosis of reality. He discovered this analysis and diagnosis in the signs of the Spirit who was calling him to give an adequate response to challenging situations.

"Seeing that the Lord...was calling me to stem the torrent of corruption and to cure the ills of a moribund society, I thought that I should dedicate myself to studying and gaining a through knowledge of the maladies of this social body" (Aut 357; cf. 358-363).

Based on these and other texts, and above all on the deeds of Claret's life, the Sourcebook proposes him as a model for us when it says: "Sensitive to the signs of the times, he committed himself to combat societies ills through poverty and the renunciation of all power, especially that of money and ambition" (n. 4c). This was the response that God was asking of him and he gave it with the utmost radicalism. "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" (Aut 359).

Numbers 357-371 can be taken as the best key for reading the vocation and mission of Claret today, especially by the Lay Claretians. This is the focus taken by Lay Claretian

groups in many parts of today's world. Some live a life of poverty as a witness to a society of power and greed; a simple lifestyle in the service of people according to the gospel.

c. The goal of his missionary service

We could not place the word "liberation" on Claret's lips in the integral sense as we find it in the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI "Evangelization in the Modern World."

Claret's greatest concern was to bring to everyone the redeeming work of Christ, and thus obtain as they said in those days, the salvation of souls.

But in some way he understood that work of redemption was not to be limited to the spiritual realm alone. It was to embrace the whole person and the situations in which he or she lived. Hence he writes: "Man needs someone...to restore him to his dignity and, to some extent, his rights" (Aut 449). Claret believed that the service of the Word must have this transforming role in society. Moreover, the Word must be accompanied by efforts that can transform society. Thus in Cuba he created a model ranch for agricultural advancement and the formation of farm workers (Aut 567, 568). He opened a credit union to benefit the poor (Aut 569) and installed workshops in jails, "for experience had shown us that many men turn to crime because they have no trade and don't know how to make an honest living" (Aut 571). How far would Claret have gone along these lines if he hadn't been recalled so prematurely from Cuba to return to Spain?

Not without reason, the Sourcebook tells us that Claret "set his missionary service in line with the redemption, promotion and liberation of his neighbor" (4d).

d. He evangelized by means of the itinerant service of the Word

Within the Church and its mission there are manifold services. Claret felt strongly drawn by one of them - the missionary service of the Word. Hence he left the parish that had been entrusted to him (Aut 112, 120). He also resisted the nomination as bishop, since in those days bishops were not missionaries, but sedentary administrators. He felt called to be an itinerant missionary. In his letter to the Nuncio declining the nomination, he states: "If I accepted, I would be tied down and limited to a single archdiocese, whereas my spirit goes out to the whole world. And even on this little dot on the map, I wouldn't be able to preach as much as I'd like to, for I've seen with my own eyes the many affairs an archbishop has to attend to" (Correspondence Letter 95).

Obligated to accept the role of bishop, he totally changed the traditional mode. He entrusted administrative tasks to trustworthy persons and continued to be the same itinerant missionary he had always been.

The Sourcebook, in the paragraph we're commenting on, over and above this option of Claret for missionary evangelization, again highlights his missionary mettle: "Moved by the irrepressible passion to evangelize, which the Spirit unleashed in him, he committed himself to missionary evangelization through the ministry of the Word, never letting himself be held back by tiredness, difficulties or persecutions" (n. 4e).

e. Claret's Availability for the most urgent needs in missionary evangelization

Claret, like the Evangelizer from Nazareth whom he followed, was detached from everything that could hinder him from giving an immediate response to "the most urgent needs of evangelization" that arose (n. 4f).

f. Missionary character of his Marian experience

As we said in speaking of Claret's vocation as a gift, we can also say that in his missionary practice "he experienced the maternal presence of Mary, by whom he felt that he was sent as an instrument of evangelization" (n. 4g).

g. His life in communion "with those who had received... the same Spirit that animated him" (n. 4h)

We have spoken of this point earlier. For Claret, life in apostolic community was essential and inevitable, to the point that he managed to form an authentic missionary community with all the personnel working in his archdiocese (Aut 606-613). As we know, diocesan headquarters are not an ideal place for creating missionary community.

h. Claret multiplied evangelizers

"He raised up new apostles, especially among the laity, who could complement his own broad vision of evangelization" (n. 4i).

One of the outstanding characteristics of Claret's missionary praxis was his eagerness to multiply agents of evangelization. He wanted to make each Christian an evangelizer. In an age when the laity were only passive subjects, recipients of the ministry of the clergy, he strove to convert them into active bearers of the Church's mission. Hence he created many lay organizations of an evangelizing character. He even enlisted the domestic staff of his household as missionaries (Aut 605).

2. THE VOCATION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

After setting before us the exceptional model of vocation that Claret was, the Sourcebook goes on to briefly speak of the vocation of the Lay Claretian. It takes for granted that the Lay Claretian should aspire to embody now, as a layperson, what Claret was for his own times.

The Sourcebook describes the Lay Claretians' vocation from the viewpoint of their mission, since vocation is for mission and is manifested in mission. Mission is, so to speak, the high point of vocation.

SOURCEBOOK



Through the Claretian charism, which qualifies our whole being, the Holy Spirit empowers and destines us for a special service in the Church.

Identified through this gift with Christ the Missionary, we continue, as laypersons, the mission for which the Holy Spirit raised up St. Anthony Mary Claret in the Church.

The Lord has called us to be evangelizers, to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God among people by means of the word in all its forms, especially by our witness and transforming action in the world, thus bringing the Good News to all human environments and transforming humanity from within.

2.1. Vocation as a gift

At the origin of our vocation is that gift of the Spirit which we call the "Claretian charism." This action of the Spirit in us models us after the missionary Christ after whom Claret modeled his life and ministry. This gift "qualifies our whole being, the Holy Spirit empowers and destines us for a special service in the Church" (n. 5a). What is this special service? The Sourcebook spells it out somewhat in the next paragraph, when it says: "we continue, as laypersons, the mission for which the Holy Spirit raised up Saint Anthony Mary Claret in the Church" (n. 5b).

As said above, **this mission is missionary evangelization -- in the vanguard.** It is an evangelization that we have to carry out "as laypersons." To be carried out in the place and in characteristic ways that arise from our state and vocation as laity, which lead us to build up the Kingdom of God and to offer the service of missionary evangelization. It is to be done by digging our hands into the dough of earthly realities in order to transform them. The pulpit is not the usual place for laypersons. However, if they make use of it, they must

do so as laypersons, employing their experience of kneading the dough of temporal realities in order to proclaim the transforming power of the Word.

2.2. Vocation as a response

In speaking of Claret's vocation, the Sourcebook reminds us of the response he gave. Now, in speaking of the Lay Claretian's vocation, it tells us of the response we should make:

- ! To carry forward, according to our own gifts, the mission of Jesus, which today is the mission of the Church, namely, "to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God among people" (n. 5c);
- ! To continue the mission of Claret (n. 5b) as laypersons, that is, from within society "to all human environments and transforming humanity from within" (n. 5c).

As for the concrete services or ways whereby we must offer the response to our vocation, the Sourcebook indicates these three here: "by means of the word in all its forms, especially by our witness and transforming action in the world" (n. 5c).

On the "word" and on "transforming action," the Sourcebook speaks at length in nn. 21-27. On "life-witness" and its evangelizing power, the Sourcebook comments in nn. 13-18, which speak of Gospel radicalism in the following of Jesus.

B. WE ARE LAYPERSONS

I - DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

1. WHO IS A LAYPERSON?

> THE SOURCEBOOK AND VOCATION <

The efforts of Vatican II to revalue the vocation and mission of the laity unfolds in two complementary directions. The first recovers for the laity what is common to the whole people of God. The second deals with what is proper of the laity.

1.1. Recovering for Laity the common heritage of the people of God

- a.** Previous to Vatican II, it was common that many among the clergy once believed they alone held and exercised the threefold function or service of Christ: priestly, prophetic and kingly. If a layman exercised some wee part of these service-powers, it was by concession from the bishop.
- b.** Vatican II tells us that the laity, too, are members of Christ the priest, prophet and king. Hence they hold and exercise in their own right, and not by concession from the bishops, the priestly, prophetic and royal service of Christ normally. This in keeping with their own vocation as laity through baptism (LG 11, 31, 34, 35, etc.). Likewise, the post-synodal document on the vocation and mission of the laity, *Christifideles Laici*, amply presents the laity's sharing, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ (cf. n. 14).
- c.** Religious and the following of Jesus - For their part, religious had almost exclusively appropriated the following of Jesus, which is expressed in an extraordinary way in a life according to the Beatitudes and the so-called "evangelical counsels."

Vatican II reaffirmed that we are all called to one and the same holiness (LG 32, 39). This includes the radical following of Christ (LG 41a), a life according to the Beatitudes and evangelical counsels. This includes living all dimensions of our being -- freedom, affections, sexuality, relation to material goods, etc. -- as

followers of Jesus. These demands of Gospel radicalism are for everyone. What differs is **the way** they are lived. Each person must live them according to his or her own vocation and according to the different states of life to which the different vocations give rise.

- d. Recovering for the laity that which is common to the whole people of God, the Second Vatican Council has underscored the following points:

(1) The fundamental equality of all Christians

In the people of God we all have the same dignity, the same rights and obligations, although we exercise different functions. We all participate in the one mission of the people of God, although we are called to carry it out by means of different services (LG 32b; 33 bc).

None of this belongs to the laity by delegation from other members of the people of God. It flows from the fact that they are themselves members of Christ and of the people of God. "By baptism they are incorporated into Christ, are established among the People of God, and are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world" (LG 31a; CL 15).

(2) The laity also have a vocation (LG 31b; CL 2)

They are not an undefined remnant of the People of God, left over after God has chosen and called priests and religious. Secularity is not merely a sociological condition of life. It is, rather, a form of Christian life, as are the ministerial priesthood or the religious life. Just as those who may declare themselves priests or religious are thus ipso facto but must be called by God, so it is with the laity. Those who declare themselves laity are not ipso facto laity, but they are only those who have been called by God and have decided to live, within Christ, the lay vocation and mission.

(3) Active co-responsibility in the life and mission of the Church

This active co-responsibility in the life and mission of the Church belongs to the laity in their own right. It is in virtue of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (LG 33). All are equally responsible, although the concrete responsibilities we have may be different.

Formerly the laity were regarded mainly as passive subjects, as recipients of the pastoral action of the priests. At times they were delegated certain functions and responsibilities. Now, we are all called to action. However, it is understood we are under the coordination of those who have received the charism and ministry of governing the Christian community.

1.2. Discovering the Specific Character of the Laity

Despite the interest that the Church has taken in the vocation and mission of the laity during the past 30 years, we still do not have a precise definition of the identity of the layperson. Vatican II did not leave us a definition. Rather it gave a phenomenological description of the laity. It told us how they live and what they are called to do. As to their being, it reaffirmed what is common to all Christians: belonging to Christ and being engrafted into Him. This happens through Baptism and is consummated in the Eucharist. This engrafting, common to all Christians, is the principle source of the being and action of the laity. This is the same as saying that the layperson is a Christian --which is no small matter-- but without indicating what specifies the layperson from a theological viewpoint.

The 1987 Synod of Bishops stressed the need for a positive description of the identity of the laity. We basically have been designating them by negative expressions: they are non-priests and non-religious (CL 9a). But neither the Synod nor the pontifical document on the laity (*Cristifideles Laici*) has offered us any description better than that of Vatican II. This latter document gathered and amplified -- sometimes elaborating on, sometimes shortening -- the Synod's conclusions. They were limited to restating what was already said in the Vatican documents (LG 31).

The task of discovering what is most proper of the laity is still in its early stages. But we are not just walking in the dark. We already have some guidelines rooted in the theology of Vatican II. Concretely, two characteristics stand out in the model of Church the Council offers: (1) its new focus on the Church's relation to the world, and (2) its greater stress on the spiritual and charismatic dimension of the Church.

1.2.1. *Within the secular dimension of the Church*

a. Church/World before Vatican II

We should recall that for several centuries Church-state relationships have been marked by open hostility and mutual rejection. The Church would not and could not evangelically incorporate the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment, which were charged from the outset with a strong antireligious bias. The Church felt besieged and withdrew dangerously within itself. Thus, along with the unacceptable, it also rejected many positive values of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, as expressed in the terms liberty, fraternity, equality and democracy. These are now used quite freely by Christians but were in former days prohibited.

The harshest point of this confrontation was in the days of Pope Pius IX and Vatican I (1870). Today we tend to blush on reading the list of 80 errors condemned by Pope Pius IX in his Syllabus of Errors. The last of them reads as follows: May anyone who says that

the Pope can accept modern progress and culture, let him be anathema (the devil take him).

In this way the 19th-century Church gravely jeopardized its relationships with society and culture. It also jeopardized its own mission of announcing and spreading the Kingdom of God in the world. It is a mission that it could not carry out enclosed in itself or in its churches.

b. Church/World with Vatican II

A hundred years later, Vatican II led the Church to a change in attitude toward the world. It led it to pass from rejection of the world to dialogue with it. It moved from flight to encounter with the world and insertion in it.

In this dialogue with the world, the Church does not present itself just as an agency that teaches and saves the world. But it is also to listen to and learn from the world. It is even to be evangelized by the world through the human and cultural values that exist in the world. The theological basis for this new relationship lies in the **Christic dimension** of all creation and in the **cosmic dimension** of the Incarnation. What do we mean by this?

(1) The **Christic dimension** of creation means that God has created everything through Christ (Col 1:16). The Fourth Gospel, speaking of the Word, tells us that "Through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be" (Jn 1:3). Hence, in all creation, above all in human beings, there are "**seeds of the Word**," Christian values, which the Church must discover and be evangelized by.

(2) The **cosmic dimension** of the Incarnation means that on becoming incarnate, Christ inaugurated a new presence in all creation and took it on in order to save it. As an old adage put it: "What was not assumed, was not redeemed."

c. A Church for the World

Vatican II shows us that the Church is not only in the world, but is also for the world. Better still, it is there to announce, embody and upbuild the Kingdom of God in the world. To fulfill this mission it must be fully inserted within worldly realities. Only thus can it be an evangelical leaven for the growth of the world-that-God-wants.

d. The Church and "Secularity"

Secularity --being in and for the world-- is a quality and condition of the whole Church. All of it is secular (CL 15c). "Relationship with temporal realities is proper of all the baptized, although in a variety of shades and forms, connected more with personal charisms than with static contrasts between laity, hierarchy and religious status."¹¹

¹¹ Forte, B., op. cit., p. 66.

d. Christian Lay Persons and Secularity

We are all for the world. But there are Christians who by vocation are called to be much more deeply immersed in worldly realities to transform them from within by managing and directing them. **We call these Christians "laypersons."**

When the Council alludes to secularity as being proper of the laity, it always indicates that this is not exclusively theirs: "Secular duties and activities belong properly but not exclusively to the laity" (GS 43b). The laity realize more fully the secularity that is characteristic of the whole Church and of all its members.¹²

Priests and religious, while also being for the world, are generally so in another way and in another degree. They do not, for example, raise families of their own, with all that this would entail. The same can be said of their profession and their tasks.

We say "generally," because in some cases particular charisms can alter cases. Thus we can have, for example, religious or priests who are as immersed in temporal realities as laypersons are.

Vatican II has summed up in one phrase what it regards as most proper of the laity: "The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by **engaging in** temporal affairs and by **ordering** them according to the plan of God" (LG 31b). Elsewhere it states that "They are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society" (GS 43c).

Every Christian vocation is for spreading the Kingdom of God. The layperson does so "with his or her hands immersed in the dough" of earthly realities, to transform them.

The fact of stressing the distinctiveness of the laity's engagement in earthly realities according to God's plan should not lead us to a simplistic division of tasks, in which the field of the laity is the profane, and the religious field of the Church community is proper of the clergy.

The layperson has important responsibilities in the ecclesial community, in its upbuilding, animation and coordination. Priests and religious must also work at animating and transforming worldly realities in order to bring about the world-that-God-wants, without burying the special talents and charisms that equip them for this service.

1.2.2. Within the charismatic dimension of the Church

¹² Estrada, J.A., op. cit, pp. 159-160.

Vatican II strongly underscored the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the Body of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit, through His gifts, who animates and dynamizes it. "More over, the same Holy Spirit...distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank...making them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices useful for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church" (LG 12; cf. CL 20,24).

1.3. A some important points regarding charisms and Gifts:

- a. The Holy Spirit and Charisms - We should not imagine that charisms (Greek for graces or gifts) as a mark or character with which the Holy Spirit singles out or adorns Christians. The charisms are a lively action, here and now, of the Holy Spirit in us. They are "particular impulses" (CL 24) whereby He moves us. These gifts destine and fit us to provide certain services in the Church and in the Church's mission in the world. "They are ordered toward the building up of the Church, toward the welfare of human beings and toward the needs of the world" (CL 24).
- b. Charisms and God's plan - These gifts are at the origin of the vocation of each Christian and are what give him his true profile. In our vocational itinerary, the first thing (even before we are born) is God's plan for us. Then comes God's call to be and do what He has planned for us (vocation). With this call, the Spirit gives us charisms that equip us in a special way to carry out God's plan, that is, our own vocation and mission (cf. GS 38a).
- c. Each person has many charisms, but not all are equally developed. The greater or lesser development of some charisms determines the vocational profile of each Christian. The development of some more than others depends on many factors. It may be one's personal history, the World-Church reality in which each person lives. It could be the challenges and needs which this world reality presents, and above all, the action of the Spirit which impels him or her to respond to the most urgent challenges of these realities.
- d. Every charism is for a service in the Church or in the Church's mission (CL 24). Some of these services are **institutionalized**, that is, they form part of the official organization of the Church and are subject to determined norms that regulate access to and exercise of them. These are either ordained ministries (bishops, priests, deacons) or installed lay ministries (acolytes, lectors, etc.).

Other services are exercised freely, without being subject to norms regulating access to or exercise of them, and are hence called **free**. "From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which may be less dramatic, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of humankind and for the upbuilding of the Church. In so doing, they need to

enjoy the freedom of the Holy Spirit who "breathes where he wills (Jn 3:8)" (AA 3d).

- e. Charisms are **actual** and **historical**: they are the action of the spirit here and now (actual) and for the here and now of the Church and the world in which we live (historical).

Saint Paul offers us a list of the main charisms which the Spirit distributed among the members of the community of Corinth in order to fulfill their mission in the concrete time and place in which they lived. But these charisms cannot be taken as the universal pattern for all communities in all times and places. Today, the members of a community can have these and other charisms, because they live in a different context and are facing different challenges.

- f. Charisms essential for the Church - There are charisms that are essential for the Church in whatever time and place, and the Holy Spirit will not fail to grant them generously. A clear case of this are the ministerial charisms acknowledged and institutionalized by the Church as the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons.

Along with these one must rank the charisms that give rise to different ways or states of life in the Church, e.g., the call to matrimony or to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.

There are other charisms that are not so essential, but are very useful for orienting and dynamizing the ecclesial community and its evangelizing action, e.g., the gift of serenity and good judgment, apt discernment in difficult situations, creativity, ease in communicating, the ability to reach the "alienated." Charisms that are also important for animating the Christian community are special qualities for music, catechesis, animating groups, joy, etc.

There are persons especially gifted by the Spirit for action to transform society and its structures, e.g., those who have a lively critical sense, insight and the ability to sniff out situations of injustice or manipulation; those who have the courage and staying power for prophetic denunciation and for struggling in defense of justice and human rights.

Others have a keen awareness for social problems and for arousing this same awareness in other members of the Christian community and moving them to make a commitment. Some have the charism of leadership in politics, unions or popular organizations.

All these charisms we have just listed are of the highest importance today for the Church's mission in the world, yet they are not mentioned by St. Paul in 1Cor 12-13.

- g. Charisms and laity - The surest way to ascertain what the laity are in the Church, are the charisms, since these are the factor that shapes their vocation and mission.

1.3.1. Which charisms are most characteristic of the laity?

The kerygmatic and diaconal charisms, and in both cases, of the "free," i.e., non-institutionalized kind.

- a. **Kerygmatic** (from *keryx* = herald). *Kerygma* is the first proclamation of Christ and the Gospel to those who have never known them. When we speak of kerygmatic charisms we mean those gifts of the Spirit that equip and destine Christians to make the first announcement of Christ in the milieu in which they live. It is to reach out to the alienated of the ecclesial community in order to announce the Good News of the Kingdom to them and to denounce everything that contradicts it. The laity are called to be the front line in the proclamation of Jesus.
- b. **Diaconal**, that is, of service in the world. The service a Christian provides in the world to extend the Reign of God can be summed up in two phrases taken from the Lay Claretian Sourcebook: (1) Christian animation of temporal realities, and (2) action aimed at transforming the world. Within these services we find the Christian living of the realities of the family, labor, culture, education, etc.; also trade union and political leadership, action on behalf of justice and the defense of human rights and striving for the transformation of unjust systems, institutions, structures and situations.

The lay vocation is characterized by the natural and charismatic gifts which lead, equip and empower laypersons to offer these services in the milieu in which they live, in order to build up the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and in order to be "witnesses of Christ at all times in the midst of human society" (GS 43d).

II -COMMENTARY

1. THE LAY PERSON IN THE CHURCH

This chapter of the Sourcebook, "We are Laypersons," embraces two parts of rather unequal size. The first part has four numbers (7-10) and is entitled: "A distinctive way of being Church." Perhaps this part would be better entitled: "Anointed and sent as laypersons." The second part, entitled: "A distinctive way of being in the world in service of the Kingdom," is made up of just number 11, which deals with God's call to be in the world and with being sent to transform it from within.

The Sourcebook presents the lay dimension of the Lay Claretian vocation from the viewpoint of the charisms, although it does not spell it out in too much detail. It does touch on the theme when it says that we follow Christ and carry on His mission "according to the gift we have received" (n. 6).

SOURCEBOOK



All Christians are called to follow Christ, each of us according to the gift we have received. As our gift from the Spirit, we have received the lay vocation, which empowers and destines us to cooperate in the upbuilding of the Church and the spread of the Kingdom of God by our engagement in temporal affairs.

For us, following Jesus as laypersons means a distinctive way of being Church, and of being in the world at the service of the Kingdom of God.

1.1. The Two Spheres of the Lay Vocation

This is dealt with in an introductory number that presents the two spheres of the vocation of the laity: (1) their way of being in Christ in order to carry on His mission, and (2) their way of being in the world to serve the Kingdom. At the same time it offers some important aspects on the lay vocation:

- a. Christians called to follow Christ - The lay vocation is nothing more than the Christian vocation which consists of following Christ. The laity, through the gifts they receive from the Spirit, give priority and special stress to certain aspects of this following: "All Christians are called to follow Christ, each of us according to the gift we have received" (n. 6a).
- b. The Lay Vocation - "Laity" is not merely a social condition, it is a true vocation. The Father calls us; the Holy Spirit consecrates us with His gifts. These gifts not only destine us to a way of being Christians and of cooperating in the upbuilding of the Kingdom, but they also **equip** us for it. "As our gift of the Spirit, we have received the lay vocation, which empowers and destines us to cooperate in the upbuilding of the Church and the spread of the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs" (n. 6a).
- c. The "lay" way to build the Kingdom - In the paragraph just cited, the Sourcebook, taking a cue from Vatican II, indicates what is **our way** of cooperating in the upbuilding of the Church and the spread of the Kingdom: "**by engaging in temporal affairs.**"

The idea seems clear as regards our way of being and serving the Reign of God in the world. As we have seen in the previous doctrinal framework, the specific way in which we, the laity, have to build the Kingdom is by a "hands-on" involvement in the task of animating and transforming temporal realities.

But we must also emphasize that as regards the building and animating of the ecclesial community, the most proper contribution of the laity is by way of insertion in the world and within their commitment to transform society. In effect, the gift of secularity equips the laity and impels them toward building a Church that is for the world, open to society, alert to social problems and committed to ordering temporal realities "according to God's plan" (LG 31b).

As laypersons we stress the secular character of the whole Church and of each of the communities that make it up. While participating in the life of the Church community, we do not put our lay vocation in parenthesis to become a kind of second-class clergy.

- d. Laity following Jesus - The second paragraph of n. 6 introduces the next two sections and presents them as aspects of the following of Christ: "For us, following Jesus as laypersons means a distinctive way of being Church, and of being in the world in service of the Kingdom" (n. 6b).

The text indicates that these two elements are common to all Christians, but that we laity live them in "a distinctive way." The ensuing numbers tell us what this way consists of.

1.2. A Distinctive Way of Being Church

Before commenting on numbers 7-10 of the Sourcebook, it is fitting to offer a theological synthesis on two themes that are deeply related to these numbers: **the consecration and priesthood of the laity.**

To better understand numbers 7-10, it is fitting that we clarify some terms, such as "anointed," "sent," and the twin expression :consecration-mission."

a. Consecration: Anointed and Sent as Laypersons

Vocation is not just a call or invitation from God to a way of life, but also an intervention of God in our being and life by the Spirit. This intervention does not leave things as they were, it transforms us and changes us. Thus understood, vocation is a consecration. In this consecration, we are anointed by the Spirit for a mission. The anointing of the Spirit makes us envoys, equips us and strengthens us for mission. At the beginning of His public life, Jesus Himself declared that He was anointed by the Spirit to carry out His mission (cf. Lk 4:18).

(1) **Consecration** - Where, or rather, in whom does the Father reach us and consecrate us by means of the Spirit's action? It is in Christ. "Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens!" (Eph 1:3). God does not reach us in isolation, but in Christ, His Son. Since the Son took upon Himself our nature, He invaded it with His divinity. He consecrated it. There, in the sacred humanity of Christ, we meet God the Father and He invades us, makes us His own, consecrates us.

The moment in our consecration is Baptism. In Baptism the Spirit anoints us (as the Kings of Israel were anointed to fulfill the Lord's mission) and enriches us with His gifts. This intervention of God in our being, this consecration, makes us members of the Body of Christ and hence, other Christs. It makes us partake of the being of Christ, and Christ is priest, prophet and king.

(2) **Mission** - The Holy Spirit, in conforming us with Christ the priest, prophet and king, makes us priests, prophets and kings. Thus He empowers us today to continue the priestly, prophetic and kingly role or service (mission) of Christ in today's world. Moreover, it unites us to Christ the priest, prophet and king, so that through us, Christ may continue this threefold role in history today.

But not all of us continue the threefold role in the same way and with the same characteristics. The difference of way depends on the action of the Spirit in each Christian, through His gifts. Thus we laypersons realize this threefold function as incarnated especially in those aspects for which our lay charisms equip us.

b. The priesthood of the faithful or common priesthood of all Christians

In contrast to the Jewish priesthood, Jesus was a layman who criticized the ritualism, superficiality and legalisms into which the priests of the Chosen People had fallen.

Christ inaugurated **a new priesthood** in which He is the one Priest, in whom all those who cling to Him by faith will be priests.

Between the priesthood and worship inaugurated by Christ, and the Jewish priesthood and worship, there are enormously contrasting differences, as the Letter to the Hebrews makes clear:

- ! The Jews had a multitude of priests who offered countless sacrifices and offerings. The Christians have but one Priest (Christ) and one sacrifice (that of Christ Himself who was both priest and victim).
- ! Jewish worship was ritualistic, that is, it consisted of ceremonies, rites and animal sacrifices in the temple. The worship of Christ and of Christians is not ritualistic but existential (the commitment of one's very existence). The worship that Christ offered the Father did not consist in the burning of incense and the offering of sacrificed animals, but in doing God's will by sacrificing one's whole life day by day for others -- a commitment which He carried to an extreme at the Last Supper and on the Cross.
- ! This offering is perpetuated in the Eucharist, the making-present in every place and time of the one sacrifice of Christ -- the sacrifice of His own earthly existence and of His own life. Hence, all the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass stress the fact that Christ is the sacred Victim and that we offer ourselves with Him as victims.

All those who are incorporated into Christ by faith and baptism become members of His body and also priests, because they partake in the priesthood of Christ, the one Priest. It is in the sacrament of baptism that all Christians are consecrated priests (cf. LG 10a).

Consequently, all Christians are priests, but priests in Christ. Our priesthood is not *like* His; rather, it is His very priesthood present and acting in us. Hence our priesthood, too, is existential, not ritual. The worship we give God as priests is our own life offered day by day in earthly activities done in fidelity to the will of the Father and serving others.

The Eucharist, the making-present of the supreme act of Christ's priesthood, the offering of His life for us, is not a *rite* for Christians. What is unfortunate is that we tend to convert it into a rite. We make it a series of ceremonies, gestures, automatic

prayers to which our own existence remains alien. In this way we return to the ritual worship of the Jews, which Yahweh Himself rejected so many times, because it was joined either to the exploitation of the poor (cf. Is 58:1-7), or to an unfeeling and proud heart (cf. Ps 50:18-19).

In the Eucharist we, the faithful, exercise our priesthood, not so much by prayers and gestures, as by identifying ourselves with Christ, priest and victim. This identification must be translated into our own victimization or being-offered for others. "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It" (LG 11a).

"The Christian temptation is to revert to the Jewish way, to make the Lord's Supper into a rite in which *something* is offered (albeit the death of Jesus), rather than *someone* (an existence, a living form)."¹³

Finally, let us point out another great contrast between the Jewish and Christian priesthood. In the Jewish community, only some were priests (the descendants of Aaron). The community did not have direct access to Yahweh, only the priests did, as mediators between the community and God. In the Christian community we are all priests and we all have direct access to God in Christ. The ministerial priesthood (bishops and priests) is not a mediatorship, as the Jewish priesthood was.

What is the place and meaning of the ministerial priesthood within the Christian community, all of which is priestly?

The ministerial priesthood is a charism converted into a ministry (service) through ordination. The ministerial priesthood is ordained toward providing the community with determined services of governance, coordination, and presidency at the Eucharist and other sacraments in the name of Christ. "The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (LG 10b).

¹³ Estrada, J.A., op. cit., p. 28.



Our baptismal consecration conforms us with Christ, and makes us members of His Body and sharers both in His being and in His priestly, prophetic and kingly roles. In virtue of this consecration and of the anointing of the Spirit which we receive in Confirmation, we become a new humanity through which Christ continues His mission in the world today.

We cooperate in the growth of the Body of Christ and the spread of the Kingdom of God, by carrying out, in the framework of evangelization and as laypersons, the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly service of Christ.

1.3. Anointed and conformed with Christ, priest, prophet and king

The ideas just set forth are summed up in n. 7 of the Sourcebook. It tells us that the moment of God's intervention in our being and life, the important moment of consecration and of the anointing of the Spirit, is at Baptism and, complementarily, Confirmation.

The effects this consecrating intervention of the Spirit produced in us are presented in various synonymous and complimentary expressions. "It makes us members of His Body" and "sharers both His being and in His priestly, prophetic and kingly roles." "It conforms us with Christ," that is, it makes us other Christs.

Thus united so profoundly with Christ and assumed by Him, we are a new humanity. His new humanity. A new humanity because, by the working of the Spirit, we are recreated through Him. We have become a new creation.

"A new humanity..." - What does this expression mean? Just as the Son, some two thousand years ago, assumed a human nature, in which and through which He carried out His mission of announcing, embodying and spreading the Kingdom and of saving us, so likewise today, He assumes us and makes us His new humanity through which He renders His presence visible in history and carries on the mission the Father entrusted to Him. This is the meaning of the Sourcebook's expression, "we become a new humanity through which Christ continues His mission in the world today" (n. 7a).

The second paragraph of n.7 summarily states that we exercise the threefold service or function we share with Christ as Claretians and as laypersons. The expression, "in the framework of evangelization," is an allusion to what we do as Claretians. **Evangelization** is one of the most notable features of the Claretian profile.

This is how "we cooperate in the growth of the Body of Christ and the spread of the Kingdom of God, by carrying out, in the frame work of evangelization and as laypersons, the threefold priestly, prophetic and kingly service of Christ" (7b).

In the following numbers the Sourcebook presents each one of these three functions more amply, and also indicates how we fulfill them within the Lay Claretian charism.

SOURCEBOOK



Through our sharing in the priesthood of Christ, we are especially empowered to consecrate the world to God by offering our evangelizing commitments, our prayer, our married and family life, our work, our rest and our trials, to the Father, through Jesus Christ and by our life in the Spirit. We unite all of these things to the offering of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, wherein we ourselves are offered to the Father, together with the Sacred Victim.

1.4. Priestly Function of laity

Following closely the document on Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II (LG 34), n. 8 describes the way in which Lay Claretians can live their priesthood.

- a.** Source of nourishment - The **wellspring** at which the priestly role of the laity is nourished, is the priesthood of Christ: "Through our sharing in the priesthood of Christ, we are especially empowered to consecrate the world to God" (n.8).

The principal source of the priestly function we exercise is Christ himself. He acts in us by making us priests and also acts through us to exercise His priestly role. "Since the supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, wills to continue His witness and serve through the laity too, He vivifies them in His Spirit and unceasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work" (LG 34a).

- b. The **content** of this priestly function consists, according to Vatican II, in "consecrating the world to God."

Consecration is understood here in an active sense, that is, as offering and handing over everything created, all temporal realities, to God. We make this offering in Christ, who is our temple, the place of encounter with the Father; and we do so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consecration in an active sense is a handing over of all things to God. It also has as its goal consecration in a passive sense, namely, that all things be imbued with the presence of God, that they be ordered according to His will and subjected to the sovereignty of His Reign.

We consecrate our person and our life to God and, in them, we consecrate to the Father all of the earthly realities in which we are immersed and which form part of our existence.

"Through our sharing in the priesthood of Christ, we are especially empowered to consecrate the world to God, by offering our evangelizing commitments, our prayer, our married and family life, our work, our rest and our trials, to the Father, through Jesus Christ and by our life in the Spirit" (n. 8). As we said earlier, we unfold our priesthood and our worship of God in our own existence.

- c. The **way** of consecrating our person, our life and the whole world to God, is not only by offering them to Him in an interior act of worship or prayer, but by living all things "in the Spirit," reorienting them all to God, doing all things according to His plan. We consecrate the world to God by opening up ways whereby the Spirit may enter and permeate people, society, culture and events. In this way we turn the world back toward God because, through us, Christ is subjecting all things to the sovereignty of the Father, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).
- d. The celebration of Eucharist - **culminating moment** - The culminating moment of the priestly role of the laity and of the consecration of the world, is the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist makes present the priesthood of Christ in its highest moment: His death and resurrection. The Sourcebook, in the words of Vatican II (LG 34b), says: "We unite all these things to the offering the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, wherein we ourselves are offered to the Father, together with the Sacred Victim" (n. 8).

In the narrative of the Last Supper, the word "body," in terms of the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke, means the whole person. It is in the person of Christ, offered to the Father in the incredible gesture of love on the Cross, made present now in the Eucharist. Thus we offer our being, our life and the whole world to the Father.

"Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It" (LG 11a; CL 14d).

N. 8 of the Sourcebook, inspired by the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II (LG 10), stresses the existential character of the priesthood of the laity. We must take great care not to understand the Eucharist as disconnected from the world and from our existence. The Eucharist has an incredible power for transforming the world. It transforms us, and through us it transforms the world around us, so as to make of it the-world-God-wants. In this way we consecrate the world to God in the Eucharist and also strengthen our resolve to transform the world.

SOURCEBOOK



United to Christ the Prophet and invested with the power of the Spirit, we are enabled and destined:

- to proclaim by our life-witness and word, that the Lord Jesus is risen and is alive;
- to confess our faith in the midst of ongoing temporal realities;
- to announce the absoluteness of God and of lasting goods, and to proclaim the provisional character of all things;
- to denounce the mystery of evil, and to struggle untiringly and non-violently against the dominators of this world and against the idols of society.

1.5. Prophetic Function

The Sourcebook presents the prophetic function as a gift which has its roots in the anointing of Christ, "a prophet powerful in word and works before God and the people" (Lk 24:19). He makes us prophets by communicating His Spirit to us. "The holy People of God also share in Christ's prophetic office" (LG 12a). According to the Sourcebook, we are prophets because we are "united to Christ the Prophet and invested with the power of the Spirit" (9a). Let us remember that in Pauline language "invested" does not mean only being covered externally and superficially. But it means being inwardly filled and, in this case, possessed by the power of the Spirit.

As we said in speaking of the priestly function, we must now say that it is Christ himself who continues his priestly function in history through us. "Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until His full glory is revealed. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity. For that very purpose He made them His witnesses and gave them understanding of the faith and the grace of speech, so that the gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life" (LG 35a).

a. We, like Christ, must be prophets in words and works

Pope John Paul II document on the laity, *Christifideles* (CL), sums up the prophetic function as follows: "The participation in the prophetic office of Christ, who `proclaimed the kingdom of His Father by the testimony of His life and the power of His words (LG 35)', equips and commits the lay faithful to receive the Gospel in faith and to announce it in word and works" (CL 14).

The characteristics of the lay vocation are also manifested in prophetic functions. A distinctive feature of the prophetic ministry of the laity is an announcement of the gospel that arises from life. It is a magisterium whose theology is none other than the expression of the experience of the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the structures of the world.¹⁴

The Sourcebook, again following closely the teaching of Vatican II, highlights some elements of the prophetic function:

(1) **Prophets by the word** - The laity announce and spread the Good News of the Kingdom "through the lived and spoken word (prophecy as witness and evangelization). They possess the Word, or rather, are possessed by the Word, thanks to the anointing of the Spirit" (B. Forte, op. cit., 53).

Thanks to this anointing, the laity have full right to the Word in the Church. On this fact of being possessed by the Word "are also based the prophetic richness of the life-witness which the laity can give in most varied circles. They have the ability to undertake concrete tasks of evangelization and catechesis, and Christian influence of the temporal order by denouncing injustice and announcing liberating truth" (id., 54).

Proclaiming the faith, we proclaim as prophets, as our Sourcebook highlights *kerygma*, that is, the first announcement of the core of our faith: we proclaim "by our life-witness and word, that the Lord Jesus is risen and is alive" (n. 9b). "Each Christian

¹⁴ Estrada, J.A., *La Iglesia: identidad y cambio*, Ed. Cristiandad 1985, p. 160.

should be a witness to the world of the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus..." (LG 39).

(2) Confess the faith - Another aspect of the prophetic function of the laity is "**to confess our faith** in the midst of ongoing temporal realities" (n. 9c). Confessing the faith means more than declaring that we are believers. It means living all temporal realities in accord with the demands of faith. It means "being true witnesses of Christ both by word and deed" (LG 11).

All this must be done against the current worldly seductions without yielding to the enslaving power of unbelief or the hostility of those opposed to the transforming power of the Gospel.

It is not a hothouse faith, enclosed and protected. But it is a faith rooted in a strong experience of life, incarnated in the world and "exposed" to the world. In this way it is an evangelizing faith.

"The announcement of Christ proclaimed by life-witness and word, acquires specific characteristics and a singular efficacy by the fact that it is carried out in the common conditions of the world" (LG 35b).

(3) Denounce evil - Within the prophetic function, along with announcing the Good News, the Sourcebook refers also to **denouncing** all that is opposed to the permeation and presence of the Kingdom: "to denounce the mystery of evil, and to struggle untiringly and non-violently against the dominators of this world and against the idols of society" (n.9e).

This paragraph of the Sourcebook is inspired in LG 35a which, citing the letter to the Ephesians, speaks of "wrestling with the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph 6:12). In this verse Paul refers to beings and powers that are above man. In our present, demythologized world, the world-rulers of this darkness are ideologies, systems and structures, together with the persons who incarnate them and use them as oppressive power.

The Sourcebook also speaks of denouncing and struggling "against the idols of society." This means toppling from the scale of values those absolutized material or temporal realities that occupy the highest points in society's scale of values. Today, as two millennia ago, these realities can be summed up in power, greed and manipulation which generate permanent situations of injustice and oppression on which some thrive and subsist.

(4) To announce the what is good - Another aspect of the laity's prophetic function, which the Sourcebook ranks third and not fourth as we do here, is the **eschatological**

dimension. This means "to announce the absoluteness of God and of lasting goods" (the Kingdom in its future fullness beyond history). It also includes, "to proclaim the provisional character of all things" (n. 9d).

Eschatological realities, i.e., the good of the Kingdom in its definitive stage beyond history, are in some way already present in our history. Christ, by his incarnation, death and resurrection, has already inaugurated the new times of God-with-us. In view of these goods, earthly realities pale to insignificance and we live them in passing, as Paul says, "as if they were not." The Sourcebook cites this passage from 1 Corinthians in a footnote: "Those who have been buying property to live as though they had no possessions; those who are involved with the world as though they were people not engrossed in it. Because this world as we know it is passing away" (1 Cor 7:30-31).

(5) Prophets are above all women and men of God - Possessed by the Word they speak of God and of God's designs for human beings. But they are also humans among humans, beset by their problems and specific circumstance, speaking to God of the life-and-death situations their sisters and brothers are suffering.

This dimension of prophetism is not contained in n. 9 of the Sourcebook, on which we are commenting. It appears later, in speaking of prayer, where it states: "In dialogue with the Lord, we share the problems and needs of our brothers and sisters" (n. 39b).

SOURCEBOOK



Our participation in Christ's Kingship leads us to make a radical option for His cause: the reign of God. It puts us in His service and in the service of all people, in order to renew humanity from within and change the inhuman structures of the world, so that all may be governed by justice, peace and charity.

1.6. Kingly function

As when speaking of the priestly and prophetic functions, the Sourcebook presents the **kingly function** as a participation in the kingship of Christ, manifested in His victory over sin and death. It is in the service of humanity and all creation in order to bring them under God's sovereignty.

Properly speaking, it is not we, but rather Christ himself, who continues the exercise of His kingship through us.

We exercise the kingly function by striving to transform humanity and society in order to create the kind of humanity that God wishes. Sharing in the kingship of Christ and the anointing of the Spirit "puts us in His service and in the service of all people, in order to renew humanity from within" (n. 10).

"By their belonging to Christ, Lord and King of the universe, the lay faithful share in His kingly office and are called by Him to serve the Kingdom of God and diffuse it in history" (CL 14g).

"This kingly function is exercised precisely in the process of liberation --personal, communal and cosmic-- inaugurated by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, to which Christians can contribute, thanks to the anointing they have received" (B. Forte, op. cit. 55).

The Sourcebook highlights the relationship between the kingly function of Christ, in which we share, and the reign of God. Hence it says: "Our participation in Christ's Kingship leads us to make radical option for His cause: the Reign of God" (n. 10). We exercise the kingly function by receiving the gift of the Reign and extending it in ourselves, in others, in society and in all creation.

a. In ourselves

The first step in extending the Reign of God in ourselves is to fight, with God's grace, against all that is anti-Kingdom in ourselves. "They live Christian kingship above all by means of spiritual combat to overcome the reign of sin in themselves (cf. Rm 6:12)" (CL 14g; cf. LG 36a). In receiving the Kingdom we commit ourselves wholly to God's sovereignty. In committing ourselves wholly to Christ, in whom the Father is already fully reigning, the Kingdom invades us. In Christ, the Father consecrates us and makes us His own. His sovereignty reaches to the deepest dimensions of the person --liberty, understanding, will and affections-- which He reorders according to His plan. He puts them at the service of the Kingdom. In this way the petition, "Thy Kingdom come," increasingly becomes a reality in us.

b. In our sisters and brothers

The Sourcebook says that partaking in the kingship of Christ "places us at the service of all people" (b. 10). When the disciples were quarreling about who would have the first places in the Kingdom, Jesus taught them that those who would be first in the kingdom must be the least of all and the servant of all (Mt 18:4, 20:24; Jn 13:14). Christians, who serve Christ in others, "humbly and patiently lead their brothers and sisters to the King, for whom serving is reigning" (LG 36a). The document on the laity (CL) adds that we live Christ's kingship in our own "commitment to serve Jesus, in

justice and charity, present in all His brothers and sisters, especially in the least of them" (CL 14g).

c. In society

The Sourcebook, in the words of the encyclical Christ in the Modern World (EN), speaks of renewing humanity from within" (EN 18), by being fully immersed in it, in all its organizations, situations and problems.

The task of subjecting society to the sovereignty of God involves changing the inhuman structures of society. "The laity likewise join efforts in order to remedy social structures" (LG 36c). But this can not be achieved without changing the deepest attitudes of human beings which have been disordered by the presence of evil. "The Church considers it to be undoubtedly important to build up structures which are more human, more just, more respectful of the rights of the person and less oppressive and less enslaving; but she is aware that the best structures and the most idealized systems soon become inhuman if the inhuman inclinations of the human heart are not made more wholesome, if those who live in these structures or who rule them do not undergo a conversion of heart and of outlook" (EN 36).

To bring society to be governed by the values of justice, love and peace, sown by God in the human heart, is indeed to spread His kingdom.

All human and social realities must be submitted to the designs of God. "No human activity can be withdrawn from God's dominion" (LG 36d). The laity "imbue culture and human activities with moral values" (LG 36c).

Work in any area of society and human life is a means for upbuilding the Kingdom. By our work we pursue the creative work of God and the liberating action of Christ. In this light, "the Christian value of work, of all ordinary human work, of culture, of political commitment, shines forth brightly, insofar as they contribute to the building of a world that is more human and, as such, closer to the promised kingdom where human beings are ends, not means: a world open to the Transcendent Being who provides a basis for their dignity beyond all bounds."¹⁵

d. All creation

"For the Lord wishes to spread His Kingdom by means of the laity also, ...a kingdom in which creation itself will be delivered out of its slavery to corruption and into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God (Rm 8:21)" (LG 36a). The pontifical document on the laity (CL) adds that "the laity are called in a special way to give back to all creation all its original value. When, by means of activity sustained by the life of grace, they order created things to the true good of humankind, they partake in the exercise of

¹⁵ Forte, B., op. cit., 55-56.

that power whereby the Risen Christ draws all things to Himself and subjects them together with Him to the Father, so that God may be all in all (Jn 12:32; 1 Cor 15:28)" (CL 14h).

Part of our secular vocation is to live a life of full involvement in the world, that is, in the ordinary circumstances of married, family and social life; exercising our secular professions as competently as we can, and being occupied in affairs of the domestic, social, economic, political and cultural orders.

We are, and feel that we are, part of the people and, as citizens, we take part in all our responsibilities.

2.3. A distinctive way of being in the world at the service of the Kingdom

2.3.1. What do we mean by "world"?

Here, world is not taken just in a material sense (everything created) or just in a moral sense (the place of the struggle between good and evil). The New Testament often takes the world in this latter sense. This true above all in the Johannine writings. The world (all creation, especially humanity) is the area which sin and death have penetrated and where the devil, "the prince of this world," holds sway. Christ, and later the Church, are bent on introducing the Kingdom into this world dominated by the "devil."

The Sourcebook uses the concept of world found in Vatican II. This includes material things, human beings and their manifold relationships: familial, social, working, economic, political, cultural. Also the moral dimension that exists in all of them. "The Council focuses its attention on the world, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which families live. It gazes upon that world which is the theater of man's history. It carries the marks of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs. It is the world that Christians see, created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ. He was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified Evil, so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfillment" (GS 2b).

2.3.2. The laity and the world.

For a long time the negative moral vision of the world predominated. The Church saw the world as its irreconcilable enemy. The confrontation and rejection of the world has had various painful moments throughout history. The most recent was unleashed by

the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, both implacably condemned by the Church. This vision and rejection of the world is still alive in some sectors of the Church, despite the new focus brought to bear by Vatican II. This was referred to earlier.

According to this new focus, the whole Church is for the world. All Christians, but especially lay or secular Christians, are for the world. ("Secular" comes from the Latin "sæculum," which means "world"). The layperson has a more direct and more intense presence in worldly or temporal realities.

Vatican II presents temporal realities as the locus of the vocation and mission of the laity. God's call convoking them resounds in the midst of temporal realities. "They are called there by God" (LG 31). It is also the locus of their mission: "They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations..., in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the salvation of the world from within, in the manner of leaven" (LG 31).

To be a leaven of temporal realities and "permeate them with the spirit of Christ" (LG 36b), all Christians, but in a more intense and deep way the laity, must be immersed in temporal realities. And this, as the Sourcebook reminds us, is a constitutive element of their vocation: "Part of our secular vocation is to live a life of full involvement in the world" (n. 11).

The Sourcebook then lists the realities in which the laity are immersed. It sums up what is said in LG 31, AA 7, and EN 70. "Part of our secular vocation is to live a life of full involvement in the world, that is, in the ordinary circumstances of married, family and social life; exercising our secular professions as completely as we can, and being occupied in affairs of the domestic, social, economic, political and cultural orders" (n. 11).

The Sourcebook presents these realities here from the viewpoint of vocation, since we are in the chapter on vocation. It will present them more amply in Part Two, when it speaks of mission and, concretely, of the transforming action which the laity should carry out in all temporal affairs (nn. 22-23).

In paragraph 2 of n. 11, we read: "We are, and feel that we are, part of the people and, as citizens, we take part in all our responsibilities." Here the word "people," if we bear in mind the footnote reference of AA 7e, refers to citizens engaged in all spheres and dimensions of social life. It does not have a sociopolitical meaning, nor does it refer directly to the grass-roots or popular classes, although it logically includes them.

These words are an invitation to be part of all organized expressions of civic life: social political, economic, cultural, popular, union-related, etc. As we are still on the theme of vocation, the Sourcebook refers here predominantly to the presence of the laity in all of these. When it speaks of mission it will refer more directly to active involvement in them.

III. WE ARE CHRISTIANS

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION AS CLARETIANS AND LAITY

I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

(This chapter of the Sourcebook has two sections: the first, entitled "Dimensions of the Christian Vocation," is made up only of n. 12; the second, entitled "Gospel Radicalism," is made up of 6 numbers (13-18).

*This first section (n. 12) describes the **trinitarian origin** of the Christian vocation and presents the characteristics of vocation as it arises with reference to each of the three divine Persons. It ends making reference to the ecclesial and eschatological dimensions of the Christian vocation.*

*The second section (nn. 13-18) refers to three themes of exceptional importance in Christian life: (1) **the following of Jesus**, (2) **Gospel radicalism**, and (3) **life according to the spirit of the Beatitudes**.)*

1. DIMENSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION GOSPEL RADICALISM

Until not too many years ago, these three themes were regarded as the exclusive preserve of religious and priests. Only they were thought of as being called to the following of Jesus, to Gospel radicalism and to living according to the Beatitudes. Christian foot soldiers, the laity, already had enough to do keeping the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church. Now, thank God, these three themes have been recovered for the laity.

These are not three unconnected, or even different, themes. Gospel radicalism forms an essential part of the following of Jesus. The Beatitudes, in turn, are genuine expressions of Gospel radicalism. We, the laity, are called to follow Jesus radically and not according to some lower standard. We are to live like Him in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

This is not the place to get into a lengthy explanation of these three themes; however it is worth our while to recall their core points briefly.

1.1. The Following of Jesus

The briefest and most complete summary of what following Jesus means, is found in these two words of Jesus to Peter: "Follow me" (Jn 21:22). The many vocation accounts in the Gospels show us that "following is a free response to a gratuitous call. It is Jesus who takes the initiative. He comes forward to meet those He calls. It is not so much the person who seeks God, as God who seeks the person. And this is something that is constantly renewed."¹⁶

a. What does following Jesus mean?

Following Jesus does not mean studying His life, contemplating it through the Gospels to see how He acted, and then trying to do the same thing He did. This is not a following of Jesus, but rather, the imitation of an external model. It could be some saint, an exceptional woman or man, a hero. We imitate the saints, but we do not follow them. No matter how much we like them, they are always models that are external to us. However, following always refers to Christ. Why?

b. Following Jesus is not imitation of Christ.

Because following is not an external imitation of Christ. It is not focusing on what He did to literally and anachronistically repeat it. For us, Christ is not an external model. He arose and lives in us. He is within us, a principle of life and action. Following is progressive union with Christ. From this union a new life springs. Saint Paul felt this so powerfully that he could write: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This kind of following consists in allowing oneself to be possessed by Christ and to let Christ live through us. It doesn't consist of copying what He did, or of thinking and acting the way He did. It is much more: it is making His own sentiments, which we bear within us, our own. But which sentiments?

The founding and fontal sentiment of Jesus of Nazareth, the one that gave the meaning of His life and His way of existence, was the experience of God as "Abba." That is, as a tenderly loving Father who was always close to him, as "papa" or "daddy."

This was the sentiment or experience that founded ("founding") all His life and all His practices. It was also the source ("fontal") from which arose two attitudes that determined His style of life: (1) a love and unbreakable fidelity to the Father, and (2) a love and absolute availability for the service of human beings, of whom God is also the Father. These two sentiments or attitudes can be summed up in two words: sonship and brotherhood.

Following Christ does not mean stirring up these two sentiments or attitudes of sonship and brotherhood within us. It means much more. As He lives in us and we are united with Him, we commune in His very sentiments and attitudes. In this way, in an indivisible

¹⁶ Maccise, C., *La espiritualidad de la nueva evangelizacion*, Mexico 1990, p. 60.

unity, He lives in us as we in Him in His seamless fidelity to the Father and His absolute availability to His brothers and sisters.

c. Following is not copying Jesus

It is from here, from this source, that there arises in us a lifestyle which does not just copy what Christ did or would do today. But rather, is a lifestyle that lives out and does what Christ is really doing today, in us and through us, who are, as n. 7 of the Sourcebook puts it, His "new humanity."

e. Following Jesus means conforming our lifestyle to His

Following Christ implies not only imitating His lifestyle, but undertaking it. It also implies assuming and continuing His mission of announcing, living, embodying and spreading the Reign of God. Mission not only forms part of His lifestyle and ours - **it conforms our lifestyle to His.**

If we take up His lifestyle and mission, we are also going to incur His lot of being misunderstood, rejected, slandered and persecuted.

We can achieve none of this by our own unaided power. We rely on a power that exceeds our own. Christ himself has given us this power: His Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes our following of Jesus possible. To be a Christian is to follow Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

1.2. Gospel radicalism

To those whom He calls or who decide to step out decisively to follow Him, He proposes some very radical living conditions. In a word, it is His own style of life. Let us recall, for example, this passage: "As they were journeying long the road, someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have lairs and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk 9:57-58).

Gospel radicalism can be understood two ways: subjective or objective.

a) Gospel radicalism in the subjective sense -

In a subjective sense, that is, from the standpoint of the life and activities of the follower of Jesus, Gospel radicalism means an option to undertake and put into practice down to its last consequences, the program of life which is the Gospel.

b) Gospel radicalism in an objective sense -

In an objective sense, that is, in terms of the gospel itself, radicalism is an ensemble of very strong, and sometimes unusual, demands contained in the Gospels. They are especially the three Synoptic Gospels where there is set forth a style of life for those who

would follow Jesus. These demands are grouped around various nuclei. The three main ones are the following:

c) The three demands for following Jesus -

(1) **The person of Jesus** - For the disciple, Jesus must come before all else. To follow Him we must at once break any bonds of whatever sort: family, profession, goods, our own life. And we must never look back, longing for what we have left behind (cf. Mt 10:37; Lk 9:59-62, 14:26,31; Mk 8:34-38; Mt 10:37-39).

(2) **The Reign of God.** For Jesus this is the supreme value that must be achieved even at the cost of all we possess. It is the one for which we should sacrifice everything, even our own life (cf. Mt 10:37, 13:34; Lk 14:26; Mk 9:42-47; Lk 9:55ff.). We must seek first the Kingdom of God and all the rest will be added to us (Mt 6:33).

(3) **The love of neighbor.** This is the indisputable proof of the authenticity of our love of God (cf. Jn 13:34, 15:12; 1 Jn 3:10, 4:20). Jesus' demands regarding love for others were quite unusual for His contemporaries: loving others as oneself, loving them as He loved us, loving our enemies, forgiving without limits, etc. (cf. Mt 5:44, 18:21-22,37-39; Mk 12:30-31; Lk 6:27,35, 10:25-27).

(d) Gospel radicalism only for the elite?

Some think that Gospel radicalism is only for an elite corps within the followers of Jesus. However, it is for all. Radicalism taken in the subjective sense, as an attitude, commitment to and living of the Gospel, is equal for all Christians. Radicalism taken in the objective sense is also for all. In effect, Christ, the Kingdom, and our brothers and sisters, must come first for all, and must be the values that shape the lifestyle of every Christian. What varies are the way and the means of living this Gospel radicalism.

(e) Religious and gospel radicalism

Religious live this radicalism in a different way and with different means. They organize and realize their life according to the very form of life-outlook that Jesus adopted regarding human realities (family, profession, goods, etc.).

(f) Married folk and gospel radicalism

Married people, for example, live their radical fidelity to the gospel in another way and with other means. They do not leave home, spouse or children in order to follow Jesus. If they did so, they would be going against the will of God and their own vocation. Within their own family in their matrimonial and family relationships, they live the primacy of Jesus, the Kingdom, brothers and sisters. But also in openness to mission and love for others.

1.3. The Beatitudes as a Proposal for the Radical Following of Jesus

The Gospels offer us two rather different versions of the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus: namely those of Matthew and Luke. Between them there are notable differences of focus and even number: Luke lists four Beatitudes, while Matthew lists nine.

In Luke's version the Beatitudes have a theological focus, that is, they speak of God, tell us how He behaves toward the poor, the humble and the persecuted. They describe attitudes of God, the Just King, who wants equality for all His children.

Matthew offers us an anthropological version, that is, one centered on human beings. He speaks to us of the attitudes and dispositions human beings must have in order to share in the goods of the Kingdom.

In both Evangelists, the Beatitudes also have a christological character, that is, they speak to us of Christ. In some Beatitudes, this character is implicit; in others, such as the Beatitude of persecution, it is clearly explicit, since it speaks of persecution "for my sake" (Mt 5:11; Lk 6:22).

From another point of view all of the Beatitudes are christological. They offer us a portrait of Jesus' sentiments, His inner dispositions and His lifestyle. Hence, they are an invitation to follow Him.

Matthew, by placing the Beatitudes at the beginning of Jesus' preaching, means to tell us that they are the Magna Charta of the new society, the Kingdom of God. God is going to judge us with this one law in hand (Mt 25:21ff.).

The Beatitudes, especially in Matthew's version, are the fundamental law of all Christian life. We know that the fundamental law of Christian life can be none other than Christ Himself and His Gospel. Moreover, they are "gospel," that is, not just an announcement, invitation or proposal, but also a grace, an event, an action of God in us, and are hence "Good News," that is, Gospel. They make present in our life what they proclaim. They are a power that helps us walk as followers of Jesus and as those who further of His cause.

"The charity of God that has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rm 5:5) enables the laity to really and truly express the spirit of the Beatitudes in their life" (AA 4e).

II. COMMENTARY

The first two paragraphs of number 12 set forth the origin and trinitarian dimension of the Christian vocation. They underscore the fact that baptism is the moment when the three divine Persons become fully active within us. The third paragraph refers to another dimension of the Christian vocation: incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ. Thus live in community as children of God and followers of Jesus. Finally, the fourth paragraph offers a well-articulated presentation of the three dimensions of Christian life, which relate to the vocational response that God expects from us with the help of His grace: (1) the call to Christian perfection, (2) the following of Jesus under the action of the Spirit and (3) the call to share one day the inheritance of the Kingdom in its eschatological fullness.

The beginning and end of the n. 12 of the Sourcebook make us see that the Father is at the origin of our vocation (taking the initiative). He is also the final term of our vocational itinerary: to share His inheritance and to be a praise of His glory. Throughout this journey which we make as Church and which leads from the Father to the Father, we advance in union with Christ and in the power of the Spirit.

1. ORIGIN AND TRINITARIAN DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

SOURCEBOOK



Even before we existed, the Father chose us in the person of Christ to be holy and faultless before him in love, and destined us in Christ to be His children.

In baptism, which makes the Father's plan explicit and puts it into effect, we have truly become God's children and sharers in the divine nature; we have put on Christ and have been united with Him to form one Body; we have received the Holy Spirit, who seals and bears witness to our status as sons, dwells in us, makes us temples of God and enriches us with His gifts, especially with charity, the highest charism, which impels us to love God and our neighbor.

COMMENTARY

Through baptism, we have been incorporated into the Church, the new People of God. Through this election and these gifts of God, we are all called to the perfection of Christian life by following Jesus under the action of the Spirit, and to share one day in the definitive inheritance of Christ.

1.1. The Initiative and Plan of the Father (n. 12a)

"Even before we existed, the Father chose us in the person of Christ to be holy in love, and destined us in Christ to be his children" (n. 12a). These words of the Sourcebook are an almost literal citation of Eph 1:4-5, where Paul reveals to us the immense love with which the Father loves us. He, even before time began, thought of us, saw us in Christ, united to Him who is the Head of the new humanity. He chose us to be entirely His possession, that is, to be holy. For He is holy and, in taking possession of us, His holiness invades us and makes us holy in the love He has for us.

This election is an act of God's love that makes us adoptive sons in His only-begotten Son, Christ. In other words, by union with His first-begotten Son, we are transformed into sons of the Father.

1.2. Baptism: moment of trinitarian action in our being and life (12b)

In baptism the Father and the Son intervene in us through the Holy Spirit. Thanks to this trinitarian intervention in baptism, the project which the Father has in mind for us is initially and essentially enacted.

In this paragraph of n. 12, the Sourcebook points out some elements of God's plan that become a reality in baptism.

a. In relation to the Father.

In baptism we are made His true children, and as such we become partakers in His divine nature and enter into intimacy with Him. Baptism introduces us into the mystery of the Trinity and introduces the mystery of the Trinity into us. In view of this incredibly great truth, the author of the First Letter of John exclaims: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that is what we are" (1 Jn 3:1).

"Through holy baptism we are made children of God in His only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus. On coming up from the waters of this sacred font, each Christian hears again the

voice that once rang out on Jordan's bank: 'You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased' (Lk 3:22). Each christian understands that he has been associated with the beloved Son, becoming an adoptive son' (cf. Gal 4:4-7)." (CL 11c).

b. In relation to Christ

This paragraph of the Sourcebook tells us that "we have put on Christ" (12 b). These words are taken from the Letter to the Galatians: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). As we have already mentioned, in Paul's usage "putting on" does not mean that we are covered with some outer garment. It means, rather, that we allow ourselves to soak in, to be transformed into Christ, to be like Him, to have His own sentiments.

The Sourcebook, following the thread of Galatians, goes on to say that we are so joined with Christ as to form but one body with Him (Gal 3:28). (In a footnote the Sourcebook cites 1 Cor 13:12; it ought to read 1 Cor 12:13, which states, "It was in one Spirit that all of us were baptized into one body.")

c. In relation to the Spirit

This number of the Sourcebook tells us that in the act of receiving baptism "we have received the Holy Spirit" (12b), whom the Father and the Son send to us so that He may be the divine power that works the wonders of baptism in us. That He may explicitly unfold our condition as children of God, draw us into intimacy with the Trinity, and enable us to address God our Father with the incredibly endearing word, "Abba." ""You have received...a spirit of adoption through which we cry our "Abba!" that is, "father" (Rm 8:15).

It is the Holy Spirit who seals and guarantees our condition as children of God: "The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rm 8:16). The very presence of the Holy Spirit in us is the greatest guarantee that we are children of God. "The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of his Son which cries out "Abba!" "Father" (Gal 4:6).

The Holy Spirit **dwells and acts in us permanently**. He is the inner force that helps us live the Christian life in its twofold and inseparable dimension of love of God and human beings.

(1) Dwells in us

Paul tells the Romans: "The Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rm 8:9). He tells the Ephesians that they are "a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22). In this last phrase there is a veiled allusion to Judaism, which believed that God could only be encountered in the temple of Jerusalem (God's dwelling place). Now God has His dwelling place in every

Christian through the presence of the Spirit in them. The person of the Christian (the body) is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

(2) Acts in us

Acts in us with His gifts, which are not ornamental trappings, but a living power, impulses and permanent attitudes which lead us to a style of life and a commitment to mission. "He enriches us with His gifts, especially with charity, the supreme charism (1 Cor 13:13, Rm 5:5), which moves us to love God and neighbor" (n. 12b).

Anointed by the Spirit in baptism we are able "to repeat the words of Jesus, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore He has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord' (Lk 4:18-19). In this way, through the outpouring of baptism, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus Christ" (CL 13c).

d. In relation to the Church

The Sourcebook states that "through baptism we have been incorporated into the Church, the new People of God" (n. 12c).

The Christian calling is essentially a co-calling, that is, a call to form part of the people of God together with others likewise called. "It was God's will to sanctify and save men not in isolation, with no connection to one another, but so as to constitute a people" (LG 9a; AG 2).

The Church, the community of the baptized, is a prolongation and image of the communion that unites the Father with the Son and the Son with the Father in the loving bond of the Spirit (cf. Jn 17:21).

1.3. The Christian vocation as a task to be realized (n. 12d)

The last paragraph of n. 12 presents vocation as a task we are called to discern. It is a task which is not only or even mainly our own work, but the work of the Father who chose us, of Christ who is with us and of the Holy Spirit who guides and strengthens us with His gifts or charisms.

Hence this paragraph begins by saying, "Through this election and these gifts of God, we are called..." and then indicates the goal to which we are called and toward which we must walk: "to the perfection of Christian life by following Jesus under the action of the Spirit, and to share one day in the definitive inheritance of Christ" (n. 12d).

These are not three goals, but only one: the perfection of Christian life. But we will achieve this goal in its fulness only at the end of time, "when we share the definitive inheritance of Christ" in the consummate plenitude of the Reign of God. The way to reach the perfection of Christian life is, as this number states, "following Jesus under the action of the Spirit."

All the faithful "are called to the fulness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. To reach this perfection the faithful must use their strength according as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. In this way they can follow in His footsteps and mold themselves in His image, seeking the will of the Father in all things, devoting themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor" (LG 40b).

2. TAKING THE BEATITUDES AS A RULE OF LIFE

SOURCEBOOK



Like all Christians, we are called to make the Beatitudes our own rule of life. This entails that we make a radical option for Christ, and accept the Kingdom of God as our highest value, placing at its service all that we are: our life, our capacity for love, our liberty and our relationship to earthly goods.

Life according to the Beatitudes also demands that we renounce all those securities that would tie us down or form an obstacle to our following Jesus and spreading the Kingdom of God.

2.1. Recovering the Beatitudes for the Laity

This n. 13 opens with a quite significant lead-in phrase. We should not rush over it just because it is a lead-in. I refer to the expression: "like all Christians..." In this phrase we find a clear statement that the Beatitudes are for all Christians and not just for a select group, as used to be held some years ago and as is still held by some who are stuck in the past.

2.2. The beatitudes as a Rule of Life.

COMMENTARY

The Sourcebook presents the Beatitudes within the role they play in the Gospel of Matthew, that is, as the fundamental law of the Kingdom, as the rule of life for all who accept the invitation to follow Jesus. "Like all Christians, we are called to make the Beatitudes our own rule of life" (n. 13a).

As a rule of life, they cannot be left as theoretical principles, but must shape our concrete way of existence, impelling us to determined attitudes, experiences and behaviors, namely, those proper of a follower of Christ.

2.3. Life according to the Beatitudes supposes an option for Christ and for the Kingdom.

The Sourcebook indicates that an option for the Beatitudes as a rule of life is above all an option for the One who proclaimed them and incarnated them in His own life: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Without "opting radically for Christ" (n. 13a), the Beatitudes have no meaning for us. Nor is there any way we can possibly live them, since we lack the inner power that makes it possible to live according to the Beatitudes, namely, Christ himself, who carries on His life in us.

Antecedent to their being a norm of life for us, the Beatitudes are life in Christ, and for this reason form part of our following of Jesus.

The Sourcebook also states that making the Beatitudes our rule of life "implies making the Kingdom of God our highest value." A radical option for Christ includes opting for the cause that gave meaning to His life, preaching, passion, death and resurrection: the Kingdom. The Beatitudes have their full meaning within the framework and dynamics of the Kingdom. They are the fundamental law of the Kingdom. No one can be a citizen of the Kingdom unless he assumes and lives this law. And no one can assume and live it, unless he first opts radically for the Kingdom.

2.4. The Beatitudes as a rule of life demand putting everything at the service of Christ and of the Kingdom

This entails that we make a radical option for Christ, and accept the kingdom of God as our highest value, placing at its service all that we are: our life, our capacity for love, our liberty and our relationship to earthly goods" (n 13).

In the process of making Christ and the Kingdom the highest values that take first place in our life and give it meaning, and in our course of putting "all that we are" at the service of Christ and the Kingdom, we can distinguish two moments or phases:

- a. Opening ourselves to Christ and the Kingdom, letting their presence and power **invade** all dimensions of our being, beginning with the richest and deepest, namely, "our ability to love" and "our freedom," and then followed by "our relationship to our earthly goods" and all other relationships, aspects and dimensions that are included in the expression, "our life." Crying out insistently, as He taught us: "Thy Kingdom come!."
- b. The power of Christ and the Kingdom, present in us, not only invades all that we are, but **reorders** it according to the demands of Christ and the Kingdom. It leads us to put everything --feelings, freedom, etc.-- at the service of the Kingdom and Christ. This establishes a new way of living our affections, love, freedom and relationship to goods.

2.5. Life according to the Beatitudes demands renunciations

"Life according to the Beatitudes also demands that we renounce all those securities that would tie us down or form an obstacle to our following Jesus and spreading the Kingdom of God" (13b).

The complex of renunciations involved in a life according to the Beatitudes is summed up in "all securities." What we have here is mainly an allusion to the Beatitude of poverty. This includes renouncing ourselves and our trust in our own resources in order to humble ourselves before God and place our security in Him. It also includes refusing to put our trust in riches and in any sort of power.

This paragraph 13b also points out the motive for these renunciations: "the following of Jesus and spreading the Kingdom of God."

3. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF GOSPEL RADICALISM

(Numbers 14, 15 and 16 present some important elements of Gospel radicalism. We can sum them up in the following seven points.)

SOURCEBOOK



The awareness of our creaturely condition, our limitations and weaknesses, makes us humble before God. Knowing that we can

COMMENTARY

do nothing of ourselves, we place our hope and our security in Him.

The new commandment of Jesus leads us to seek solidarity and the sharing of our goods with those who suffer misery and injustice, and to help them find a way out of such conditions by promoting human advancement.

A Gospel sense of poverty impels us to work, to carefully administer our goods and to use them according to the criteria of simplicity and generous service to our brothers and sisters, and to the work of evangelization.

We thankfully proclaim the goodness of all created beings and the relativity of earthly goods in comparison with the absolute goodness of God and His Kingdom. We reject every form of attachment to riches, consumerism and ostentation, as being contrary to the love of God and neighbor. This attitude allows us to grow in inner freedom and to become more available for the following of Jesus and the service of our brothers and sisters.

2.1. Poor in the eyes of God. Creaturely Poverty

(14a).

This first paragraph of n. 14 catches the most genuine sense of the beatitude of poverty according to Matthew: to feel small and weak in the eyes of God, our enemies and the forces of evil. Consequently to place all our trust in God.

This paragraph speaks of creaturely poverty: "the awareness of our creatureliness." This is the most radical form of poverty: poverty of *being*, which means acknowledging that we have received all from God: our being, life, the good qualities we have -- all. Moreover, not only have we received our being, we also keep receiving it from God. Through this poverty of being, Christians feel that they are poor and helpless creatures and useless servants, and banish all self-pretension (Lk 17:10; Mt 20:1-16), but they also feel that they are strong and can do all things with Him who strengthens them.

The awareness of being creatures, along with the experience of "our limitations and our weaknesses" (14a), leads us to the poverty of humility, which is a fundamental attitude of the "poor of Yahweh": "It makes us humble before God" (14a). It creates in us another of the

characteristic sentiments of the poor of Yahweh: trust and hope in God, "knowing that we can do nothing of ourselves, we place our hope and security in Him" (14a).

2.2. In Solidarity with the poor and the marginalized (14b).

To love our neighbors, including our enemies, is one of the fundamental elements of Gospel radicalism. The gift and commandment of love leads us to adopt the sentiments of the Father and of Jesus Christ toward the needy. In this way we embody the beatitude of poverty according to Luke. In effect, Luke shows us God's feelings for the poor and His striving to deliver them from this state of abasement which offends God, the just King, who cannot tolerate such inequalities in his Kingdom.

Facing situations of humiliating poverty, injustice and marginalization, the love of neighbor finds expression in "solidarity." Solidarity is much more than an inner feeling or an outward help. It is putting oneself alongside others, becoming one with them, sharing their predicament of abasement and their struggle to escape from this condition: sharing the same lot.

Solidarity is what defines the life of Jesus (cf. Lk 4:16-18; Mt 5:2ff., 11:2ff.), hence it is an essential part of following Him.

In this context of solidarity we must place these two ways of action proposed by the Sourcebook:

- a) "Sharing of our goods with those who suffer misery and injustice,"
- b) "and to help them find a way out of such conditions by promoting human advancement" (14b).

Here we must understand advancement not in a paternalistic, but rather a liberating sense. The protagonists of this liberating process are those who suffer injustice themselves. We share with them in solidarity on their journey toward liberation.

2.3. Being open in using our goods for our neighbors and the work of evangelization (14c).

"A gospel sense of poverty impels us to work, to carefully administer our goods and to use them according to the criteria of simplicity and generous service to our brothers and sisters, and to the work of evangelization" (14c).

The footnote refers to a text in Acts in which Paul exhorts the elders of Ephesus to work, so as not to be a burden for the rest, and above all so as to be able to share with the needy: "You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my own needs and for those of my companions. I have shown you in every way, by working like this, that you must support the weak, remembering the saying of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34-35).

The Sourcebook presents a series of indications and lines of action that should guide the behavior of Lay Claretians regarding material goods:

- a) "To carefully administer our goods" (14c), that is, with evangelical discernment, not squandering them, but rather making them productive for the good of others.
- b) Simplicity and austerity of life in order to be able to share more with our brothers and sisters and to have resources available for evangelizing action.

2.4. Not allowing ourselves to be possessed by our possessions (14d)

The option for Christ and for the Kingdom --absolute values which we must serve with all that we are and have-- leads us to free ourselves from wealth as an absolute that orients our life and centers our efforts and concerns. Only thus will we be free to follow Jesus and carry on His mission. Only when riches are not the mainspring of our life, will we be available for the service of our brothers and sisters, not just with our goods, but with our time and our personal presence.

"We reject every form of attachment to riches, consumerism and ostentation, as being contrary to the love of God and neighbor. This attitude allows us to grow in inner freedom and become more available for the following Jesus and service of our brothers and sisters" (14d).

Detachment from riches allows us to enjoy great inner liberty and constant availability for serving the Kingdom of God (cf. AA 4e).

The phrase "we reject every form of attachment" is quite radical. It does not refer to a spiritual detachment, but to a real one. It refers to sharing, not keeping or accumulating, because it is hard not to be possessed by the goods we have.

In this aspect of poverty, Saint Anthony Mary Claret left us an exceptional witness (cf. Aut 357-371).

2.5. Witnesses to the primacy of God and of absolute goods (14d)

"We thankfully proclaim the goodness of all created beings and the relativity of earthly goods in comparison with the absolute goodness of God and His Kingdom" (14d).

The life of a lay person is paradoxical. They are called to affirm the world (outside us) and at the same time to relativize it (it is not the ultimate thing); to assume the consistency of human realities and simultaneously to transform them; to accept the social order and criticize it in order to change it."¹⁷

With our Christian attitude toward material goods, we proclaim, on the one hand, the goodness of all creation and its ordering toward the human person, and on the other, the provisional character of all things. We know riches in passing and do not set our heart on them; rather we set our heart on God and on the absolute goods of the Kingdom. And this "in no way diminishes but on the contrary increases the importance of the mission incumbent on them (the laity) of working with all people in building a more humane world" (GS 57a). Thus the laity make the absolute goods of the Kingdom already present in history grow (GS 37d).

SOURCEBOOK

15

We submit to God's sovereignty and the demands of following Jesus, all dimensions of our affectivity and sexuality, and we strive to carry out God's design for us by living a love of total oblation, whether in matrimony or in celibacy for the Kingdom.

Renouncing every form of egoism in this dimension of our being, we grow as persons in openness and self-giving to others, and feel more liberated in order to struggle for the cause of the Kingdom.

The witness of oblation love that we give by living Christian chastity within the various forms of secular life, becomes transformed into a denunciation of eroticism and hedonism.

2.6. Opening the gates of our affective world to the liberating power of the Kingdom

¹⁷ Estrada, J.A., *Identidad de los laicos*, p. 178.

a. Letting the Kingdom to be a part of our affective world

"We submit to God's sovereignty and the demands of following Jesus, all dimensions of our affectivity and sexuality, and we strive to carry our God's design for us by living a love of total oblation, whether in matrimony or in celibacy. (15a).

Affectivity is surely one of the richest and most positive dimensions of the human person. There, in the field of affections --packed with forces, tendencies and impulses of which we are largely unconscious-- the course of our life is played out. From it arise postures, attitudes and decisions that determine our way of life. Following or not following Jesus, putting or not putting our life at the service of the Kingdom, are issues that are largely decided in the field of affectivity.

We have to open the doors of our affectivity to the transforming power of the Kingdom, so that it can subject, connect and order all the forces that cross it, sometimes in an uncontrollable way, so that in the midst of all this the passion for the person of Jesus and following Him, and the passion for the Kingdom, may be uplifted as the dominant force that polarize and center all others.

b. Our affectivity and God's plan for us (15a)

Submitting our whole affective world to the sovereignty of God and of His Kingdom is a grace that we have to pray for constantly. It is also a task. Hence the Sourcebook goes on to say, "We strive to carry our God's design for us by living a love of total oblation, whether in matrimony or in celibacy." (15a).

(1) God's plan for us is related to love in this paragraph. God is love and all that God plans is also love. His overall project for humanity is summed up in love, because what God wants is for all people to live in love for Him (to live as His children) and for others (to live as brothers and sisters). God will reign in the measure that humans recognize and love Him as Father, and in the measure that they acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters. All of this is both a gift of God and a task of our own.

(2) Oblative love - Here, the Sourcebook qualifies love with an adjective which, by-passing the rules of grammar, is a substantive. It speaks of "oblative" or "self-offering" love. Love is neither Christian, nor is it love, unless it is oblative, that is, unless it anticipates in loving, like God Himself, who "first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). And unless it is a gratuitous love for the other, without seeking anything in exchange, is thankful and joyful for whatever one receives. This is the only authentic and mature way of loving. It is the love of solidarity or of com-passion, that is, a love that leads us to those who have misfortune to suffer.

The Lay Claretian can live this self-offering love both in matrimony and celibacy for the Kingdom. In effect, matrimony cannot be based on an immature, possessive love of the other person. Love that wants to subject the other and keep the other in servitude, is nothing but selfishness. Sometimes, as in the case of the "machismo" of some married men, the spouse is presented as having the duty of submitting herself and of being compelled to put up with it as a demand of Christian morality.

Love in marriage can become a kind of closed circuit, of selfishness of two who have become one. It must be open to others, self-offering and outward-going. Even in the giving of two to others, "in union there is strength."

Celibacy is either self-offering love or it makes no sense at all. The option not to marry is the result of another, higher option: the Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:1-12). A person undertakes the celibate life, even within the lay state, in order to devote oneself in a more free and exclusive way to spreading the Kingdom where it is most urgently needed.

c. Oblative love and our growth as persons (15b).

By renouncing every form of selfishness in this dimension of our being, we grow as persons" (15b).

Selfishness does not allow us to grow either as human beings or as Christians, because God's plan for us is that we be perfect, mature in the love He has for us and in the love that we should have for Him and for others. In the measure that we keep growing in self-offering love, we will go on maturing as human beings, because we will be growing nearer to the ideal of the kind of human being that God wants.

The selfish person does not grow, he turns in upon himself; he is a "puer æternus" who never stops sucking his thumb, a perpetual narcissist .

d. Oblative love and struggle for the Kingdom (15b).

When we renounce all forms of selfishness and live a life of self-offering love, "we feel more liberated to struggle for the sake of the Kingdom" (16b). Indeed, authentic love frees us from the strongest bond that hinders committing our life to the service of the Kingdom: self-love.

From a positive point of view, love awakens our sensibility and generosity regarding the manifold situations of denial of the Kingdom that exist in the milieu in which we live.

e. Oblative love as prophetic denunciation (15c).

"The witness we give to oblation love by living Christian chastity within the different forms of secular life, becomes a denunciation of eroticism and hedonism" (15c).

Present-day societies and cultures are characterized by a craze for having and enjoying. This craze leads people to make sexuality not a way of dominating, but of consuming others. It also leads them to seek pleasure (hedonism) in the comfort and selfish enjoyment of all goods.

Christians seem like strange and naive beings amidst a society that seeks happiness not in giving, but in consuming. Those who take as their norm of life the saying of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), are by their very way of life at cross purposes with the exploiting selfishness of a consumerist world.

SOURCEBOOK



Like Jesus, we unceasingly seek the will of the Father; we discover it in his Word, in prayer, in the Church's teachings, in dialogue with our brothers and sisters, in events, in the signs of the times and in the projects of our group; and His will becomes our food.

The will of God enlightens and sustains us in the fulfillment of our family duties and professional commitments.

Through obedience, accepted in faith as a following of Christ who was obedient even to death on a cross, we unite ourselves with the divine plan of salvation, always aware that we are acting as God's envoys and as collaborators with His will, which is that all people be saved.

2.3.7. "Here I am; I come to do your will" (Heb 10:9)

a. The ceaseless search to know and do God's will -

this is for us, as it was for Jesus, the nourishment of our life (cf. Jn 4:24), and forms part of Gospel radicalism and of the following of Jesus. Thus we make our own one of the two sentiments or attitudes that determined the lifestyle of Jesus: His unwavering fidelity to the Father and to His plan of salvation.

b. There are many ways and means to seek God's will

The Sourcebook points out the following six:

"We discover it (1) in His Word, (2) in the signs of the times, (3) in prayer, (4) in the teachings of the Church, (5) in dialogue with our brothers and sisters, (6) and in the group's projects" (16a).

(1) The Word

When we speak of the Word of God we refer to the Bible, to reality and to history. These are not three means that function separately; they mutually enlighten and complement each other.

Reading and meditating on the Bible is a very important channel for discovering God's plans, His will and His demands. But to do this we have to read the Bible in the light of the reality and history in which we live, with the situations of people staring us in the eyes. If we do not read it thus, we may discover God's will for the immediate recipients who were contemporary with the respective Bible passage, but not for ourselves. In the Bible God spoke to people of 2,000-2,500 years ago to guide them and show them what He expected of them in the reality and the historical situation in which they lived. When these same words, set for all time in the printed text, are read in the light of our reality, they come to life again, sound fresh and clean for us here and now, and show us what God expects of us. Reality and the Word mutually enlighten each other.

Reality itself --the situations, events and the liberating journey of marginalized people-- is also a word of God.

This is the basis and root of some other means for discovering God's will: the signs of the times.

(2) The signs of the times are

The signs of the times are manifestations of the Spirit in history and through history. In the tendencies, aspirations and movements that characterize each stage of the history or journey of a people, the will of God is manifested to us. For example, the tendencies and aspirations of the Enlightenment, taken up and spread by the French Revolution, whose bicentennial we have just celebrated, were signs of the Spirit's action in history. The Church, wounded by the enormously

aggressive blast that the Enlightenment unleashed against it, rejected, along with negative elements, some positive ones that tended to develop values very close to those of the Kingdom of God, such as liberty, fraternity, equality and democracy.

Generally speaking, the liberation movements of so many peoples are, doubtless, a sign of the Spirit. They are a word of God calling us to walk with them. The Sourcebook witnesses to this in its closing words: "The Spirit, who dynamizes the historical processes of oppressed peoples, moves us to communion with them and with their struggle for liberation" (n. 40b).

Through negative signs, even signs of death, the God of life speaks to us and summons us to struggle to make them disappear. The word of God resounds strongly in the cry of the poor, in premature deaths, in the silence and clamor of abandoned children, in the humiliating and exploiting dependence of the Southern hemisphere on the Northern hemisphere, in the scandalous inequalities between the different regions, classes and ethnic groups of the same country.

(3) Prayer

Prayer is another means singled out by the Sourcebook. In prayer, Jesus himself sought the Father's will and asked for the strength to carry it out. This kind of prayer has to be embodied in the context of the Word (Bible-reality-history) in order to discover what God wants of us in the here and now of our life and history.

Our prayer forms part of the following of Jesus. This means that in prayer we must make Jesus' prayer our own, saying with Him, "Let your will, not mine, be done" (Mk 14:36).

(4) The Church's teachings

This means refers not only to the teachings of the magisterium, but of the whole Church; and not only to oral or written teachings, but also to the teachings that shine through in the commitment and life-witness of Christians and of ecclesial communities.

Certainly, the teachings, guidelines and decisions of the magisterium (Councils, Popes, Bishops) are very important for us; but so is the *sensus* of the people, manifested in shared ideas and tendencies, in Christian commitments assumed by communities, in the reflections of simple people to whom God reveals Himself (cf. Mt 13:25) and in their oral and written manifestations.

(5) Dialogue with our brothers and sisters

One means of discerning God's will that the Sourcebook points out is dialogue with our brothers and sisters. Here it refers especially to our brothers and sisters in community, but it does not exclude dialogue with others who can enlighten us in situations of conflict or perplexity about what God wants of us.

Group or community meetings of Lay Claretians can often be the best place for a community discernment of God's will for the group or for each of its members.

(5) The Group Project

The group project, which is the fruit of a community discernment based on the reality in which the group lives and on the reality of the group itself, is also a means of discerning the will of God and a guide for putting it into practice.

c. Obedience to the Father and mission (16c)

In this paragraph the Sourcebook once more presents Christian obedience as a following of Jesus, who, in order to carry out the mission the Father entrusted to Him, obeyed even to the extreme situation of dying on the cross.

Our obedience to the Father is inserted and inserts us within the plan of salvation for all human beings, which He willed to carry out in history by means of Christ and of all His followers. "Through obedience, embraced in faith and as a following of Jesus who was obedient even to death on a cross, we are united to the divine plan of salvation" (16c). In this way Christ and the Father makes us their collaborators, "always feeling that we are envoys and collaborators with the will of God, who wants all people to be saved" (16c). This is the foundation of the missionary character that Christian obedience always has.

d) The Will of God and family and professional commitments

In the second paragraph of n. 16, the Sourcebook refers to two concrete spheres of the Lay Claretians' life in which they should seek God's will and allow themselves to be enlightened by it: the family and ones' profession. But as the will of God is also a grace that acts in our life, not only does it enlighten us, but also sustains us in fidelity to our Christian commitments. "The will of God enlightens us and sustains us in the fulfillment of our family and professional commitments" (16b).

The gift we have received and the experience of it which we share, are bonds of a communion. This charisnaic communion, which is above all a grace, we express and develop in friendship, mutual help, teamwork, assemblies, days of reflection, review of our life and prayer, in other encounters planned by the community, and above all in the Eucharist.

We achieve the community dimension of our charism not only within our own group, but also in our relationships with the local Church and in dialogue with people of other confessions.

2.4. Following Jesus in Community (nn. 17, 18)

Keys for a clearer understanding of the sections that follow, on **Community:**

- ! Community (or communion or fellowship) means, fundamentally, an inner openness toward others that leads us to share all that we are and have with them.
- ! This availability for fellowship is the fruit of the gratuitous action of the Trinity within each one of us.
- ! The action of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit within us, is what creates the New Man and reproduces in us Jesus, the Community Man par excellence.
- ! When we speak of community life, rather than thinking of a group, we ought to be thinking of the capacity for commitment we must have and of the affective commitment we must make to others . This fundamental community-thrust does not necessarily imply entering into a community of life with those who are the object of our fellowship.

- ! We can and in fact do form community with all those to whom we commit our life, as Jesus did. This is why Jesus formed a community with us, because He gave His life for us and continues giving it; and because within us, He is at work, in union with the Father and the Spirit, forming or creating us in His likeness.
- ! Although Jesus lives within all human beings and makes His permanent commitment there, He nevertheless, as man, chose to form a community of life with other companions, men and women, in order to teach us this special group-dimension, because the life of human beings, wherever they may be, needs sharing with others. And this life of daily sharing --a special form of fellowship-- needs to be sanctified in a particular way.
- ! If the group we form is going to become a community, it must be animated by the commitment of self, if necessary, to the point of giving one's life for it. By not starting here or from failing to practice it, many groups that we call communities are really not communities: they are lacking something fundamental.
- ! The cause for which Jesus was moved to give himself up for others was the Kingdom of God, that is, making room within Him for the Father, so that the Father could take possession of His being, so that the Father could reign or establish His reign within Him.
- ! This cause for committing oneself to others, the cause of the Kingdom, must be the fundamental reason for being constituted in a Christian group. The clarity with which this cause is lived, is the source and measure of the Christian quality of each group.
- ! Although the community character is essentially measured by the commitment of solidarity with others, without necessarily demanding a sharing of common life under the same roof, nevertheless experiences of community life lived within a commitment to mutual growth and transformation, a commitment that looks beyond self, bring us closer to the experience of Jesus himself.
- ! The evangelical character of community is measured by mercy or solidarity, which means making other people's problems our own, especially when others' needs are greater because of the oppression they suffer from oppressors.

- ! Jesus was particular community-minded or merciful or in solidarity with persons who were marginalized by the official structures of their society, which excluded them from the possibility of salvation and refused to recognize their dignity as sons of the same Father, their God.
- ! The power of evangelical solidarity should so possess persons who profess that they are followers of Jesus, that closed circles are broken to make way for a broader sharing with other groups the values which God himself, dwelling in all human beings, keeps sowing and cultivating in all His children, without barriers of persons, social classes, sex, religion, ethnicity, etc.

Life in communion, an essential dimension of Jesus

- ! Community is an essential dimension of the Christian life that had for some time become an exclusive preserve of religious, whereas in fact it is an evangelical demand for all Christians. Life in communion is an essential part of the following of Jesus and of Gospel radicalism, as the practice of Jesus and of the first Christian communities makes clear. There are no Christians apart from community.
- ! The first thing Jesus did when he began his public ministry was to create a community with the persons he called to follow him, whom he was going to prepare to carry on his own mission. "He called to him those he himself wanted..., that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mk 3:13-14). When Jesus calls someone to follow him, he does not let them live their following in isolation, but invited them to form part of the community of followers. Jesus assures them of his presence in the community: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).
- ! The first Christian communities show us how from the very outset the following of Jesus was lived in community. The fundamental sentiments or attitudes of Jesus --filial love for the Father and love-service for human beings-- can only be fully embodied in his followers when they are lived in community. Luke's accounts of the first Christian communities in Acts show us a reality (though a considerably idealized one), and a utopia.
- ! As Paul tells the Philippians, it is the Spirit who creates and sustains the fellowship in Christian communities: "Therefore, if there is any

consolation in Christ..., any fellowship in the Spirit, you must have in you the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:1-5). Since Jesus ascended into heaven it is his spirit that unites and drives the Christian community gathered around the Risen Lord. The Great Pentecost and the lesser pentecosts that Luke narrates in his second volume are always related with the development of the community. From that time on, the Church and all the communities that make it up are communities of the Spirit.

2.4.1. The Community of Lay Claretians (n. 17)

Speaking of the community of Lay Claretians, the Sourcebook says that "it is above all a grace," that is, a gift of God; and it calls this community "charismatic": "The gift we have received and the experience of it which we share are bonds of communion that unite us deeply. This charismatic communion, which is above all a grace, we express and develop in friendship, etc." (n. 17).

The adjective 'charismatic' means that the fact that some persons, within the great community of the local and universal Church, form a smaller and more closely knit community core, is due to the action of the Spirit who, by His gifts or charisms, has created a deep attunement among them and has gathered them together to share the same vocation, mission and spirituality in the Church.

It is the Spirit who creates, by means of the charisms, a communion of life and mission. The reason for the Lay Claretian community's existence, the reason for which the Spirit has raised them up, is the vocation and mission which He himself gives them and for which He equips them with the appropriate charisms.

2.4.2. Channels of Communion

N. 17 of the Sourcebook lists various channels, ways and important moments in which the community expresses and increases communion: "We express and develop this charismatic communion in friendship, mutual aid, teamwork, meetings, assemblies, days of reflection, revision and prayer, in the other encounters that each community programs, and above all in the Eucharist" (n. 17).

The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church and of all ecclesial communities, because in it are memorialized, that is, made present again, the supreme gestures of Christ to the Father and his commitment to humankind. In the Eucharist we commune in and make our own those two attitudes of Christ --his filiation and fraternity-- which are the two pillars of every Christian community. Thus we can better understand which Vatican II

states that the Eucharist is the "source and apex of all Christian life" (LG 11). (A fuller account of the dynamisms of animation and growth of the Lay Claretian community may be found in notebook 18 of the collection of study helps, entitled, "The Lay Claretian Group: Evolution and Maturation.")

Within the pluralism that is proper of a charismatic communion, Lay Claretian groups are generally small ecclesial communities, which may even have all things in common, like the early Christian communities.

2.4.3. Group or Community?

And what of the centers or local groupings of Lay Claretians? Are they a group or a community? In order to answer this question adequately, we must first come to an agreement on the meaning of both terms.

Sociology offers us several typologies for describing and classifying groups. We are going to offer just a few that can be useful for the theme we are dealing with.

- ! From the viewpoint of relationships, there is a well-known typology that distinguishes between two kinds of groups: **primary** and **secondary**. Relationships within a secondary group are mainly functional, that is, each person is related to the other members according to the roles they perform so that the group can function and achieve its objectives.

In contrast, in primary groups relationships are personal, spontaneous, open, trusting, warm and deep. Some sociologists call the primary group a community and the secondary group an association.

- ! From the viewpoint of the motives for which people come together, there are groups of shared **interests** and groups of shared **values**.

Groups of shared interests arise and exist for themselves, in order to satisfy the interests of their members, whether they be of an economic, political, cultural, religious, sporting or any other sort.

The aim of a group of shared values is not to satisfy personal needs or interests, but to live and carry out certain values that are above the group. In this case, the

group is not for itself, but for the values it aims at realizing. Its members are joined by something that is worth more and is higher than its members and their personal interests.

Obviously, the Lay Claretian group must be a group of shared values. It is not created in order to satisfy personal needs, but rather to internalize, to live personally and to realize in the world the values of the Kingdom, which are summed up, as we have so often said, in living and striving so that all may live as children of Gos and as brothers and sisters to one another.

- ! From the viewpoint of Christian life, we can establish certain differences between a group and a community. The group tends to share and develop only some dimension or aspect of the Christian life, while the community tends to share all dimensions and aspects. Partiality, which is proper of the group, and totality, which is proper of the Christian community, are the characteristics that most clearly distinguish them.

We all know a great variety of ecclesial groups with partial aims, such as Bible study groups, prayer groups, formation groups, apostolate groups, etc. Although the communication and relationships between members of these groups may be excellent, they do not therefore form a Christian community, since in community all aspects of the Christian life and of commitment to the Reign of God are developed and shared in depth.

"Within the pluralism proper of charismatic communion, Lay Claretian groups are, generally speaking, small ecclesial communities, which can even hold all things in common, like the earliest Christian communities" (18a).

As is clear from this paragraph, the Sourcebook allows a very broad scale when it comes to the shape and degree of communion possible on the level of each local group: a scale that runs from a simple group of apostolate or spirituality all the way to a community that strives to incarnate the ideal of the Christian community as seen in the book of Acts.

It is not in keeping with the spirit of the Sourcebook for Lay Claretians to be a secondary group or a group of interests. Nor is it in line with the Sourcebook for a Lay Claretian group to remain for a long time as a group with partial objectives, such as work, formation, apostolate or spirituality. It is not completely ruled out that the members of a Lay Claretian group can belong to different Christian communities to which they bring the charismatic richness of their missionary vocation. This situation calls for peak moments of charismatic re-nourishment.

2.4.4. Communion toward outside the group (18b)

The Lay Claretian community would not be Christian if it were closed in on itself. In this way it would become more of a sect. Authentic inward communion of the group spurs it toward communion outside itself.

The Sourcebook points out some of the poles with which Lay Claretians should develop bonds of communion. The list given is only indicative.

- ! In the first place it singles out "**other groups of Lay Claretians.**" The movement as a whole would like to be a great evangelizing community, always on the march, as the very name "movement" suggests. Each Lay Claretian and Lay Claretian group must develop an awareness of belonging to this ecclesial communion and express it in meaningful signs and gestures, such as the living of the Sourcebook, the acceptance of the statutes, participation in assemblies and in events on a larger than group level, communication with their own region and with the general coordination, contribution to the fund of shared assets, the fulfillment of the quotas assigned, etc.
- ! The Movement is part of a great family raised up in the Church by Saint Anthony Mary Claret: **the Claretian Family**, as we already said in commenting on n. 2. Communion with the Claretian Family is expressed in good relationships with all its branches, in the holding of encounters, in solidarity and mutual cooperation, etc.
- ! Another very important pole of communion is the **local Church**. Only in it does our life and mission make full sense. Communion with it, and through it with the universal Church, is of vital importance for the group or community of Lay Claretians.
- ! Finally, the Sourcebook singles out communion with persons belonging to **other Christian confessions**, which, animate like us by the same Spirit and by the same eagerness to follow Jesus and carry on His mission, are bent on spreading the Kingdom of God.

Part 2

MISSION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

1. "OUR MISSION"

As we begin this reflection on "our mission" in the Church, it may prove useful to ask ourselves just what the expression "our mission" means. Clarifying this will help us to avoid confusions and save our communities from ghetto - or church - bound attitudes.

In effect, expressions like "our mission" or the mission proper of laity, priests or religious might lead one to think that each category or group or community of Christians has its own "proper mission." Thus the Church's mission results from the articulation and integration of this multiplicity of missions.

Let's say it straight out: there's only one mission -- the one which the Father entrusted to Jesus Christ and which He in turn entrusted to His followers, the Church. Speaking precisely of the laity, Vatican II reminds us that there is only one mission, that of the people of God. It states that the laity "carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world" (LG 31a). "Thus lay people, by virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon them, are at the same time a witness and living instruments of the mission of the Church herself" (LG 33b).

"If there is but one mission, then what's the sense of talking about the mission of the Lay Claretian? By this expression we refer to the way a Lay Claretian contributes to carrying out the one mission of the Church.

The mission that the Father entrusted to the Son and the Son to the Church is so great, so all-embracing, that each person and each community embody some special aspects or ways of carrying out this mission.

This mission is not something external to our person, to our being Christian. It's not a simple charge or task that has been entrusted to us as an add-on after our configuration as Christians. We were made for mission. We don't just have a mission, we are a mission, that is, **we are missionaries**. The whole Church not only has a mission, but is for mission. More

than this, it is a mission, or better put, it is a sent community. It is not for itself, it is for mission. It is ex-centric, because it is not centered in itself, but in mission. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (AG 2a).

As we said in the preceding chapter, vocation and mission are two sides of one reality, and hence correspond perfectly. Just as we said that there is but one vocation --the Christian vocation-- and that at the same time there are as many vocations as there are persons, because God's call is personal, so also we now say that there is but one mission, and at the same time there are as many ways of cooperating in this one mission as there are persons.

These distinctive ways of cooperating in the one mission are determined by the will of God (in His plan for us), by the deep tendencies and qualities that God has sown in us, and by the charisms whereby the Holy Spirit has equipped us to unfold the Father's plan.

If mission is personal, what sense does it make to speak of the proper or community mission of the Lay Claretian Movement? Is there, perhaps, a mission common to all of them?

The Lay Claretian Movement or community exists because several persons discovered that they are in tune with each other in some deep-seated tendencies, qualities and charisms. This and the paths of history brought them to join forces in order to cooperate in the same or a similar way in the mission of the Church. This is how we are to understand the common or proper mission of the Lay Claretians.

If our mission is the mission of the Church, in the realization of which we cooperate according to the qualities and charisms we have received, we should ask, first, what is the mission of the Church? Secondly, what is the special way for Lay Claretians to cooperate distinctively in this one mission?

This is how our Sourcebook --summing up the Gospel and the magisterium of the Church-- answers the first question: "The mission entrusted to the Church is to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God" (n. 19c). In a footnote it cites LG 5a, where Vatican II states that the Church receives the mission of proclaiming the Reign of Christ and of God, and of establishing it among all peoples.

Further on, the Sourcebook (n. 21) indicates that the mission of the Church is evangelization, taking into account the words of Paul VI: "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (EN 14).

We have, then, two fundamental statements that express what the Church's mission is: to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God and to evangelize. In what follows we are going to offer a brief doctrinal summary on each of these statements, pointing out the deep relation that exists between both.

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS MISSION OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH

In the summary chart that figures on the first pages of the first chapter of this work, it is said that the mission of the Lay Claretian is to announce, embody and open up pathways to the Reign of God. What does this oft-repeated expression, "Reign or Kingdom of God," mean?

Doubtless the terms king, reign and kingdom belong to the remote past, when States were politically organized as hereditary monarchies. Today the most widespread political form in the world is democracy. Monarchy, king and kingdom are realities that the current of history has swept into the past. It matters not that a few European countries has still kept their kings. They also have Roman bridges, although they are ill-built for heavy traffic.

In an age where kingdoms no longer exist, we followers of Jesus still use the phrase "Kingdom of God" to express the core of the message of Jesus and of Christian life. Aren't we a little out of touch in doing this?

We'd be seriously out of touch if we took the expression literally, as if God were, so to speak, a king in the style of Charles V. The expression "Kingdom or Reign of God" has a symbolic meaning. Perhaps a few synonyms might clarify what we mean by this image. But we are dealing with a reality that is so rich, that all synonyms are bound to fall short of expressing it. One of them might be "God's plan or project" for humankind and the world; a plan or project that is still being carried out in history.

lan or project that is still being carried out in history.

2.1. How was the "Kingdom of God" understood in Jesus' times?

The proclaiming of the Reign is the essential core of the message of Jesus, who began His preaching by saying: "The Reign of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Good News" (Mk 1:14; cf. Mt 4:17). Christ came to announce the Reign of God to all cities and towns (cf. Lk 4:43).

The expression "Reign of God" occurs more than a hundred times in the Gospels. However, it did not originate with Jesus. It comes from the Old Testament and was much used in the Judaism of Jesus' time.

Jesus' Jewish contemporaries were waiting for the coming of the Reign of God, "the Day of Yahweh," which would consist of an intervention of God in the world to radically change the situation of Israel and of other peoples. As for the manner of its coming, there were two different opinions. To both of them, Jesus' position was openly revolutionary.

- a. **Some were awaiting a lightning-like coming, by means of a cosmic catastrophe** in which God would judge the world and separate the just from the unjust, in order to begin His Reign with the just alone. Situated on this apocalyptic wave was John the Baptist, who announced that "even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees, to cut down every tree that does not bear fruit and cast it into the fire" (Mt 3:10). John had recourse to fear and to divine chastisement in order to call people to conversion.

Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, was rather in tune with John. But after His baptism He started to diverge from him and began to preach the coming of the kingdom not as a time of destruction and judgment, but as one of upbuilding and of mercy. Jesus states that "the Kingdom of God is already in your midst" (Lk 17:21). His entry into the world has been sudden and unexpected, not by means of a cataclysm, but in the very person of Jesus. Jesus does not announce a catastrophe, but glad tidings, the Good News that God loves all people, especially the physically or socially disadvantaged, and those who are deprived of liberty (cf. Lk 4:18).

Like John, Jesus issued a call to conversion; however, unlike John, He did not have recourse to fear, but rather to the love and mercy of God. Jesus really wrought a Copernican revolution, something very radical, with regard to His contemporaries' ideas on the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God.

- b. **Others were awaiting the coming of the Kingdom in two stages** - The first would begin with the coming of the Messiah announced by the prophets. He, taking over the leadership of Israel, would create a sociopolitical reign to which he would subject the Gentiles. This reign of well being would last a thousand years. Then would come the definitive reign, not in this world, but in the next. This would be entered by all the just of Israel and of those other nations which, through Israel, had come to know Yahweh and had become

just.

Jesus' own disciples, in their bickering over the first places in the Kingdom (cf. Mt 20:20-28), manifest their conviction that Jesus was going to establish this sociopolitical kingdom on earth. And Peter was surely thinking the same things when he told Jesus, "You are the Messiah" (Mk 8:29), because when Jesus began to tell him that He had to suffer and die, Peter took him aside to get that idea out of His head. Jesus rejected him as if he were Satan personified" (Mk 8:30-33).

2.2. The Kingdom that Jesus Proclaimed

Jesus, too, taught that the Kingdom had two stages, one earthly, the other beyond history (cf. Mt 25:31f.). But His vision of the earthly stage was quite different from the one held by the Jews of His time. For Jesus, it would not consist in the restoration of the Reign of David, as the Jews hoped, nor in the sway of Israel over other peoples. It would indeed consist of a new society and a new set of relationships of human beings to one another and to God.

For Jesus, the Kingdom is God's loving plan that makes all people His children, and brothers and sisters to one another, and He wants them to live as such.

The new society (the Kingdom) Jesus proclaims corresponds to the social plan that appears in the Bible at the origins of the chosen people. In the Exodus, the founding event of the People of Israel, God's plan was made manifest. Yahweh wanted a people liberated from the slavery of Egypt, an egalitarian society without kings and without those trappings of state (army, administration, temple and official priesthood) that create differences among people and exploit the "underdogs" for their maintenance.

Linked to this line, which had been broken by the monarchy of Israel, Jesus proclaimed a new society, in which all should be equal and live like brothers. The first addressees of this Good News were the poor, because they were the ones who most needed to be liberated and given equality.

The fundamental and constituent law of this society is God's love for humankind and, by the grace of God, the love that human beings have for God and their fellow humans. This is the only commandment of the new society, of the community of the Kingdom: "This is my commandment: that you love one another" (Jn 15:17).

If love and fraternal solidarity are the fundamental law of the Kingdom, then none can enter into it or its dynamism unless they are in solidarity with the rest, especially those who are victims of the non-solidarity of the powerful. Jesus shows us what the Kingdom is by way of a banquet at which everyone sits down at the same table, including "the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind" (cf. Lk 14:21).

In its historical stage, the Kingdom is manifested wherever there are new humans, that is, humans in solidarity. Wherever there are human groups characterized by fraternity, where nobody exploits anybody, but where each seeks to be the first to serve (cf. Mt 20:26). This is

God's plan. As it is increasingly carried out, the Kingdom grows on earth. "The Kingdom tends to transform human relationships and is increasingly realized in the measure that human beings learn to love one another, forgive one another and serve one another" (RM 27).

2.3. Christ and the Kingdom of God

We will underscore just three aspects in the relationship of Christ to the Kingdom:

- a. **The Kingdom constitutes Jesus' mission, and gives meaning to His Incarnation, His life and preaching, His actions, His passion, death and resurrection.** This is why He came into the world: to announce and introduce the Kingdom in history. And in this effort He lost His life. "In order to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and Himself, as well as to fashion them into a fraternal community, God determined to intervene in human history in a way both new and definitive. For he sent His Son, clothed in our flesh" (AG 3).
- b. **Jesus personifies the Kingdom** - The Kingdom is not a reality or event foreign to Him. Christ in person is the full incarnation of the Kingdom and all its values. In His person He brings to fulfillment the two dimensions of the Kingdom: living as sons and living as sisters and brothers. He incarnates God's love and option for the poor and enslaved, and is Himself the One God sent to liberate them. He is the New Man, the Man in solidarity, the Son who loves the Father without limit and enters into solidarity with the Father's plan of salvation (the Kingdom). He is the Brother who loves all people "to the end" (Jn 13:1). In the incredible solidarity of His death on the cross we know what love is (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).
- c. **Christ is the point of encounter with the Kingdom for all creation and all of us** - As Christ is the fullness of the Kingdom, so we, when we are united to Him by the adherence of faith and love, enter into the dynamics of the Kingdom, we enter into solidarity with Him and with His solidarities, that is, with the Father and with human beings, especially with the poor.

Christ has as His mission to congregate not just human beings, but all creation, in order to submit them to the sovereignty of the Father. When, by means of Him, all becomes conformable to the plan of God, the Kingdom will have reached its fullness, for "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

2.4. The two dimensions of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God has **two** absolutely inseparable dimensions: one vertical, namely

filiation and the other horizontal, namely fraternity.

- a. **The vertical line of filiation, God's love for us** - The vertical line of filiation is, on God's part, the incredible love He has for us, which has led Him to make us His children and introduce us into the intimacy of His trinitarian family. On our part, it consists of loving like sons and daughters, in the Son, loving God as Father, always seeking to do His will and cooperating in carrying out His plan, the Kingdom.
- b. **The horizontal line of fraternity, one in solidarity with Christ** - The horizontal line of fraternity is, on God's part, making us one in Christ, as brothers and sisters in solidarity with Him. On our part, it consists of living like brothers and sisters, living in solidarity (cf. Mt 23:8; 1 Cor 12-13).

These are two absolutely inseparable dimensions of our Christian being. In effect, only by living as brothers and sisters, can we live as true children of God. Those who center their life on God and forget their brothers and sisters with their problems, are deceiving themselves. They have not centered their life on God, but on an idol, because the true God is the One "who hears the cry of His enslaved people" (Ex 6:5).

It is not possible for a life to be centered on God, if it is not centered on our brothers and sisters, especially those in most need. Let us say this with the inspired Word: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 Jn 4:20). It is in solidarity with our brothers and sisters that we show that the Kingdom of God has come among us.

The encounter with God as the Father of all human beings and as liberator of the poor, that is, a life lived as God's sons and daughters, is what leads us to live as brothers and sisters. Anyone who nears God is sent, as Moses was sent, to join in solidarity with the enslaved, and accompany them in their process of liberation.

2.5. The Kingdom of God is both a gift and a task

When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom, He did not invite people to conquer it, but rather to allow themselves to be conquered by the coming Kingdom. To be sons and brothers/sisters, to live as sons and brothers/sisters (the Kingdom) is, before all else, a grace (gift), which also requires our collaboration (task) in order for it to take root and grow in us and in society. In this task, God does not leave us alone, at the mercy of our weakeners. He has given us His Spirit, who dwells in us and helps us cry out, "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6).

Our first task regarding the coming Kingdom is to receive it humbly and simply, making ourselves little, for God gives His Kingdom to the little ones (cf. Lk 12:32), to let the Kingdom overcome us, to let it destroy everything in us that belongs to the anti-Kingdom (selfishness, non-solidarity) and to let it make us into new men and women in solidarity.

Another task regarding the Kingdom is to open up pathways for it in the world, by struggling against situations of slavery, inequality, injustice, humiliating poverty, ignorance and marginalization, which deny to so many persons their dignity as children of God and as brothers and sisters, and which are opposed to the inbreaking of the Kingdom.

The power of the Kingdom, which Christ has introduced into history in order to transform it, keeps struggling to turn the world around. In effect, Jesus harshly attacked the rich, that is, those who were moved by greed for money, dominance and prestige; those who are always seeking to be the first in everything. When Jesus announced that prostitutes would enter the Kingdom ahead of the self-righteous Pharisees, he was turning the Jewish society of His time completely upside-down.

Another world turnabout was Jesus' intent to create a new society in which each would be concerned for their brothers and sisters, not money; would think of how to serve others and not of how to dominate them; would seek to be the last and not the first, to be little and not great (cf. Mt 20:25,28); would enter into solidarity with the half-dead, like the scorned Good Samaritan, and not remain selfish, like the prestigious priest and Levite who thought more of their image than of their half-dead brother (cf. Lk 10:29-37).

This effort of Jesus to turn the world upside-down is still a pending task. Unhappily, our "Western Christian" world, for the most part, continues to be moved by the same values that moved the mainstream Jewish world of two thousand years ago.

2.6. The Church and the Kingdom of God

The Church is not the Kingdom of God, but it is called to be a sign and anticipation of the Kingdom. The Church exists for the Kingdom; that is its reason for being (cf. LG 5). When the Kingdom reaches its fulfillment beyond history, this Church of ours will disappear, hopefully having fulfilled its mission.

The Church can only be a sign and servant of the Kingdom if it allows itself to be conquered by the Kingdom, if it allows its power to invade it and transform it into a community of the Kingdom, fraternal, humble and serving, incarnating the option of the Father and of Christ for the poor. Everything in it that is moved by prestige, power and wealth is a denial and anti-sign of the Kingdom. Its very structure must allow itself to be shaped by the fraternity of the Kingdom.

The Church is a servant that opens up pathways to the Kingdom of God in the world, in the measure that it proclaims the great news that we all have the favor and dignity of being children of God and brothers and sisters of each other, and in the measure that it struggles for equality, fraternity, justice, peace and respect for human rights.

Each one of the small communities that make up the great ecclesial community should also be a sign of the Kingdom, a place of solidarity within and without, especially toward those who are in greatest need of solidarity.

The relationship of each of the members of the Church with the Kingdom is the same as that of the whole ecclesial community: to receive it, to open up pathways for it in their person and their life so that they may become the "new man" in solidarity; to announce it with the joy of one who has found a great treasure which he would like to share; to open up pathways for it in society by struggling to build of world of greater justice and solidarity (cf. LG 36a; GS 39b, 57).

3. EVANGELIZATION

3.1. What is evangelization?

As the word itself indicates, evangelization is an action connected with Evangelium, the Gospel. The Greek word *euangelion* means good news. Hence, to evangelize is to proclaim news that is full of joy, hope and happiness. For those who receive it, it becomes an event that leads to a change in their lives.

And what is this good news? The same news that Jesus announced from the outset of his public life as reported in the Synoptic Gospels: "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17). Luke goes a little further in spelling out the contents of this good news: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore He has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Lk 14:18-19)

These words, taken from Trito-Isaiah, in which they were a prophecy of things to come, are said by Jesus to be a present reality: "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). That is to say, the Kingdom has arrived, and has done so in the person of Jesus. This Lukan passage makes it quite clear that evangelizing is communicating good news to the poor of this world and through them to all the rest.

In his own evangelizing activity, Jesus announces the Kingdom, but his disciples do not. In the evangelization carried out by the Apostles, there is a very significant change; little by little they cease proclaiming the Kingdom and go on to proclaim Christ, His death and resurrection (cf. Acts 2:23-24, 8:12, 10:36f.). Their proclamation and their invitation to believe in Jesus are guaranteed by the coming of the Spirit on those who accept the invitation (Acts 2:38, 8:17, 10:40; 1 Cor 15:3-7).

To what was this change due? Since the Kingdom was already present in its fullness in Jesus of Nazareth, when His disciples went throughout the world to proclaim the Gospel, they no longer announced the Kingdom yet to come; they announced the Kingdom already present, already manifested in Jesus of Nazareth, especially in His commitment to us until death and in His resurrection. Hence the core of their preaching was to announce that He is risen and is alive, and to call people together to believe in Him, to let Him come into their lives so that they, too, might receive the Good News of the Kingdom. They called people to follow Jesus in community and to carry on His liberating mission, realizing in our history today the program of action that Jesus himself had traced out and which Luke sums up in the words of Isaiah that we have just cited.

After this presentation, we can see the deep relationship that exists between evangelization and the Kingdom of God. Evangelization is nothing more than announcing the surprising and great news that the Kingdom of God has come and that its power has been

manifested in Jesus of Nazareth and that He, though persecuted and crucified, has risen and lives and, because He lives and is the presence of the Kingdom, He continues acting in the world by means of His Spirit and His followers.

Accepting this great news means letting ourselves be invaded by it, letting ourselves be evangelized, letting ourselves be converted to Christ and to the Kingdom. Moreover, it implies committing ourselves to open up in the world new pathways to the liberating power of the Kingdom.

The content of evangelization is the Kingdom of God with all its dimensions and values. Paul VI's beautiful document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, spells them out amply. In what follows we sum up its fundamental points.

To evangelize is:

! To bear witness that God has loved the world in His Son, and that for us He is not an anonymous and remote power, but that He is a Father, who has made us His sons and daughters and brothers and sisters to one another (EN 26).

! To proclaim that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all human beings (EN 27).

! "The prophetic proclamation of a hereafter, humanity's profound and definitive calling" (EN 28).

! To bear a message that affects all of life. "A message especially energetic today about liberation" (EN 29).

! "It is impossible to accept the statement `that in evangelization one can or should ignore the importance of the grave problems being discussed so much today concerning world justice, liberation, development and peace'" (EN 31).

! "The Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and disassociate herself from man's temporal problems. Nevertheless she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the Kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation. She even states that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ" (EN 34).

! Building up structures that are more human, more just, is part of evangelization. "But the Church is conscious that the best structures and the most idealized systems soon become inhuman if the inhuman inclinations of the human heart are not healed, if those who live in or rule these structures do not undergo a conversion of heart and outlook" (EN 36).

The aim of evangelization is conversion, that is, the adherence of faith and love to Jesus Christ and His cause, in order to follow Him and to keep on struggling for the cause He fought for: the Kingdom of God.

3.2. How the Church carries out its evangelizing mission (Mediations)

Neither the Church nor any of its members are mere functionaries in evangelization, because evangelization is not something foreign to its own being, but "constitutes its deepest identity." The Church proclaims the Kingdom (evangelizes) above all by receiving the Kingdom and letting itself be transformed by it. It evangelizes by being an unequivocal sign that the Kingdom has already reached it and by showing in its own communities how human beings can really live as children of God and as brothers and sisters to one another. Finally, it evangelizes by bearing witness to its undeniable solidarity with the people who are marginalized by life.

As we have just indicated, the Church evangelizes above all by its being, but also at the same time by carrying out evangelization, that is, by means of pastoral action.

Present-day pastoral theology has summed up under four great headings the forms of action or means through which the Church realizes its evangelizing mission, that is, it receives, announces, embodies and opens ways to the Kingdom of God. These four great forms of action can be summed up in the following phrases. (In parenthesis are the Greek words that usually designate them):

- ! **Speaking the Gospel (*Marturía*)**
- ! **Living the Gospel (*Koinonía*)**
- ! **Doing the Gospel (*Diakonía*)**
- ! **Celebrating the Gospel (*Leitourgía*)**

Let us see what each of them involves.

3.2.1. Speaking the Gospel. The service of the word.

The Church carries out its mission by announcing the Good News of the Kingdom, proclaiming that Christ is risen and lives, and that He calls us to follow Him and carry on His mission.

In Greek, this means of evangelization is called "marturía" or "martúrion." In its original meaning, "martyr" means witness, that is, one who testifies in a trial to what he has seen and experienced. This indicates to us that the service of the word in whatever form must spring from one's own faith-experience.

The service of the word has various levels or modes. These are the main ones:

- a) In the first place, there is "kerygma," the announcement of Christ to those who have never heard tell of Him. This is what the first disciples of Jesus did. Their announcement was by no means complicated. They simply announced the resurrection of Jesus and invited their listeners to

believe in the Risen Lord (cf. Acts 8:35, 10:36, 17:18).

b) In the second place, there is catechesis, which is a broadening of knowledge about Christ and His Gospel, and at the same time a growth in the life of faith.

c) In the third place, there is theology, which is a still greater deepening in the knowledge of Christ and His Gospel, which would logically have to lead to more solid adherence to Christ in faith and to a more radical following of Jesus.

As we noted above, the Greek term "martyria" underscores the fact that one cannot offer the service of kerygma, catechesis or theology, unless it is from a deep experience of faith. The apostles would say: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you" (1 Jn 1:3; cf. Acts 22:15; 1 Cor 15:8).

Pope Paul VI asked: "In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?" (EN 46). And later on in the same documents he questions us: "Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?" (EN 76).

This makes us seriously question our own service of the word. Catechesis, for example, is often treated as if it were an exercise in memory, as if it were on a par with history or geography.

3.2.2. Living the Gospel. Being a community of the Kingdom.

The Church evangelizes when she herself is transformed into a community of the Kingdom; when she makes real within herself the great good news that in Christ, God has made us all His children, and brothers and sisters to each other. In a self-centered and mass society like our own, characterized by ignorance of others, distrust, greed for possessions, for power and the desire to dominate and exploit others, the Church community needs to appear as a place of freedom, trust, love, service and solidarity. It has to try to really be that upside-down society that Christ wanted to create.

We evangelize when we create church communities of service (cf. Lk 22:24-27). Evangelization "is aimed at forming mature church communities in which faith liberates and realizes all its original meaning of personal adherence to Christ and to His gospel, of encounter and sacramental communion with Him, of an existence lived in charity and in service" (CL 34).

3.2.3. Doing the Gospel. Creating a more just and fraternal society.

Evangelizing is not just proclaiming the Good News, but also carrying it out. The former mediation we spoke of, namely, *Koinonía*, is also doing the Gospel, but as directed inwardly toward the Christian community. In contrast, *Diakonía* tries to do the Gospel outside the community, in the world. Above all, *diakonía* supposes a deep solidarity with those in greatest need. A solidarity which is neither paternalistic nor spent on inner feelings but is bent on practice, concrete cases of being with another person, of becoming one with others in order to accompany

them in their processes of liberation and running the same risks with them.

Diakonía is a commitment to transform realities that contradict equality and solidarity, as well as situations of marginalization and of humiliating poverty, but it is also a commitment to transform structures and systems that beget such situations.

In this manner of announcing the Gospel and spreading the Kingdom of God, there is room for all sorts of struggle and endeavor on behalf of justice, promotion, liberation and human rights. There is room, too, for commitments of a sociopolitical type, which are so proper of the laity.

3.2.4. Celebrating the Gospel. The Liturgy.

The Church also carries out its mission of evangelizing, that is, of receiving, announcing, embodying and opening up ways for the Kingdom of God, by means of its liturgical celebrations. In them, the Risen Christ, the fullness of the Kingdom, is present. It is He who acts in the sacraments and makes them liberating events, that is, makes them Good News, Gospel.

In the liturgy we celebrate the small or great advances of the Kingdom in history. Prayer and the liturgy celebrate the life and struggles of peoples and groups for liberty, dignity and justice. Ours is not a liturgy that is uprooted from reality, uncommitted. It is an existential worship born of life and returning us again to life so that in it we may continue the struggle for the resurrection of the new society.

3.3. The Lay Claretian's Place in the Church's Evangelizing Action.

We have described the four great means through which the Church carries out its evangelizing mission of announcing and opening up ways for the Kingdom of God in the world. In which of them is the evangelizing action of the Lay Claretians preferably set?

Before answering this question, let us make it clear that in these four great mediations, the Church not only carries out its mission in the world, but also expresses and carries out its own being as a community sent into the world. For this very reason, none of the four mediations is optional or of free choice. The Church, each of its communities and each of its members, must announce the Gospel, live in communion around the Risen Lord, be committed to transform the world, and celebrate the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the world in the advances that the Kingdom of God makes in it.

In principle, each Christian has to participate in the four great forms of the Church's presence in the world and has to evangelize by means of those same four great forms of evangelization. No one can say: the word is my job and I don't want to know anything about action to transform the world, or about creating communities, or about liturgical participation and animation. We all have to participate in everything, but each one, according to the charisms he has received, must provide special services in one field or another.

The Lay Claretians considered overall, that is, as a Movement, can say that:

- in virtue of the Claretian charism they are called to give preference to tasks related to the service of the word;
- and, in virtue of their lay vocation, which situates them in the thick of temporal relationships as a transforming leaven, are called to give special importance to diakonía and, concretely, to action that transforms the world.

But this doesn't stop them from participation and commitment in the other two means: community and liturgy. They must also live them with great intensity, but from the standpoint of their vocation as servants of the word and of the transformation of the world. Their most genuine contribution to liturgical celebrations, for example, is to bring live and white-hot reality to them. Celebration does not alienate them from the world, but send them out with greater vigor to pursue the task of transforming society.

In the Lay Claretian, the very service of the word has to be steeped in the reality he has in his hands and in his heart; hence his word is less doctrinal and theoretical, but is more real, concrete and practical, more efficiently transformational.

In each Lay Claretian, evangelization by the word and action to transform reality takes on different modalities, because each has different qualities, charisms and abilities that orient him toward determined services within these four great areas or mediations. Some, for example, can have extraordinary qualities for animating the community or the liturgy and should put them to work there. They should let no gift be lost. They must provide these ministries from the viewpoint of the service of the word and of transforming action, which are the fundamental charisms that situate their evangelizing action in the Church.#

(# All of this is treated more fully in A. Vidales and G. Fernández, "Evangelization by means of the word and of transforming action," Col. subsidios n. 9, pp. 4-53.)

II. COMMENTARY

The Sourcebook presents the theme of mission summed up in four points, as shown in the following outline. The first two are of a rather introductory character.

MISSION OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

1. Ecclesial thrust of the mission of the Lay Claretian (n. 19).
2. The mission of Claret and of the Claretian Family (n. 20).
3. Mission of the Lay Claretian:
 - 3.1. The two great spheres of their mission: the world and the Church (n. 21).

3.2. What they are called to do in each of these spheres:

- In the world: "Doing the Gospel" by means of:

- Christian animation of temporal realities (n. 22)
- Action to transform the world (n. 23).

- In the Church:

- promote a model of Church that lives and does the Gospel (nn. 24, 26)
- speak the Gospel by means of diverse forms of service of the word and multiplying evangelizers (n. 25).

4. Missionary bent of the Lay Claretians: fundamental attitudes that must characterize them and their evangelizing actions (n. 27).

1. Ecclesial thrust of the mission of the Lay Claretian

As far as the Lay Claretian is concerned, the key affirmation underlying the first paragraph of n. 19 is that "our mission is nothing else than the mission of the Church. The resto of the number is a sort of "summary" or theological synthesis on the mission of the Church, which could be taken for granted and not included in the Sourcebook. Yet it does not harm to recall the framework in which our mission makes sense and is developed.

The content of this theological synthesis on mission is articulated into the following three points:

1.1. How we participate in the Church's mission.

In view of the outmoded preconiliar teachings that situated the Church's mission only in the hierarchy, the Sourcebook, with the phrase "as members of the Body of Christ we participate in the mission..." (n. 19), reminds us that the laity have a mission in their own right, that is, by the very fact that they are Christians, and not by some concession from the hierarchy. We all participate in the Church's mission by the fact of being united to Christ, the first Envoy belonging to the Church, the people of God who are sent forth. "The apostolate of the laity springs from the very essence of their Christian vocation" (AA 1)." "They are assigned to the apostolate by Christ Himself" (AA 3). Likewise, through His gifts, the Holy Spirit enables and equips us to participate in the Church's mission (cf. AA 3d; CL 33; AG 2; RM 71).

1.2. Trinitarian and Christological origin of the Church's mission.

The origin of Christ's mission and that of the Church is the Father, and the goal of this mission is likewise the Father, that is, His Kingdom and His Glory. As the first paragraph of n. 19

indicates, mission comes from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Church: "We partake in the mission that the Father entrusted to the Son, who in turn entrusted it to the Church" (n. 19a). As Vatican II says, the Church "continues and unfolds the mission of Christ Himself throughout history" (AG 5).

In the second paragraph of n. 19, the Sourcebook describes the action of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Church: "The Risen Lord sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to impel and sustain the Church in its mission" (n. 19b).

It is the Holy Spirit who keeps the Church afoot on its mission and enables it to carry its mission out with creativity and efficacy. Without this action of the "First Evangelizer" (EN 75), this mission would be a inoperative mandate. "The Holy Spirit...instills into the hearts of the faithful the same mission spirit which motivated Christ Himself. Sometimes He visibly anticipates the apostles' action, just as He unceasingly accompanies and directs it in different ways" (AG 4).

This same second paragraph points out other aspects of the Spirit's action in the Church by means of His "manifold gifts," that is, by means of the charisms that are the dynamism, power and enablement that the Spirit bestows on the members of the Church. On the theme of charisms, we have already spoken at length in part one of this commentary.

As for other aspects of the action of the Holy Spirit, following LG 4, the Sourcebook indicates these three: "He guides it in truth, unifies it in communion and governs it" (n. 19b).

The aim of the charisms is to dynamize the Church, not only as a community, but as a community that is sent. Communion cannot be understood outside mission, since mission is the deepest identity of the Church (cf. EN 14; CL 32). The immediate effect of the first Pentecost was to create a community, but a community that was wholly sent, missionary. Today, too, every manifestation of the Spirit has this same effect.

The Spirit governs the Church, that is, directs it by His gifts toward its mission and toward the mission commitments that are most urgent in every time and place in history. He also governs it by bestowing charisms of authority and coordination to certain persons (the hierarchy) so that they may coordinate the charisms and service and spur the community along the ways that the Spirit wills.

Finally, He guides the Church in truth. This truth is the Father, His Word and His plan of salvation (the Kingdom); it is Christ Himself in person, because He is the Word of God made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14).

1.3. Content of the Church's mission.

Without beating around the bush, the Sourcebook states: "The mission entrusted to the Church is to announce and expand the Kingdom of God" (n. 19c). Afterwards it enumerates some very important aspects of this "announcing and expanding" of the Kingdom of God," which we have already commented on in the doctrinal framework that precedes the commentary on this part of the Sourcebook. We should note that, as the Kingdom of God is a gift, when the Sourcebook talks of spreading or building the Kingdom, it refers to opening up ways for it in ourselves and in

the world. It refers to eliminating the obstacles and resistance that the powers of evil set up to hinder its coming.

Tellingly, as a synonym for "announcing and spreading the Kingdom," the Sourcebook uses the expression "announcing salvation in Jesus Christ and bringing people to encounter Him" (n. 19c). As we said in the doctrinal framework, Christ in person makes the Kingdom present. To announce Him is to announce the Kingdom; to enter into communion with Him is to enter into the Kingdom and into the dynamics of the Kingdom. The encounter with Christ never leaves things the way they were. You either withdraw from Him or begin to follow Him, that is, to live in keeping with the values of the Kingdom and struggle to make those values a reality among people.

This final phrase of this paragraph of the Sourcebook evokes some parable whereby Jesus set about disclosing the mystery of the Kingdom: the seed that grows of itself (Mk 4:26-29), the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32) and the yeast (Mt 13:31-33). "The Church's mission is to unfold the seed of the Kingdom in the world, in order to renew humanity in keeping with the newness of the Gospel" (n. 19c).

New human beings and a new humanity, because they have been renewed, changes, turned around by the power of the Gospel, that is, by the power of the Good News of the Kingdom. Human beings and society become new in the measure that the powers of evil (non-solidarity, hatred, selfishness and injustice) are destroyed, and in the measure that the powers of good (solidarity, love and justice) grow.

This is the sublime and impossible of a Church wounded by the powers of evil. Only in the measure that she and each of us allow ourselves to be penetrated and led by the power that comes from on high (cf. Lk 24:29), the power of the Spirit, will we be able to keep taking steps toward that grand utopia that was the cause of the life and death of Jesus: the Kingdom of God.

2. The Mission of Claret and of the Claretian Family.

As we already said (p. 11), the person of Claret and his missionary spirit is the point of reference that unites us and makes us feel like a family. But underlying this attraction that Claret exerts, there is a deeper reality: the charism that we have received from the Spirit, that is, a vocation and mission that are in harmony with those that Claret received.

Number 20 of the Sourcebook picks out elements that are common to all branches of the Claretian Family and stood out exceptionally in the Apostolic Missionary, Anthony Mary Claret. Let us analyze each of the four paragraphs that make up this number 20.

2.1. The mission of Claret (n. 20a).

"The mission of Saint Anthony Mary Claret was evangelization." If we understand evangelization as the overall and all-embracing mission of the Church, this phrase means that Claret has no other mission than that of the Church. But perhaps this is not the drift of the phrase.

To make it clear, let us recall that in Claret's day and even to a few years ago, evangelization meant only a part of the Church's mission, the service of the word. Hence, this phrase means that the vocation and mission of Claret are located within the first means we spoke of above, namely, the announcement of the Good News. But within this means, the mission of Claret is more concretely specified, since it is the missionary service of the word.

The adjective "missionary," which was so substantive for Claret, sums up a series of traits that characterized his service of the word. Let us single out the following:

- It has a markedly prophetic sense of both annunciation and denunciation.
- It has a martyric thrust. Claret constantly experienced persecution and longed to suffer because of his mission (cf. Aut 457ff., 679). Like the Apostles, he felt happy when his service was sealed with the warranty of persecution.
- It presupposed a lifestyle characterized by detachment from everything that might hinder his generous and exclusive dedication to the service of the word: poverty, itinerancy, availability for what was most urgent (cf. Aut 357-371; 454,456; 221,224).
- The missionary character of his service of the word also derives from its addressees: the people (popular missions), those who had never heard the message (his endeavor to go to mission territories. Cf. Aut 112, 120) and those who were most alienated.

2.2. The mission of the Claretian Family (n. 20b).

Besides his charisma of the missionary service of the word, Claret also had another charisma and another mission: that charisma of founder and the mission of gathering others together for the service that obsessed him: evangelization by means of the word.

It is the Holy Spirit who destines some Christians to form part of the Claretian Family and destines them by giving them the same or similar charisms. But there needs to be a person to convocate and congregate those who are on the same charismatic wave length. That person was Claret. "By means of Claret, and for the service of evangelization, the Holy Spirit raised up a whole family of laypersons, priests and religious, whom Claret conceived of as an army of evangelizers under the ensign of the Heart of Mary" (n. 20b).

As is clear from the Sourcebook's footnote here, this paragraph refers to Claret's "Rules for Secular Clergy living in community." At the time, he wanted to establish a Claretian family with three branches: laity, secular priests and the Missionary Sons of the Heart of Mary. Later, other branches of the Claretian family arose or were incorporated.

Claret conceived of this family as "an army of evangelizers," that is, of servants of the word, because that was what evangelization meant at his time. (Perhaps it would be useful in later editions of the Sourcebook to change the word "evangelization" in this number to "service of the word." This would better correspond to Claret's idea.)

"Under the ensign of the Heart of Mary." Claret continues expressing himself in military terms. "Ensign" means "banner": a symbol that unites, orients and cheers on those who struggle for their homeland. For the Claretian Family, this symbol is the Heart of Mary, that is, Mary seen as a manifestation of God's kindness and mercy for sinners. The love and trust in the Heart of Mary, Mother and Refuge of sinners, is Claret's response to the preaching of many missionaries

in his day, who were heavily influenced by Jansenism, which presented God as an all-dreaded Judge and terrified people with the threat of dreadful eternal chastisements.

2.3. Core content of the Claretian mission (n. 20c).

"The communication of the total mystery of Christ through the service of the word holds the core place in the charism of the Claretian Family" (n. 20c). This vision of the service of the word ties in with the preaching of the Apostles who, as they dispersed throughout the world to fulfill the missionary mandate of Jesus, dedicated themselves to proclaiming Christ, His message, His passion, death and resurrection; to bear witness that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. Above all they proclaimed the mystery of His death and resurrection, in which the presence and liberating power of the Kingdom of God is manifested in its fullness.

The Claretian missionary service of the word is strongly Christ-centered. Christ is the Good News that must be announced to the whole world in order that human beings may "participate fully in the mystery of Christ" (AG 5).

2.4. The Leading Role of the Word (n. 20d)

"The Word plays the leading role in our family spirit" (n. 20d). This primacy was almost absolute in the life of Saint Anthony Mary Claret (cf. Aut 238, 704, etc.).

Those who recognize that they are "Claretians" are also called to this service of the word, but according to their own distinctive charism. Concretely speaking, for the Lay Claretians, this means according to their lay charism. It would be contrary to their vocation for them to provide the service of the word in a clerical style, "from above" or within the "magisterium." They must provide it "from below" and within the ordinary realities and situations of family life and of the workaday world. In this way they set in march the timely word that enlightens and guides; the word born spontaneously from an authentic, sincere and consistent Christian faith.

Also, when they offer such services as catechesis, they do so with the stamp and focus of their lay vocation, which sets them in the thick of temporal realities. This service of the word requires some basic conditions:

- In the first place, it is necessary that we allow ourselves to be impacted and transformed by the Word, that Word which "when listened to and received, evangelizes us" (n. 20d). If this is not the case, then our service of the Word will be that of a drudge who repeats "canned" messages, like those of automatic phone answering machines.

- To put it another way, the word, in order to be effective, must be backed up and accompanied by life witness: "with the warranty of witness" (n. 20d). Witness is the first form of evangelization: the most authentic and convincing word (cf. RM 42).

Only under these conditions will the word of God which we transmit be able to display all its power and to really lead others to Christ, to the Word in capital letters: "It leads them to an

encounter with the Word made flesh" (n. 20d), which is the goal of all evangelization. Here, once again, the Christ-centeredness of the missionary service of the Claretian Family stands out.

3. The Mission of the Lay Claretian

3.0. The two great spheres of the mission of the Lay Claretian.

Number 21 of the Sourcebook indicates, without going into details, the two great spheres in which the Lay Claretians are called to unfold their evangelizing action: the world and the Church community.

The laity are at once and inseparably members of the Church in the heart of the world and citizens of the world in the heart of the Church. "The lay faithful belong fully, at one and the same time, to the people of God and to civil society" (AG 21b). "The Gospel cannot be deeply imprinted on the talents, life and work of any people without the presence of the laity" (AG 21a).

The laity carry out their mission in the world, by "the Christian animation of and transforming action on temporal realities," and in the Church community, by cooperating "as laypersons toward the upbuilding of the local Church as a community of faith, hope and charity" (n. 21).

Regarding these two spheres of the mission of the laity, it is fitting for us to point out two important orientations here: that the laity's priority is their action in the world, and that the service they offer within the church community is above all that of laypersons.

As to the first point, the Document CL puts the laity on guard against the temptation to focus so markedly on ecclesial services and tasks, that in practice they abandon their specific responsibilities in the professional, social, economic, cultural and political world (cf. CL 2i).

It is always very important to keep in mind that the laity cooperate in the upbuilding and animation of the church community "as laypersons." that is, not as clergy or religious. The lay vocation affects not only their work in the world, but also their service in the church community. In their own flesh, the laity bring to the community the experience and challenges of a materialistic and selfish world whose unfeeling routine crushes the weak underfoot. They bring to the community, in a livelier way than anyone else can, the cry of the poor.

An Evocation of What Claret Did

Before going on to comment on the numbers of the Sourcebook that refer to the action of the Lay Claretian in the world, I think it is fitting to do a sort of "excursus" on a passage from the Autobiography of Saint Anthony Mary Claret that can be very illuminating for us. I refer to Chapter 24 on Claret's missionary poverty, nn. 357-371.

Claret begins by making a diagnosis of social reality in his day: a diagnosis which is still valid today. Society, he says, is corrupted by a monstrous selfishness which is manifested and moved by three "concupiscences" as they were then called:

- The lust for possessions: "the love of riches" or of "gold."
- The lust for prestige and power: "the love of honors."
- The lust for pleasure: hedonism, or "the love of sensual pleasures." (Aut 357)

For Claret, these are the real idols of society (Aut 358), which do not liberate, but rather enslave and exploit the weak. "I have seen this era as one in which selfishness has made men forget their most sacred duties to their neighbors and brothers" (Aut 358). This selfishness is the anti-kingdom, because it destroys brotherhood and the other values of the Kingdom.

In view of this diagnosis, Claret does not remain indifferent, but feels moved by a kind of prophetic indignation to "stem the torrent of corruption and cure the ills of a moribund society" (Aut 357).

Claret decides to face this problem through a radical option for poverty, by destroying the power of selfishness first of all in his own person (Aut 359 ff.).

This evocation of Claret's missionary attitude toward reality suggests to Lay Claretians how they, too, should act in the face of the reality they are called to transform.

In the first place, they have to make a critical analysis of reality in order to discover in it the stumbling blocks to God's plan (the Kingdom of God). Naturally, this analysis requires some prior enablement and the use of adequate methods.

In the second place, they have to make a diagnosis of reality from the viewpoint of the urgent promptings of the Kingdom that is struggling to change this reality. The aim of this diagnosis is to unmask the idols of our times that are destroying the plan of the true God, who wants all human beings to live as His children and as brothers and sisters to each other.

Undoubtedly, the idols of our society are in large measure the same as those that Claret denounced in his, but they are wearing new faces and costumes that are more subtle, and at the same time, more cruel.

In the third place, we must commit ourselves in the struggle against these idols. This struggle must begin, as it did for Claret, by destroying them in ourselves. It must begin with stripping away all that there is within us of corruption, of terrain we have ceded to idols. We find the response to this challenge in Gospel radicalisms, that leads us to solidarity with the victims of selfishness (Sourcebook n. 14).

The Sourcebook presents the struggle against corruption and idols as Christian animation of temporal realities (n. 22) and as action to transform the world, which entails a commitment on behalf of justice (nn. 23 and 27), human advancement and liberation (n. 23) in order to "restore man to his dignity and...his rights" (Aut 449).

Human advancement and liberation demand that we make a radical Gospel option for the

poor and needy and for solidarity with them at all costs. This is the best re-reading and embodiment of the poverty with which Claret proposed in his own day to take a stand against the "dreadful giant" of selfishness that acted through love of money, honors and sensual pleasures.

3.1. Evangelizing action of the Lay Claretian in the World.

3.1.1. The Christian animation of temporal realities.

A) How to Animate Temporal Realities

The first paragraph of n. 22 of the Sourcebook presents temporal realities as a field of action quite proper of the laity, precisely because of their lay condition and vocation which sets them fully in the midst of the world. Afterwards it lists a long series of realities that need Christian animation. The list of these realities is taken from EN n. 70.

The second paragraph tells how we can animate these realities in a Christian sense: "by living them ourselves with an evangelical thrust and by impregnating them with the spirit of Christ, so as to order them according to the righteousness of the Kingdom of God" (n. 22b).

To live temporal realities with a Christian thrust means to live them as Jesus did, within the values and demands of the Kingdom, that is, in love and solidarity, in truth and freedom. Only by living them within the values of the Kingdom will they be "ordered according to the righteousness of the Kingdom of God" (n. 22b)

In various texts, Vatican II has told us that the laity are called to "steep the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel, so that their temporal activity can openly bear witness to Christ and promote the salvation of men. Since it is proper of the lay state to live in the midst of the world and of secular transactions, the laity are called by God to burn with the spirit of Christ and to exercise their apostolate in the world as a kind of leaven" (AA 2b; cf. AA 4b; LG 31b). "The laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation" (AA 7d).

Finally, the Council exhorts the laity "to assist one another to live holier lives...so that the world is impregnated by the spirit of Christ" (LG 36b).

B) Fields or Areas of Action for the Lay Claretian

We are going to offer a brief commentary on some of the realities or fields pointed out in n. 22 of the Sourcebook.

a) The vast and complex world of politics.

In the last 25 years various documents of the magisterium of the universal Church, such as EN and CL, and of regional Churches, such as Medellín and Puebla, present the field of politics as the prime place for the laity's evangelizing commitment (EN 70).

In politics, the cause of the Kingdom in its earthly phase is to a large extent played out.

Politics can be bad or good news for the poor; it can be a burden that oppresses the more and more or a lever to lift them up, turning around situations of inequality, injustice, marginalization and humiliating poverty.

The option for the cause of Jesus implies a decision to become committed in politics in a broad sense. In this same sense, a sociopolitical option is not optional for any Christian; it is obligatory. When we speak of politics "in the broad sense," we mean all activities aimed at the common good of citizens, both those developed by political parties (partisan politics) and those developed by popular, civic and neighborhood associations and organizations, by justice and peace commissions, by permanent assemblies for human rights, by feminist and ecological organizations, etc. (non-partisan politics).

CL refers to politics in this sense when it says that "in order to animate the temporal order, the lay faithful can in no way give up participation in politics...aimed at the organized and institutional promotion of the common good" (CL n. 42b).

Likewise, the exercise of political power, to which access is generally had through political parties, is a duty for Christians who have aptitudes and a vocation for it. "Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine should not refuse to administer public affairs, since by performing this office in a worthy manner they can simultaneously advance the common good and prepare the way for the Gospel" (AA 14a; cf. GS 75a).

CL is even more explicit: "The accusations of self-serving, power worship, selfishness and corruption that are often directed against people in government, parliament, the dominant class and political parties, as well as the widespread opinion that politics is a place of necessary moral danger, do not in the least justify either absenteeism or skepticism of Christians in relation to the public order" (CL 42b).

For a political commitment to be Christian and evangelizing, it must be motivated by evangelical motives, not just social or ideological ones. Moreover, it must be inspired by the political thought of the Church. Only in this way will "political commitment be a broader form of charity."

In this field, too, we must exercise the prophetic dimension of our vocation, by denouncing abuses of power and the manifold forms of corruption, helping the people in their critical analyses of reality, in their grassroots organization and in their alternative of political participation.#

b) "The social order"

In practice, social situations and problems are not separable from politics. In effect, political action can either be the cause and accomplice of social problems or it can also be an effective means for solving them.

When we speak of "the social order" we refer above all to the just or unjust organization

and structuring of society and the manifold problems that trouble our societies, such as:

- the manifold and persistent forms of social inequality, as regards both individuals and social and ethnic groups,
- trampling on human rights,
- subhuman living conditions: hunger, malnutrition, lack of health care, infant mortality, illiteracy, etc.
- uncontrolled or ill-controlled population explosions, especially in the poorest countries, and problems of birth control at odds with Christian moral principles,
- the progressive deterioration of nature and the environment, with the grave consequences this entails for human life,
- the great problem of the marginalization of women, above all in certain societies,
- the wars that break out in all parts of the world,
- the lack of the most elementary services such as schools, housing, water, light, channels of communication, etc.
- emigration and immigration, which place great masses of people in inhuman situations.
- terrorist or institutionalized violence,
- political refugees,
- narcotraffic, drug addiction and alcoholism.

This list of problems cannot be alien to the Christian commitment of Lay Claretians, because this would mean abandoning the task of building a more fraternal society.

It is advisable that each community of Lay Claretians examine itself from time to time regarding how it is responding to these social challenges.

c) The world of economy

The area of economics is also full of situations and problems that challenge the Lay Claretian's capacity for Christian commitment:

- The ever-growing imbalance between rich and poor countries; "the broadening abyss between the areas of the so-called developed North and the developing South" (SRS 14).
- The triumphant economic neoliberalism with its unmistakable stamp of creating selfishness, financial greed, consumerism and non-solidarity.
- The unjust concentration of capital and landholdings, especially in the Third World.
- Starvation wages, especially in the underdeveloped South.
- Work stoppages and unemployment.
- The unpayable debt that is crushing so many poor countries.
- The systematic despoilment of the richness of Third World countries at the hands of the transnational companies.

Again, none of these problems are alien to the mission of the Lay Claretian.

c) Culture

The world of culture is also a challenge for lay evangelizers, whether culture is

understood in the humanist sense or in the sociological sense.

Taken in its humanist sense, the center of culture is the person, the development of whom it attempts to promote by different formative means. Thus understood, culture aims at helping people live better, grow and develop all their abilities and potential.

Understood in the sociological sense, the center of culture is the people or the group. Culture is their way of being, living, interrelating, feeling and expressing themselves (art, language, symbols, folklore, etc); their systems of belief, traditions and customs; their organization and their laws, etc. Each culture has its values and antivalues. An important task for the laity is to commit themselves to the defense of indigenous and minority cultures, to the evangelization of cultures and to the inculturation of the gospel. Also, modern occidental culture --ex-Christian in many aspects-- is full of challenges for Lay Claretians of the First World and for those of the Third World, because in the latter it is the "coming culture."

Also the great means for transmitting culture: schools, universities and the communications media, are a most important field for evangelizers. The communications media have an irresistible influence on the shaping of culture, on ways of thinking, believing, behaving, world outlook and the meaning of life. Today, these mass media are a challenging "mission land" for all Christians (cf. R< 37c).

Claret, more than a century ago when the communications media were in their infancy, intuited the power they were going to have and put an enormous effort into using them in the service of evangelization. The sparse presence of the Claretian Family in this field bespeaks a certain lack of fidelity to their Founder.

e) Work

One of the first things that Claret demanded of the laity who were joining the groups he created, was the fulfillment of their own duties, that is, work and family obligations. This is a simple, if rather undramatic, way of living the gospel values of the Kingdom --love, solidarity, the creation of a new society-- a way to which we tend either to attach little importance or live it only as something of a burden.

There are people so overwhelmed by domestic or professional tasks that they feel as if they are not doing anything by way of evangelization because they don't even devote a couple of hours weekly to teaching catechism or to other parish activities. They must convince themselves that they can do a great deal in the task of opening up ways to the Kingdom of God by their witness and their work in their own family, their profession, their neighborhood, etc. (cf. GS 34).

CL speaks admiringly of the many "men and women who, precisely in their everyday life and activities, are tireless workers in the Lord's vineyard; they are the humble and great artificers of the growth of the Kingdom of God in history" (CL 17b).

f) The Family

The family, the basic cell of society and of the Church, is the institution that can have the greatest influence on the formation of "new men and women" of solidarity and of a more fraternal society.

This is a field of evangelization that is most important not only for the family itself, but for other families and for the world: "This announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world" (LG 35; cf. EN 71). For its part, CL states that "marriage and the family constitute the first field for the social commitment of the lay faithful" (CL 40a).

The family, which is called to be a sign of the values of the Kingdom, a privileged place of fraternity, equality, liberty and solidarity, is in a deep and long-lasting crisis; it is being constantly eroded by selfishness, ease, consumerism or, in some cases, by a lack of the most elementary means of living.

This disintegration has the gravest consequences for the person, for society and for the Church. "Hence, an apostolic commitment oriented in favor of the family takes on an incomparable social value" (CL 40e).

The family is a temporal reality that needs Christian animation, beginning with living in one's own family according to gospel values, making it a clear sign of equality and fraternity within, and of solidarity towards others. Creating a family in which relations are not marked by domination but rather by fraternity, in which parents educate one another and educate their children, is indeed evangelizing -- as opposed to a family that is marked by selfishness, taking care of oneself and living for oneself alone.

3.1.2. Action aimed at Transforming the World.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMING ACTION?

While Christian animation refers to activities that are fundamentally good, transforming action, in contrast, transforming action refers to situations and realities that are contrary to God's plan and which, by that very fact, cannot be animated by the spirit of Christ, but must be eliminated or radically transformed.

Vatican II in one of its most important documents states: "Let the laity by their combined efforts remedy any institutions and conditions of the world which are customarily an inducement to sin" (LG 36c). A short time later, in 1967, Paul VI wrote, in his encyclical "Populorum Progressio": "In developing countries no less than in others, the laity should assume the renewal of the temporal order as their proper task" (PP 81).

Transforming action is in some way counterposed to the word. Although it is certain that the service of the word is also directed toward the transformation of human beings and structures, when we use the expression "transforming action" we refer not to words but to praxis, that is, to concrete deeds, works and actions aimed at transforming a reality or situation in order to adjust things to the demands of the Kingdom of God.

There is a strong connection between transforming action and the word. The efficacy of the word is shown in transforming action, since the word leads to, orients and animates transforming action. The announcement of the Gospel and of gospel living is very important, but it can never be forgotten that the gospel is not just to be said, but to be done. It's not enough just to talk about fraternity, justice, peace and liberty; we have to make them a reality by struggling against unjust systems and structures and by committing ourselves in the creation of more just and fraternal situations.

The word also contributes toward transforming the world, but it does so in another way, without directly "putting its hands into the mix" of reality. It works by illuminating and spurring us on to action.

As a first step, transforming action demands the formation of one's own critical consciousness and helping the people and oppressed groups to grow in their critical vision of reality, so that they can come to know as best they can the causes of the situations they are suffering from and can unmask the structures and systems that create such situations. Only in this way can they commit themselves to "remove not only the effects but also the causes of various ills" (AA 8e).

Christians have to take a clear and critical stand regarding sociopolitical and economic systems: regarding Marxist totalitarian systems, which make utopian promises of equality, yet negate the most noble personal prerogative of liberty; regarding neoliberal capitalist systems, which promise development and welfare for all, yet strengthen and deepen inequality and exploitation.

Nevertheless, we have to live in a society in which the great systems are embodied and have crystallized in different structures. In this morass of systems, the laity have to discern, with the help of the social thought of the Church, and opt for the lesser evil, in order to start from there in carrying out action to transform their society.

Finally, in this introduction, let us say that while any transforming action in the sphere of education, health, welfare, justice and liberation can be evangelizing, we should note that it is not automatically so. There are many non-believers who perform these same actions. Evangelization is essentially the action of a believer, carried out in the power of the Spirit and within an option for Christ and for His cause. For the different forms of transforming action to be evangelization, they have to be born of love and be gestures of love. "The new commandment of love is the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation" (GS 38a). This does not mean that the actions of non-believers on behalf of justice do not contribute to opening up ways to the Kingdom in the world.

As we will presently see, the Sourcebook points out three channels through which the laity commit themselves to transforming the world: action on behalf of human justice, human advancement and liberation.

A) Action on behalf of human justice (n. 23a).

The first paragraph of n. 23 which some 20 years ago constituted an important step forward in the Church's teaching: the fact that action on behalf of justice is really "a constitutive dimension of the Church's mission." These are the words of the Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World, held in 1971. Paul VI, in his discourse opening the following Synod in 1974, from which the document EN arose, stated that it is impossible to accept the position "that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world" (EN 31).

The Sourcebook next cites an idea from DP 827: "We urgently appeal to the laity to commit themselves to the evangelizing mission of the Church, of which the promotion of justice is an integral and indispensable part, and one that most directly relates to the activity of the laity."

Starting from these doctrinal principles, the commitment of Lay Claretians opens out in two complementary directions: "the struggle to eliminate situations of injustice and to remedy the structures that produce them" (n. 23).

This last phrase is inspired by *Lumen Gentium*, which states: "Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy any institutions and conditions of the world which are customarily an inducement to sin, so that all such things may be conformed to the norms of justice" (LG 36c).

This commitment on behalf of justice will involve denunciation and recourse to all just and effective means within our grasp. It will often imply either taking part in political, social and popular organizations and recuperative actions that they carry out, or else promoting such actions ourselves. And all of this not for political or social motives, but for the gospel motives of love for God and neighbor, "in order to build the world that God wills" (n. 23).

The following paragraph of the Sourcebook awakens us to the fact that unjust practices or even systems can creep into our own lives and into our family, working, social and even Church relationships. Hence it reminds us, in the words of a discourse of John Paul II on his first visit to Mexico, that "our commitment is not limited only to denouncing injustices, but demands above all that we be witnesses and agents of justice" (n. 23). Vatican II had already reminded us that "the demands of justice should first be satisfied, lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift" (AA 8e).

B) Human Advancement (n. 23d).

Human advancement is not understood here as a paternalistic action that negates the

leading role of its addressees and does not attack the roots of the problems and structures that underlie situations of inferiority of persons and human groups. Human advancement is understood as stimulating and accompanying efforts at self-advancement by those who are in a situation of inferiority or "on the margin of life." In the second place, and at the same time, it is oriented toward the transformation of structures that create such situations. If this were not the case, then we could not include human advancement within the scope of action to transform the world, since, rather than transforming, it would be paralyzing.

The Sourcebook invites us to join forces above and beyond religious and ideological differences in this struggle for human advancement: "As members of the People of God, we cooperate with it and with all people who are truly seeking human advancement" (n. 23d).

C) Liberation

The concept of liberation is very close to that of advancement, so long as the latter is not understood in a paternalistic sense. Perhaps liberation lays more accent on certain aspects of reality and on the way of transforming it.

Advancement refers to situations of inferiority from which people need to escape, such as the inability to read, lack of training for work, etc. Liberation sees these and other situations as chains that bind, create dependencies and enslave -- situations from which people must be freed by breaking enslaving situations. Liberation lays greater stress on the character of collective living, both on enslaving situations and on the struggle to escape from them.

Within our liberating commitment one problem that must be uppermost is that of the marginalization of women in the social, political, economic, working and even Church spheres, which in some places is truly grave.

The Sourcebook, citing the words of EN 30, says that "we cooperate in the liberation of millions of persons who are condemned to remain on the margin of life" (n. 23d).

A very important nuance of our commitment to liberation is introduced by the words "we cooperate," because it is not we who liberate, but rather the oppressed people or group. We walk alongside them in their journey of liberation. As the last lines of our Sourcebook say, "The Spirit, who dynamizes the historical process of oppressed peoples, spur us to communion with them and with their struggle for liberation" (n. 40).

3.2. In the Church. Building and animating the Church community.

The Sourcebooks say that we contribute to the upbuilding and animating the local Church mainly in these two ways: by promoting a new model of Church and by pastoral action.

It is important to note that the Sourcebook speaks of the local Church, since it is there that the universal Church is realized and it is there that the life and mission of the Lay Claretian unfolds.

3.2.1. By promoting a new model of Church.

To which model of Church does the Sourcebook refer? Evidently, to the model proposed by Vatican II, namely, "The Church, the People of God" or the "Church communion" (cf. LG 9). "The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Council" (CL 19).

This model of Church unfolds and takes shape in different ways in different local Churches. Thus, for example, in many Third-World places, this model of Church has taken concrete shape as the "Church of the poor," an expression that originated with John XXIII and might sound bad to some ears because at first sight it might suggest an attitude of exclusion. The Church-communion is an expression of deep solidarity and excludes no one; those who are not in solidarity exclude themselves. The expression "Church of the poor" indicates the social and evangelical place in which the Church is growing and from which it evangelizes everyone.#

The Sourcebook mentions some important traits of this "new model of Church":

a) Incarnated in the people.

This is not a vaguely universal model of Church, but one strongly rooted, inculturated and inserted in each time and place. In n. 27 the Sourcebook states that we live concerned with the "incarnation of the local Church" and that we commit ourselves to work together to see "that it be born and grow inculturated."

b) Community-oriented and participative.

This is a strongly community-oriented and participative model of Church in which "all the faithful can fully develop the responsibilities and demands of their own ecclesial mission" (n. 27).

We must work so that the traditionally clerical Church may open its doors to the participation and co-responsibility of the laity. The foundation for this participation and "differentiated co-responsibility" (that is, according to different charisms and ministries) lies in the sacraments and in belonging to the Church. This is what makes its members active participants in the Church.# This is an obligation that must be taken into account by all. "If we laity are demanded, and rightly so, 'to feel with the Church,' we, for our part, can expect that priests and religious make an effort to 'feel with the laity.'"#

In this model of Church, the whole people must be an active participant. A Church that is not participated, is not community-oriented.

In order that the local Church should truly be a Church-communion, it must be made up of small church communities in which the communion of life and mission is intensely lived: :As members of the local Church and of the church communities that make it up, we cooperate

co-responsibly in its growth and dynamism" (n. 20a). "We cooperate especially in the formation and development of small church communities, which express the reality of the Church as a mystery of communion" (n. 26).

Basic church communities and other forms of Christian community are the most effective and concrete way of making the Church-communion a reality (cf. CL 11) and are the best channel and place for the participation and co-responsibility of the laity (cf. EN 58; DP 239, 640-643).

As we have said, in this model of Church the laity are not passive members, but co-responsible agents; hence, "our relationships with bishops and priests are characterized by the spirit of communion, collaboration and initiative" (n. 26).

One theme that deeply concerned the 1987 Synod of Bishops was the participation and co-responsibility of women in the Church. The post-synodal document, *Christifideles laici*, attempted to offer a response to these concerns (CL 51), though many have found it insufficient. Evidently, it is a theme into which we must continue probing.

c) Secular

This new model of Church has to be secular, that is, a Church that is for the world, for opening up ways for the Kingdom of God in the world. The most specific contribution of the laity in dynamizing the church community lies along these lines. The laity are fully inserted in the world and are strongly impacted by the sometimes bloody situations that contradict the reign of God; they live with their hands smudged with the grime of daily life in struggling to transform earthly realities. Hence they are called to make the church community keenly sensitive to what is going on, especially in sectors where it is out of touch with reality regarding situations of injustice and marginalization and to push the community to respond to them. The laity can cooperate very effectively to help small church communities and the whole local Church to become "a model of Church committed to promoting justice among our peoples" (n. 24a).

Vatican II asks that priests "through continuous dialogue with the laity, should carefully search for the forms which make apostolic activity more fruitful" (AA 25b). A very important concrete place for the participation and co-responsibility of the laity in animating the church community are diocesan and parish pastoral councils (cf. CL 25,26).

3.2.2. By means of pastoral action.

Numbers 25 and 26 of the Sourcebook point out some fields of pastoral action which are a priority for Lay Claretians precisely because of their specific calling in the Church. In the first place it mentions the service of the Word, which is in some sense present in all the other pastoral actions mentioned in this part. "For us as Claretians, the service of the Word is especially relevant in all its forms, from familiar conversations to the most advanced forms of the communications media" (n. 25a).

Lay Claretians always perform this service as laypersons, that is, from their setting in the

heart of temporal realities, even in those cases where they speak from a church pulpit.

Laypersons, better than religious or priests, can bring the word of God to the alienated, who today constitute one of the strongest challenges to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Laypersons can have more contacts with the alienated and with non-believers than priests can.

In these numbers of the Sourcebook that we are commenting on, mention is made of some pastoral activities that take on a special importance for Lay Claretians:

- Youth ministry (nn. 22, 25).
- Family and marriage ministry (nn. 22, 25, 26).
- Catechizing children, adolescents and youth. Pre-sacramental catechesis (n. 25).
- The adult catechumenate as a process of deepening in the faith that leads adults to become a Christian community (n. 25).
- The communications media (nn. 22, 25).
- Promotion of the laity and formation of new evangelizers (nn. 25, 27).
- Developing the possibilities for action that lay ministries offer (n. 25).
- Creating and animating small Christian communities (nn. 20, 26).

Obviously, these services demand a very serious effort on the part of Lay Claretians in regard to their own formation and enablement. Booklet #15 of the Collection of Study Helps, "The Formation of the Lay Claretian," is a very useful formative tool.

3.3. Characteristics of the Lay Claretian Mission

This number 27 describes the missionary bent or personality of the Lay Claretian and of his or her evangelizing action. It does so by presenting a series of traits that should always and in every evangelizing commitment characterize the person of Lay Claretians and the actions whereby they realize their missionary vocation. These characteristics shape not only the action but also the very person of the Lay Claretian. Hence this number speaks of the "options in principle that inspire our ecclesial commitment and act as permanent attitudes orienting all our actions" (n. 27a).

We can group this series of attitudes according to the three dimensions of the Lay Claretian vocation: lay, Christian and Claretian.

The first two of these attitudes include important elements of the lay dimension of our vocation:

- "Full insertion in the world," which is not just a condition, but a constitutive element of the vocation, a charism, which brings power and newness to the whole task of the laity in the Church and in the world.
- "The professional competency (qualification) that qualifies our service to others." In Vatican II it was stated that the laity should "labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields" (GS 43c; cf. LG 36b).

The following three characteristics gather some very important aspects for all Christians, to which we have already referred in different parts of this commentary:

- "A commitment for the cause of the poor and action on behalf of justice"
- "Incarnation in the local Church and collaboration to make it increasingly inculturated"
- "Promoting a more community-oriented and participative model of Church."

Finally, the last two characteristics allude to something that is common to all Christians but has special relevance for Lay Claretians, because of their evangelizing vocation:

- "An effort to multiply agents of evangelization and
- "missionary evangelization that keeps us ever alert to and available for what is revealed to be most urgent and necessary in our service to the cause of the Kingdom of God."

This missionary attitude leads some Lay Claretians to commit themselves, even on a full-time basis, in mission zones and in other services that entail some very radical kinds of renunciations.

Picture of Jesus and Followers

We recommend reading the series of articles published by M. A. Calderón in the review *Seglares Claretianos*, 1990 (nn. 28-32), entitled "Compromiso político del Seglar Claretiano."

A. Quiroz Magaña, *Eclesiología en la teología de liberación*, Salamanca 1983, pp. 97 f., 149 f.

J. A. Estrada, *La Iglesia: identidad y cambio*. Ed. Cristiandad 1985, p. 142.

J. Farnleitner, *Evolución del apostolado de los laicos en los últimos 20 años y desafíos que se plantean a los laicos en 'Christifideles laici,' elementos de reflexión*. PCI 1990, p. 17.

Part 3 SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAY CLARETIAN

I. DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

1. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

1.1. Reductionist notions of spirituality

Not all of us have clear ideas on the theme of spirituality. And ideas influence living. Among the ideas of spirituality that most reduce or distort it, I am going to single out these two which, in my opinion, are the most frequent and most important: (1) the dualistic conception of spirituality and (2) the "spiritualistic" conception of spirituality.

The **dualistic conception** of spirituality is based more on Greek philosophy (Plato) than on the gospel. Nevertheless, it has had an enormous impact on Christians. In it, the body and soul are conceived of as two realities (dualism) that are not integrated into the one reality of the person and that are always in conflict with one another. This concept views the body as evil and contemptible. The spirit, in contrast, is the noblest part of the human being. The spirit is imprisoned in the body.

Within this conceptual framework, spirituality derives from the spirit and is centered on the cultivation of the spirit and of the "spiritual" virtues. A very important element in this spirituality is the struggle against the passions that arise from matter, and above all from one's body, which must be dominated. Hence the importance that bodily mortification has in this spirituality, motivated not precisely in order to help it serve others, but simply to "tame" it.

This spirituality is centered on the spirit, and not on the person. Thus it creates dichotomies or divisions in those who try to live it, and it leaves many aspects outside the influence of Christian life: all that is related to material realm, as if this did not have to be submitted to the demands of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit, but simply had to be "tamed."

The **spiritualistic conception** reduces spirituality to the "interior life" of the person, paying no heed to all the rest, from social problems, for example. It is a spirituality of evasion, of flight from the world, of lack of interest in human beings and their problems.

This spirituality is rather widespread. Our very way of speaking about spirituality often betrays us. We say, for example, that a person has an intense spiritual life or a strong spirituality, when in fact he or she is a person of much prayer, or even of "many prayers."

And this is a reductionist way of understanding spirituality, because it reduces it to intimate relationships of our spirit with God; relationships that are developed by listening to and mediating on His Word in silence, seeking His face in prayer and enjoying the intimacy of encountering Him in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. When someone is faithful to these practices and lives them intensely, we say that he or she is leading a very serious spiritual life.

To reduce spirituality merely to practices such as these is to mutilate it sadly. It can also lead to an evasive sort of spirituality and lifestyle in which "ardent religious fervor" can go hand in hand with refined pride and egoism, pettiness in human relationships, insensitivity to the grave problems of ordinary people, and a lack of Christian commitment.

It is hard indeed to keep this spiritual outlook free of the dichotomy between faith and life. It is a classic instance of those who seek the face of God in prayer, yet do not seek His face in their brothers and sisters.

This spirituality seeks to experience God in a way marginal to reality and history. Its reference to Christ is likewise marginal both to the life story of Jesus and to our own life story. It seeks the voice of the Spirit only within, and not in the thick of life. It tends to live the three key virtues in an introverted and individualistic way: (1) a faith separated from life which believes more in truths than in the One who is the Truth; (2) a passive hope alien to any effort on behalf of liberation; (3) and an individualistic and welfare-sort of charity which soothes one's own conscience but makes no commitment to change unjust structures.

1.2. Toward a Concept of Christian Spirituality

In order to set out on the right path, let us begin by saying that the word spirituality derives not from spirit, but from the Spirit, with a capital "S". Spirituality is not originally and fundamentally constituted by sentiments and expressions of our own spirit toward God. Before all else, spirituality is God's gift and action in us through the Spirit of God, whom He has generously given to us (Gal 4:6) and who acts in us.

From this perspective, **spirituality must be defined as life according to the Spirit.** This is the definition which we find in the Bible. Paul writes to the Galatians: "Walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), and a little later he adds: "Let us follow the Spirit's lead" (Gal 5:25).

What does this 'walking in the Spirit' consist of? It consists of following Jesus. Hence we can say that Christian spirituality consists of **following Jesus in the power of the Spirit and under the guidance of the Church.**¹⁸

We have already presented the theme of the following of Jesus in the first chapter of this commentary. There we dealt with it from the viewpoint of vocation, that is, as a call to carry out the plan God has for us. Here, we must deal with it from the viewpoint of spirituality, that is, as practice, as a real and concrete walking behind Jesus, guided and strengthened by the Spirit. As we already saw (table on the first pages of this work), the following of Jesus is the common thread that holds vocation, mission and spirituality together.

Christian spirituality has very much to do with the central reality of the gospel: the Kingdom of God. We can say that Christian spirituality is living the Kingdom of God both as a gift and as a task. In other words, it is living as sons in the Son and as brothers in our elder Brother, and committing ourselves, with the power of the Spirit, to make real in the world the sonship and fraternity that God has planned for it and sown in it. Our spirituality is nothing more than the praxis of "Thy Kingdom come" and of "Thy will be done."

Spirituality is not an ensemble of sentiments; it is a style of life which consists of doing the will of the Father, following Jesus and pursuing His mission with the power of the Spirit.

The first urgency of spirituality is to prepare the way for the Kingdom of God in ourselves, by breaking down the walls of our selfishness and opening the gates so that the Good News may enter and transform us, making us radical followers of Jesus and resolute pursuers of his mission in our world.

¹⁸ Segundo Galilea, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, Bogotá 1982, p. 26.

Spirituality is not, then, just a partial aspect of the lives of Christians (their moments spent in Church, in reading the Bible or at prayer) as distinct, say, from their family, working or sociopolitical commitments. Spirituality is the whole Christian life with all its aspects, lived in the Spirit and as followers of Jesus. It is a style of life or way of living one's whole life, seconding and not stifling the promptings of the Spirit (cf. 1 Thes 5:19).

Spirituality thus understood is all-embracing; it integrates the person and all the options, commitments and activities of the person, as the Sourcebook makes perfectly clear (cf. nn. 28, 29).

1.3. The two dimensions of spirituality

We cannot understand our spirituality unless we look to the model we have in Jesus, because our spirituality is nothing more than His, since we are led by His Spirit. Christ is the perfect model of Christian spirituality. Nobody else has been as open as He was to the leadings of the Spirit.

The most basic experience of Jesus, the wellspring of His way of being, living and acting, was His experience of God as Father. This God whom He experienced as Father is the God of the Kingdom, that is, the God who as all-just King has a plan for making all human beings equals and brothers. From this unique and peerless experience of Jesus flowed two fundamental attitudes that shaped His whole existence: an unbreakable fidelity to the Father and an absolute availability in serving the Kingdom in order to announce it and introduce it into the life of every human being, of every group, and society as a whole, in order to mold all humanity into one great family.

These two attitudes of Jesus, the vertical (toward God) and the horizontal (toward human beings), spring from one and the same source: love of God and love of human beings. Especially those human beings God loves the most, the addressees of the Good News of the Kingdom, **the poor**. Both attitudes are an expression of this one and indivisible love, and are hence inseparable.

Christian spirituality is centered on living the gift and the task of the Kingdom, which likewise has these same two dimensions, vertical (of filiation) and horizontal (of fraternity). Our spirituality, like that of Jesus, has the same two points of reference: God and human beings, and one basic attitude: love, which is unique yet bipolar, because it is directed at the same time toward God and the children of God, or more unequivocally, it is directed toward God in his children.

In our spirituality there are then two tendencies or dimensions: one vertical or mystical and another horizontal or political. Here we understand "politics" in its original sense of service to the "*polis*," the human community, of an effort for the common good of all its citizens, especially those who share the least in the common good.

1.4. Sources of Christian Spirituality

And what about the reading of the Word of God, the liturgy, the sacraments and prayer --which in former times constituted the whole of spirituality-- where do they fit into this doctrinal framework? These are realities that overflow any conceptual framework, but in order to ease our appetite for systematizing things, we will classify them as "sources of our spirituality," because they nourish, animate, move and guide our journey in the ways of the Spirit. But we are well aware that all of them, besides being sources, are a point of encounter with and experience of God; they are moments in our journeying according to the Spirit.

1.5. A Spirituality incarnated in reality and in history

1.5.1. Foundation of this Incarnation

Bearing in mind that spirituality is above all an initiative and impulse of the Spirit who leads us to follow Jesus in the changing circumstances of reality, our spirituality must be incarnated in reality, in that reality whose central core is made up of human beings, especially the poor, with their situations and problems that cry out for the coming of the Kingdom.

From the moment that God became man through the Incarnation, our encounter with God takes place in and through the humanity of Christ, who continues to be present in history and in each and every human being (cf. Mt 28:20; Jn 14:23).

Hence our spirituality presupposes a true turning or conversion toward human beings, and above all a radical conversion toward the poor. Whereas the former "intimist" conception of spirituality found its most favorable milieu for encountering God in the temple of the church or chapel, we would tend to say that we find our special milieu for encountering God --without neglecting the former-- in reality: in our brothers and sisters, the poor, the people, with all their economic, social, political, cultural and religious situations. It is here that we experience God and where we follow Christ and carry on His work of love, service and liberation.

Once again we have come down to the poor. Unfortunately, many associate this reference to the poor only with the Third World or Fourth World, as if it were an element of spirituality exclusive to the Third World. The centrality of the option for the poor --not for the poor thing to whom we give an occasional handout, but for the poor as a group or as a people who are organizing to seek their own liberation-- is not an option that is proper

only to the Third World. It belongs to the very essence of the following of Jesus Himself who, in his Incarnation and in his life opted for the poor, to the extent of becoming poor Himself and dying as an outcast.

Besides, there are masses of poor people in every country in the world. Undeniable statistical data inform us that there are more people going hungry in Spain than in Haiti, which is the poorest country in Latin America. Add to this the aggravating circumstance that the situation of poverty in the First World is all the more galling by the fact of living face to face with the opulence of a consumerist society. Moreover, everywhere we look we can find other types of poverty and marginalization, such as joblessness, homelessness, drug addiction, etc.

1.5.2. Experiencing God in history and in our brothers and sisters

One of the fundamental focal points of current spirituality is conversion toward our fellow human beings. This statement, if it is not rightly understood, might be taken as a lessening of the importance of God in our life. This is by no means the case. Every conversion (change of the center of gravity in our life) is a conversion to God. But where is God and what is the way to reach Him? God is, above all, in His predilect work, human persons. "Christianity is the only religion in which we encounter God in the person, especially in the weakest of them."¹⁹ Christ is also in human beings, above all and in a privileged way in the poor (cf. Mt 25:35-40). Hence, the most unequivocal conversion to God is the conversion to our brothers and sisters, especially to those who are poor (cf. 1 Jn 3:17, 4:20).

And this is not a lessening of the love and worship of God. On the contrary, it is true Christian worship, which is existential and not ritual, as we already remarked in speaking of the priesthood of the faithful. The Jews offered worship to God in the temple of Jerusalem by means of rites, incense, and animal sacrifices. Christ, with the sacrifice of his own life for others, did away with this ritualistic cult. The rites that God wants are concrete gestures of love for our brothers and sisters. For the Jews, the "glory of God" dwelt in the Holy of Holies of the temple; for Jesus and His followers, the glory of God dwells in human beings. One of the earliest church writers, Saint Irenaeus, wrote that "The glory of God is man fully alive." Glossing on this phrase, we could say: "The glory of God is for all people to live in the dignity of God's children." And this does not just mean individual human beings, but human beings as a collective group, as a people who have organized and have become the masters of their own destiny.

In the Puebla Document there is a moving description of the poverty-stricken faces of young children, young people, indigenous peoples, peasants, laborers, unemployed men, and old people, as the new face of Christ. As the document says: "In these faces we ought

¹⁹ Segundo Galilea, *El seguimiento de Cristo*, Bogota 1981, p. 26.

to recognize the suffering features of Christ the Lord, who questions and challenges us" (DP 31).

1.5.3. Reality as a key to live all the elements of Christian spirituality

Reality is a kind of slow correcting lens that helps us form a different image of God, of Christ and of our relations with Them. It determines, in large measure, the characteristics of our way of following Jesus. Thus, for example, in the context of the misery of the great masses of impoverished people in the Third World, we see God above all as the God of life, which was how He first manifested Himself to Moses (cf. Ex 3:7-14). And what leads us to see God as the God of life are precisely the signs of death that hold our people in a vice-like grip.

Those who work in these areas try to second the impulses of the "Spirit who tends toward life and peace" (Rm 8:6), so that they may be instruments of the God who hears the cry of the enslaved and whose glory is in women and men fully alive.

Likewise, within the reality of the Third World, the vision one has of Christ and of His following is different. We see Him above all in His history and from our history. We see Him as Jesus of Nazareth committed with His people and, today, with ours. From this point of view, we feel insistently invited to follow Christ who incarnated in His person, His life and death, to incredible extremes, God's option for the poor. From within these situations of enslavement, we feel called to follow Christ the Liberator. And this implies:

- ! assuming His option for the poor,
- ! His message and practice of integral liberation (cf. Lk 4:16-18),
- ! His lifestyle, which is poor and for the poor,
- ! the conflict, persecution and even death which these options entail in some parts of our planet.

The reality in which we live also gives a special look and some different characteristics to our reading of the Word, our prayer and our sacramental praxis, as we shall see below.

2. CAN THERE BE A LAY AND CLARETIAN SPIRITUALITY?

This question can have two valid answers: yes and no. In effect, we can say that there exists but one Christian spirituality, common to the whole people of God, without distinction of classes (priests, religious or laity). The essential content of this one spirituality is to follow Jesus under the guidance and in the power of the Spirit. And this is for all Christians. Thus a specialist in biblical theology writes: "It can be said that there is but one spirituality, that of the *"laós"* or people of God who have been redeemed by Christ and enriched by the Spirit. There are not manifold ways; there are only forms of living and assuming, interpreting and traveling, the one road of Jesus."²⁰

If we take this focus, we would have to conclude that neither a lay nor a Claretian spirituality exists. But if we give full weight to "different forms of living and traveling the one road of Jesus," we can speak of a diversity of spiritualities, so that we can say, in principle, that both a lay spirituality and a Claretian spirituality can exist.

It is certain that we are all equally called to follow Jesus and to live according to His Spirit. But it is also certain that in fact each person, group and class of Christians realize the following and development of life according to the Spirit in a different way, with focuses, accents and characteristics that are so diverse that it is legitimate for us to speak of different spiritualities within Christian spirituality.

As we said earlier, spirituality consists of letting oneself be led by the Spirit in following the ways that He marks out for us. The clearest, most personal and precise manifestation of the ways of the Spirit for each of us our charism, that is, the vocation and mission that He has given us. A charism is a call from God for a mission (way) and an action of the Spirit who enables, equips and gives us the strength to live this mission (spirituality as a gift). Spirituality as a task consists of following this road which God, through His Spirit, has marked out for us: vocation and mission (Sourcebook n.28).

If we take this focus, the answer to our initial question is clear: since there is a lay vocation, there is a lay spirituality. Given the fact that "in the core of the `common' lay vocation there are `different' lay vocations" (CL 56), we must also admit that there are also different lay spiritualities. And since a Claretian vocation exists, there is also a Claretian spirituality.

In contrast with the priestly vocation and the host of vocations that exist within the religious life, it is not correct to state that the laypersons is a Christian, period, as if priests and religious had something "more" (a specific vocation) and the laity didn't. The laity, too, have a specific vocation, a something "more" of their own. It would only be correct to say that a

²⁰ X. Pikaza, "*Espiritualidad laical,*" in *Revista de Espiritualidad* 43 (1984) p. 53.

layperson is a Christian and nothing more, if one said the same about priests and religious, because neither priestly ordination nor religious consecration nor layness add anything new to being Christian; they only make explicit and emphasize certain aspects of the vocation and mission of a Christian.

Vatican II, speaking of those laity who form part of associations and movements, says that "they should faithfully strive to assimilate the distinctive characteristics of the spirituality that is proper of them" (AA 4g).

Although the essential thing in all vocations is the Christian vocation, we have to be on guard against considering the elements and characteristics that shape the different vocations and spiritualities as being something accidental or added to the common trunk of Christian spirituality and different from it. Rather than being added to Christian spirituality, they are coextensive with it. They are elements of Christian spirituality itself that act as keys or spotlights whereby we live all spirituality.

Let us take an extreme set of contrasting cases to illustrate this point. Between the spirituality of a cloistered nun and that of a Christian political leader or trade unionist, there is not just a difference of nuances and accents, but rather some profound differences as regards the focus and thrust whereby they live each and every one of the fundamental axes or common elements of Christian spirituality.

"A determined spirituality always signifies a reordering of the fundamental axes of Christian life, starting out from a central insight... What establishes the difference between one spirituality and another does not lie in these axes, which are normally the same, but in the new order that is set up among them, in the way of making a synthesis of them."²¹

If we understand things this way, we can rightfully speak, as we will below, of a lay spirituality and of a Claretian spirituality, or of the lay and Claretian character of our spirituality. In this way we will not be breaking the unity of Christian spirituality, but will be spelling out and unfolding its richness and dynamism.

²¹ G. Gutiérrez, *Beber en su propio pozo*, CEP, Lima 1983, p. 135.

II. COMMENTARY

1. THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY PRESENTED IN THE SOURCEBOOK

SOURCEBOOK

28

Our spirituality is the generous response we make, under the action of the Spirit, to the concrete way of following Jesus that is expressed in the vocation and mission we have received from God.

Our spiritual life is the point where God's call and our personal response become one. This response is expressed:

- in a life style in keeping with the Beatitudes (cf nn. 13-18);
- in commitments to evangelization that are rooted in and nourished by our spiritual life and, in turn, nourish it (cf. nn. 28-40);
- in the options in principle and permanent attitudes which qualify our life and our evangelization service.

The Holy Spirit himself, who has been poured out in our hearts, is the One who impels and energizes our spiritual life.

1.1. Concepts of Spirituality

The concept of spirituality that the Sourcebook utilizes closely coincides with the one we have presented in the Doctrinal Framework. The Sourcebook's description of spirituality in n. 28 aims at assembling in an extremely concise way the essential elements, not just of Christian spirituality but of the spirituality of the Lay Claretian.

The Sourcebook bypasses the narrow and intimist way of understanding spirituality, which reduced it to prayer and sacramental practice and gave rise to evasive spiritualisms. The Sourcebook stresses the fact that spirituality includes not just the inner world of our relationships with God, but all that we are and do under the motion of the Spirit.

It presents spirituality as life according to the Spirit, in keeping with Paul's advice to the Galatians: "If we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's lead" (Gal 5:26).

The Sourcebook also presents spirituality as the following of Christ, or better still, uniting this expression with the preceding one, it presents it as following Christ under the impulse of the Spirit: "Our spirituality is the generous response we make, under the action of the Spirit, to the concrete way of following Jesus that is expressed in the vocation and mission we have received from God" (n. 28).

Despite the voluntaristic flavor of the first phrase of n. 28 (stressing what we do of our own will power), it is made clear in the phrase that follows that our spirituality comes from the Spirit, "under the action of the Spirit," and even more clear in the final paragraph of this number which, if one were to follow good logic, should have been placed after the first paragraph and not at the end of the number: "The Holy Spirit Himself, who has been poured out in our hearts, is the One who impels and energizes our spiritual life" (n. 28).

It remains clear, then, that spirituality is both a gift and a task: a gift of the Spirit and a task which we carry out with the help and power of the Spirit. We have to put our full will and effort into following the ways of the Spirit, but we know that everything does not depend on this effort. Thus we overcome any exaggerated voluntarism.

The four lines of the first paragraph try to describe the spirituality of the Lay Claretian and hence they relate it with the distinctive charism, that is to say, the vocation and mission, of the Lay Claretian. These gifts of God which make us both lay and Claretian, are powers and ways of the Spirit which lead us to live in a determined way and with determined characteristics the core of all Christian spirituality: the following of Jesus. "Our spirituality is the generous response we make, under the action of the Spirit, to the concrete way of following Jesus that is expressed in the vocation and mission we have received from God" (n. 28a).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

According to the Sourcebook, our spirituality must be all-embracing, integrating, humanizing, prophetic and liberating and, of course, lay and Claretian.

SOURCEBOOK

29

Life according to the Spirit leads us to full human development and to the perfect integration of all dimensions of our person.

In our spiritual life, all dimensions of our existence can be in perfect unity: our involvement in the world, our temporal responsibilities and tasks, our action, our prayer and our sacramental life, as inseparable expressions of the one, indivisible reality of the love we have for God and human beings.

2.1. All-embracing

As we just indicated, spirituality is not an aspect, even the most intimate one, of our life. Rather, it embraces our whole being and our whole Christian existence. "The spiritual life is the totality of a life, in the measure that it is motivated and determined by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. The more we are motivated by that Spirit in all that we do, the better we will be able to say that we have a spiritual life."²²

The Sourcebook, which aims at describing what a Lay Claretian is, articulates its description into three parts: (1) vocation, (2) mission and (3) spirituality.

In the **first part** it presents vocation as the call from God to follow Jesus with gospel radicalism. In the **second part** it describes how the Lay Claretians are to carry on the mission of Jesus, by especially accentuating certain aspects of that mission. In the **third part** it presents spirituality, not as something distinct, but as a generous response, under the action of the Spirit, to this vocation and mission. "This response that is expressed:

²² A. Nolan, *Espiritualidad de justicia y paz*, La Paz 1986, p. 9.

- ! in a life style in keeping with the Beatitudes" (nn. 12-18);
- ! in commitments to evangelization are rooted in and nourished by our spiritual life, and, in turn, nourish it (nn. 21-26);
- ! in the options in principle and permanent attitudes which qualify our life and our evangelizing service (n. 27)" (n.28b).

Hence, spirituality is all-embracing, it envelops all dimensions and aspects of Christian existence, because all of them must be lived according to the plan of God and according to the demands of the Spirit. Thus, spirituality encompasses love for the Father and a passion for His Reign, the following of Christ, docility to the Spirit, the imitation of Mary the first follower of Jesus and the one most docile to His Spirit. It also embraces the reading of God's Word, prayer and sacramental practice; it embraces the demands of the state of life we have opted for, our commitment to the animation of temporal realities, action to transform the world, our work, and the exercise of our profession. It encompasses all that we are and do, because everything must be possessed, governed and animated by the power of the Spirit in order that it may be submitted to the sovereignty of God and placed in the service of His Kingdom.

2.2. Integrating

Life according to the Spirit not only embraces all dimensions of our person and of our existence, but also integrates them in a harmonious unity (cf. AA 4). The Sourcebook proposes that we live a spirituality that integrates faith and life, and embrace all our works and mission commitments. A spirituality which does not reduce the encounter with God to prayer and the liturgy, but which integrates action and prayer as a seamless garment. The same Spirit who leads us to encounter God in prayer also leads us to encounter Him in our brothers and sisters, especially those who are in greatest need.

"Our spiritual life is the point where God's call and personal response becomes one" (n. 28b). "In our spiritual life, all dimensions of our existence can be in perfect unity. Our involvement in the world, our temporal responsibilities and tasks, our action, our prayer and our sacramental life, as inseparable expressions of the one, indivisible reality of the love we have for God and human beings" (n. 29b).

In our spiritual life there should be no room for dichotomies (such as divisions or inconsistencies), yet it often happens that we followers of Jesus are capable of doing the impossible. The unity between faith and life, between prayer and commitment, has such firm foundations that it should be almost impossible to tear them apart. In effect, the God we meet in prayer and the God we meet in life and in our neighbor, whether individually or collectively, is one and the same God. It is one and the same Spirit who raises up and energizes our prayer and our commitment. One and the same reality, too, is the love whereby

we strive to be faithful in loving God and our brothers and sisters. Only the weakness of our faith and our love can explain our ability to do that impossible thing: to separate faith from life.

2.3. Humanizing

Living according to the Spirit as followers of Jesus is also a way of humanization, of growth as persons: "Life according to the Spirit leads us to full human development and to the perfect integration of all dimensions of our person" (n. 29).

"The way of spirituality takes shape as a process of humanization. The important thing is that human beings should be, that their life should unfold, that their being should come to be fully expressed from God through Christ in the Spirit of love. It is not a matter of repressing the human, but of fulfilling it to the utmost; it is not a matter of stifling creation, but of unfolding it. Hence the demand of the spiritual life is none other than to enable the rise of authentic, integrated, unshackled persons, capable of committing themselves to others, and inwardly fulfilled in their individual, community and even cosmic aspect."²³

God has made us in His image and likeness, and has sown in us immense possibilities for growing as images of God. The Spirit, who is at work within us, helps us to develop these possibilities.

Our human growth is above all growth in the most core element of our being, in the most genuine stamp of God's image in us: **love**. Only through loving can we reach our full realization as persons. When the Spirit pours forth in us the same love with which God loves, He develops our possibilities for loving to unthinkable heights.

Life according to the Spirit is, above all, a life in love (Gal 5:22-23). Life according to the "flesh" is the denial of love, selfishness. And selfishness means immaturity, perpetual infantilism.

The Spirit leads us to full realization in keeping with God's plan for us as embodied in the vocation and mission that He himself has given us. Only along the roads that God has mapped out for us can we reach the goal of our human realization.

2.4. A prophetic and liberating spirituality that entails solidarity and conflict

We are followers of Jesus of Nazareth, "a prophet powerful in deed and word" (Lk 24:19). Precisely for this reason our spirituality has to be like His: prophetic and liberating. This

²³ L. Boff, *La fe en la periferia del mundo*. Santander 1981, p. 32.

implies, above all, solidarity with the poor, the enslaved, the physically or socially handicapped (cf. Lk 4:18). If we want to follow this way of Jesus, our spirituality will have to be marked, like His, by conflict and martyrdom.

These characteristics of our spirituality are not gathered together in any number of the Sourcebook. They are strewn throughout the text. Thus, for example, when it invites us to look at the model follower of Jesus that we have in Claret, the Sourcebook highlights various aspects of his prophetic and martyrly spirituality: "anointed by the Spirit and sent to bring glad tidings to the poor...", he was "a sign of contradiction, persecuted to death" (n. 3).

Likewise, the prophetic, liberating and martyr-like dimension of Claret's spirituality is highlighted in n. 4: "With great sensitivity to the signs of the times, he committed himself to combat social evils by practicing poverty and renouncing all power, especially the power of money and of ambition" (n. 4c). "He set his missionary service in line with the redemption, promotion and liberation of his neighbor, even at the risk of his own life" (n. 4d).

Similarly, the prophetic dimension of the Lay Claretian is underscored in n. 9, and the liberating dimension in nn. 10, 22, 23, 27 and 40. Solidarity is featured in n. 4b, and in even clearer terms in nn. 30c, 39 and 40.

SOURCEBOOK

30

Ours is lay spirituality, hence:

- the carrying out of temporal affairs in keeping with the will of God is, for us, a place of encounter with God and of identification with His plans;
- we carry out our secular tasks and struggle for the transformation of the world, in communion with Christ and invested with the power of the Spirit;
- the Eucharist, prayer and other expressions of our spirituality, are strongly shaped by the situations, problems, struggles and hopes of our people, and lead us into solidarity with them;
- our state of life, as well as the professional service we offer, also characterize our spirituality.

COMMENTARY

- 146 -

2.5. Four aspects of a Lay Spirituality

The lay character of our spirituality, alluded to in many numbers of the Sourcebook, is especially highlighted in n. 30, which points out four important aspects of this lay dimension of our spirituality.

a. Experience of God in Temporal Affairs

Following the teaching of Vatican II, it stresses that for the layperson, the most specific place for experiencing God is in the management of temporal affairs: "Ours is a lay spirituality hence, the carrying out of temporal affairs in keeping with the will of God is, for us, a place of encounter with God and of identification with His plans" (n. 30).

Temporal affairs are not a place for encountering God because we sprinkle them with prayers, but because we do them in communion with the will of the Father and in order to spread His Kingdom. They are an experience of God because they are a task of the Kingdom. This means that "**contemplation** is not realized only in the sacred space of prayer or in the sacred precincts of the Church; it also finds its place in political and social practice, bathed and nourished by a living and true faith."²⁴

The conference of Puebla reminds us: "Lay people are not to flee from temporal realities in order to seek God. They are to remain present and active amid those realities and there find the Lord. To this presence and activity they are to add the inspiration of faith and a sense of Christian charity. Through the light of faith, they are to discover the presence of the Lord in that reality" (DP 797-798).

b. Actions for world transformation

As collaborators of God and Christ, "we carry out secular tasks and struggle for the transformation of the world in communion with Christ and invested with the power of the Spirit" (n. 30b).

Action for the transformation of the world, which is so characteristic of the lay mission, is not only the result of communion with Christ (cf. Jn 15:5) or of the power of the Spirit (cf. Lk 24:29), but it forms part of our experience of God as the Creator, with whom we are associated, and of Christ as the Renewer of all things.

c. A new focus to spirituality

The lay character of our vocation gives a new focus to all the expressions of our spirituality. "The Eucharist, prayer and other expressions of our spirituality are strongly shaped by the situations, problems, struggles and hopes of our people, and lead us into solidarity with them" (n. 30c).

²⁴ L. Boff, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

The God who tells man in prayer "come!" also tells them in that same prayer "see!" The same God who calls us is the same God who pushes us to a commitment for liberation. He commands us to unite our passion for God with passion for the oppressed. Better put, it demands that the passion of God in Jesus Christ be lived in the passion of our suffering and needy brothers and sisters. Prayer enhances the optics that allow the faithful to see the sacramental presence of the Lord in the poor and in all classes of exploited people.²⁵

"Authentic Christian contemplation, which journeys through the desert, turns contemplative into prophets and militants into mystics. Christianity effects the synthesis between the politician with the mystic, the militant with the contemplative, overcoming the false antinomy between the contemplative-religious and the committed-militant."²⁶

d. Our professional status shapes our spirituality

Finally, the Sourcebook also points out that there are other elements of the lay vocation and mission that shape the spirituality of the Lay Claretian: "Our state of life, as well as the professional service we offer also characterize our spirituality" (n. 30d). This is only logical, since spirituality consists of living all that we are and all that we do following Jesus and being led by the Spirit. For this reason Vatican II states: "The lay person's religious program of life should take its special quality from his status as a married person and a family member, or as one who is unmarried or widowed, from his/her state of health, and from his/her professional and social activity" (AA 4f).

2.6. And a Claretian Spirituality

The Claretian dimension of our spirituality is present throughout the entire Sourcebook.

Like all Christians, we Claretians follow the one and only Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, and carry on his unique mission. Nevertheless, in our following of Christ certain traits stand out that are quite different from those that stand out in other charismatic families. We do not follow the Jesus who went about healing illnesses, as much as we do Jesus the missionary, who went traveled through towns and cities announcing the Good News of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 4:43).

As we have already said, the Claretian character of our spirituality is not just one more thing added to the common trunk of Christian spirituality, but is rather the key to the way we live the whole of Christian spirituality. "Through the Claretian charism, which qualifies our whole being, the Holy Spirit empowers and destines us for a special service in the Church.

²⁵ S. Galilea, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, p. 143.

²⁶ G. Gutiérrez, *Beber en su propio pozo*, p. 59.

Identified through this gift with Christ the missionary, we continue, as laypersons, the mission for which the Holy Spirit raised up Saint Anthony Mary Claret in the church" (n. 5).

This specific thrust of our charism (vocation-mission) determines the specific thrust of how we live it, that is, the specific thrust of our spirituality.

In the very first number of the Sourcebook we are told that we "live the demands of the Kingdom, and - always within the frame work of our identity - offering a service of evangelization in the Church, according to the charism and spirit of Saint Anthony Mary Claret" (n. 1). The traits of Claret's spirit are described in numbers 3 and 4. The Claretian character of our spirituality is also spelled out in the description of the characteristics of our evangelization (n. 27), which were also distinctive of the person and spirituality of Claret. The Claretian stamp is clearest in the last two. It also appears in n. 28 and in n. 35, which deals with the missionary dimension of our reference to Mary. Likewise in n. 38, dealing with the apostolic dimension of the Eucharist.

The Claretian character of our spirituality does not derive from Claret, but from Christ Himself. It is a special reference to certain aspects and dimensions of the person and work of Christ which Claret, in virtue of the charism he received, incarnated in a particularly lively way. We, too, by God's will and the gift of the Spirit, are called today to incarnate in a special way these aspects of the inexhaustible person and work of Christ. But in Claret we do indeed have an exceptional model of response to our charism, and as such, of Claretian spirituality.

3. DIMENSIONS OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

SOURCEBOOK

31

Our spiritual life, like that of Jesus, has two points of reference: God and human beings. For that reason it has two fundamental dimensions: one mystical, the other political. Both are inseparably united in their origin -love- and in their goal, God and His reign.

In the mystical dimension, thanks to the action of the Spirit in us, we take God and His reign as the only absolute of our life, and we live the following of Christ, both as the only way to the Father and as the manner in which we build up the Kingdom.

Led by the Spirit, we fulfill the political dimension of our spirituality by committing ourselves to the Christian animation of temporal realities and to action for the transformation of the world (cf nn. 22-23).

3.1. The two dimensions: mystical and political

a. Our spiritual life, two points of reference: God and human beings

The first paragraph of n. 31 presents the two dimensions of our spirituality and stresses the inseparability of both. It presents them in a christological focus, that is, from the way Christ lived them and from the perspective of our following of Jesus. "Our spiritual life, like that of Jesus, has two points of reference: God and human beings. For that reason it has two fundamental dimensions: one **mystical**, the other **political**" (n. 31a).

Both dimensions are inseparable because they have one and the same origin: love, and one and the same end: the reign and glory of God. "Both are inseparably united in their origin -love- and in their goal -- God and His reign" (31 a). The love which is at the origin of our spirituality and which unifies the two dimensions of our spirituality, is the love that God has for us (gift) and the love which He allows us to have for Him and to which we must commit ourselves in practice (task).

b. The mystical dimension

The second paragraph describes the mystical dimension in a very terse way, highlighting its central element and final goal that polarizes and gives meaning to our life: God and His Kingdom. It likewise highlights the way that leads to this end: the following of Jesus. Once again it reminds us that spirituality, in either of its dimensions (here the stress is on the mystical dimension), rather than being a task or effort of our own, is a grace and action of the Spirit. "In the mystical dimensions, thanks to the action of the Spirit in us, we make of God and of His reign the only absolute of our life, and we live the following of Christ, both as the only way to the Father and as the manner in which we build up the Kingdom" (n. 31b). In this synthesis, the three fundamental points of reference of the mystical dimension already appear: the Father, Christ and the Spirit. And each of Them is presented in His role: the Father as the terminus or final goal, Christ as the way, and the Spirit as the force that brings us to the goal.

c. The political dimension

Finally, it presents the political dimensions, also stressing the twofold dynamic of grace and task. The task in this case is made up of our mission commitments already described in the second part of this commentary: the Christian animation of temporal realities and action that transforms the world. "Led by the Spirit, we fulfill the political dimension of our spirituality by committing ourselves to the Christian animation of temporal realities and to action for the transformation of the world" (n. 31c).

3.2. The mystical dimension.

Christian spirituality is trinitarian. "Encounter with Christ, life in the Spirit, journey set toward the Father. These, it seems to us, are the dimensions of every spiritual way in keeping with the Scriptures."²⁷ Other points of reference on this way toward the Father are: Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, and the Church, the community of followers of Jesus. In the paragraphs that follow we will spell out more amply the five points of the mystical dimension of our spirituality: the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary and the Church.

²⁷ *Annales Congregationis CMFF*, 1976, p. 300.

The Father, by His free decision to make us sons in His Son and to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, is the origin of our spiritual life. And He is also its goal because, in the power of the Spirit, we strive like sons, loving Him above all things, placing all our trust in Him, joyfully accepting His will and committing ourselves without reserve to carry out His plan of salvation.

As sons, we try to imitate His perfection, His love for all and His preference for the humble and the poor. In this way we are an expression of the love with which God loves them.

3.2.1. The Father: Loving Him who first loved us

Not only our spirituality, but our very existence springs from this fact: "God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Even before the creation of the world, God thought of us with a Father's love and chose us in the Son to make us His children (cf. Eph 1:4-5). And because He went ahead in loving us, the Father has given us **faith**, which is the guiding thread that leads us to Him, and He has also given us **love**, which makes it possible for us to encounter Him. He has sent His Spirit into our hearts to be a source of new life in us. In this way, the Father is the beginning and also the end of our spiritual life, because the final goal of our spiritual way is the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:12), His reign, His absolute sovereignty over us and over all creation (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

Since the Father, in His incredible generosity, has chosen to make us His children (cf. Eph 1:5; 1 Jn 3:1), our relationship with Him must be above all filial. What He has proposed and expects of us is that we live as His children, with the love, liberty and dignity of children of God. "We strive like sons, loving Him above all things, placing all our trust in Him, joyfully accepting His will and committing ourselves without reserve to carry out His plan of salvation" (n. 32a).

It is the Holy Spirit who helps us love God as Father and to live as His children. By letting ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit we show that we are God's children. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God...The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rm 8:14, 16).

The more we experience God as Father, the more we discover that He has a commitment in history, that He is the God of the downtrodden. In this way the experience of God as Father leads us to commit ourselves like Him in history in order to build the world that God wants. A world in which we may again see clearly the footprints of the Father's love and kindness, now effaced by selfishness, hatred, cruelty and so many other signs of death that mark our world.

Thus we see how the mystical dimension of our spirituality is inseparable from the political dimension, indeed, it leads to it. In our witness of love, especially to the most needy, we reveal to others the merciful face of our Father and we return God's footprints to the world. "As sons we try to imitate His perfection, His love for all, and His preference for the humble and the poor. In this way we are an expression of the love with which God loves them" (n. 32b).

SOURCEBOOK



In baptism, the Father unites us by means of the Spirit with Christ, and makes us living members of his Body.

Called by Jesus to follow him, we wish to do so by living in a radical way the demands he requires of his followers.

From our remaining actively united to Christ depends both our progress in the way of the Lord and the effectiveness of our life and our activities.

3.2.2. Christ: Following Jesus of Nazareth.

Number 33 of the Sourcebook gathers together three fundamental and deeply articulated ideas:

- ! union with Christ as the source of our whole Christian life,
- ! the following of Jesus as the most complete and radical expression of Christian life,
- ! that union with Christ is the source that nourishes both our progress in the ways of the Spirit and in our evangelizing action.

a. Union with Christ is a gift of the Father, who freely and gratuitously chose us to be His children in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. This union with Christ is fully, though germinally, bestowed in baptism. It remains for us, with the help of His grace, to carry out the task of personalizing and unfolding this gift of communion with Christ. "In baptism, the Father unites us by means of the Spirit with Christ, and makes us living members of His Body" (n. 33a).

b. "Called by Jesus to follow Him, we wish to do so by living in a radical way the demands He requires of His followers" (n. 33b).

On this theme of following, I have already presented a brief summary in the Doctrinal Framework that precedes nn. 13-18 of the Sourcebook. Here I would only like to insist that this following is for all. If I stress this, it is because for a long time now and even today many people consider this following and gospel radicalism as something proper and exclusive of religious or of those who, while still living in the world, consecrate themselves to God by means of the three classic vows. Without going further afield, let us simply recall that up to a very few years ago, there was talk of two classes among Lay Claretians: Associates, in general, and the "evangelically committed."²⁸ The latter were those who took vows.

Today we see things otherwise. The following of Christ is no longer a sectoral matter or one limited to one class of Christians. It is for all. "In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, who obey the voice of the Father..., and follow the poor, humble and cross-bearing Christ" (LG 41).

c. "He who remains in me bears much fruit" (Jn 15:5) - Citing this Gospel passage in a footnote, the Sourcebook reaffirms that union with Christ is the source both of our following of Jesus and of the effectiveness of our evangelizing action (carrying on the mission of Jesus).

"From our remaining actively united to Christ depends both our progress in the way of the Lord and the effectiveness of our life and our activities.(33c).

²⁸ X. Pikaza, art. cit., p. 57.



With joy and docility we live our communion with the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to his disciples and whom he has sent into our hearts specially in baptism and confirmation.

The Spirit spurs us on in our progressive conformity with Christ and our following of Jesus; He gives life to our prayer and to our liturgical and sacramental practice; He sustains us in the carrying out of our mission and evangelizes others through us.

3.2.3. The Holy Spirit: the power that guides and sustains us

N. 34 of the Sourcebook refers to our communion with the Holy Spirit and to the role which the Spirit plays in our spiritual life and in our missionary commitment.

Communion with the Spirit: "With joy and docility we live our communion with the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to His disciples and whom he has sent into our hearts especially in baptism and confirmation" (n. 34a).

The phrase "with joy we live," rather than a simple statement, is a programmatic affirmation that invites us to be aware of the Spirit's presence in our life and to develop our communion and our relationships with Him.

The role of the Spirit in our life and mission: "The Spirit spurs us on in our progressive conformity with Christ and our following of Jesus; He gives life to our prayer and to our liturgical and sacramental practice; He sustains us in the carrying out of our mission and evangelizes others through us" (n. 34b).

As indicated in the phrase of the Sourcebook we have just cited, the Spirit animates not only the mystical dimension of our spirituality, but also our mission commitments. Here too we see that the mystical dimension and the political dimension of our spirituality are inseparable.

But returning to the mystical dimension, let us recall that the Holy Spirit is the soul of the sacraments. Without His presence, liturgical actions would be reduced to empty rites and inoperative words. Thanks to the Spirit, the sacraments effect what they symbolize. "The whole liturgy is animated by the praise of the Father through the Son in the Spirit: it is a

grand doxology. In the Western Church and in the Eastern Church, the efficacy of the sacraments, and even the conversion of the eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ, are attributed to the Holy Spirit."²⁹

Nor is prayer possible without the Spirit's action in the believer. The Spirit "dwells within our hearts in such a way that prayer and the movements which the Spirit awakens in us are done conjointly and almost undiscernibly by Him and us." "The Spirit prays in us. He is so close to us, is given in such a way in our hearts, that one could attribute to Him as well as to us the cry of `Abba, Father!' (Gal 4:6)."³⁰

SOURCEBOOK

35

Within the overall mystery of Christ, we live the maternal mystery of Mary always from a missionary perspective.

With childlike love we contemplate her as model follower of Jesus and collaborator in His mission. So for us, as for Claret, her presence in our lives stamps our apostolic living: she forms us for mission, sends us, and, with her maternal presence, makes our evangelizing efforts fruitful.

For this reason, we entrust ourselves to her and consecrate ourselves in a special way to her Heart.

3.2.4. Mary: Imitating the First Follower of Jesus

The Sourcebook places Mary in her proper setting: within the saving plan of God and within the mystery of Christ. As much as we love her, we cannot make her out to be something apart, for she would thus lose her true meaning. And often enough certain forms of popular religiosity deform the role and meaning of Mary by making her a kind of absolute substituting for God.

We must see Mary as the first disciple or follower of Jesus. And indeed, she embodies in an exceptional degree the two fundamental attitudes of the follower of Jesus: unbreakable

²⁹ Yves Congar, "*Pneumatología dogmática*, in *Iniciación a la práctica de la teología*, II, p. 471.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

fidelity to the plans of God and total availability for the service of our brothers and sisters. "With childlike love we contemplate her as model follower of Jesus and collaborator in His mission" (n. 35b).

Mary is the faithful servant of God, as she herself defines herself (Lk 1:38), and the disciple who best receives and puts into practice the word which her Son proclaims (cf. Lk 11:28). The unique element that brings Mary into the salvific circle of her Son is her condition as a disciple, that is, the fact that she has listened to and faithfully kept the word of God fulfilling the will of the Father.

She is also the mother of the Church, that is, of the community of disciples, which is always a missionary community. "So for us, as for Claret, her presence in our lives stamps our apostolic living: she forms us for mission, sends us, and, by her maternal presence, makes our evangelizing efforts fruitful" (n. 35b).

At first sight, these statements might seem to exaggerate Mary's role in the life and activity of evangelizers, attributing to her actions that better correspond to the Holy Spirit. But as we said at the beginning of this subdivision, Mary must always be situated within the mystery of Christ, which is also a mystery of the Spirit. Thus situated, what these statements, which are so genuinely Claretian, mean, is that Mary is associated in the action of the Son and of the Spirit, who send us and who energizes and make effective our commitment to evangelization. "We can affirm of Mary everything which the language of faith has said of her and which has been kept in the patrimony of the Church."³¹

"For this reason we entrust ourselves to her and consecrate ourselves in a special way to her Heart" (n. 35b). This phrase sums up in good measure the meaning of our reference to Mary, which is above all of a missionary character. "For this reason we entrust ourselves," namely, for mission. In the second place, the fact that we consecrate ourselves precisely to her Heart, stresses the fact that we desire to live, as she did, the values of the Kingdom, which are love, solidarity, mercy, compassion and the gratuitousness that seeks nothing in return. "Mary is the example of that maternal love which must animate all those who, in the Church's apostolic mission, cooperate toward the regeneration of humankind" (RM 92).

As Vatican II states: "The perfect model of this apostolic spirituality is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles. While leading on earth a life common to all people, one filled with family concerns and labors, she was always intimately united with her Son and cooperated in the work of the Savior in a manner altogether special" (AA 41).

Today's vision of Christ lays great stress on His historical character. And we may say the same regarding Mary: we must see her in our history and from within our history. This focus

³¹ A. Müller, *Reflexiones teológicas sobre María, Madre de Jesús*, Madrid 1985, pp. 69-70.

does not appear in the writings of Saint Anthony Mary Claret or in the brief remarks of the Sourcebook.

In this historical and demythologizing perspective, Mary is presented to us with full realism, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us in the phrase just cited, as a simple woman of the people, doubly marginalized: by being a member of the ordinary people and by being a woman, since in the Jewish culture of that time, woman was regarded as little more than a servant. She, in the version offered us by Luke 1:49-55 (the Magnificat), takes up the cry of the marginalized and becomes the spokesperson for the poor before God and in history. This is a very important focus which should be highlighted in our Marian spirituality.

In Mary, contemplated in her history and from our history, we should see all of the oppressed and undervalued women of our time. This contemplation leads us to support their processes of liberation. In this aspect of spirituality, too, the mystical dimension (contemplation) necessarily leads us to the political dimension (a commitment to transform the situation of women).

3.2.5. The Church: Following Jesus in Community

Jesus assured us that after His death He would continue to be present and acting in the community of His followers (cf. Mt 18:19-20). After His resurrection, He is present and acting in the Church by means of the Spirit (cf. Mt 28:18-20). "Life according to the Spirit has a source of nourishment and experience to which the very Spirit of Jesus has been indissolubly and effectively united. This source is the Church."³² The Church, which is the universal sacrament of salvation, offers us the indispensable fountains of Christian spirituality: the Word, the sacraments and fraternal life.

The Church also has the role of guiding us in our spiritual life in order to free us of all deceptive subjectivism and to help us live a life according to the Spirit which is objectively in accord with Jesus' gospel and way of life.

Christian spirituality, like faith which is its root, is essentially community oriented. Jesus Himself, from the outset of His missionary ministry, wanted to share His experience of God with the community of disciples He chose and formed.

Spirituality "is the way through which the Spirit leads throughout history the 'new messianic people,' that is, the Church. This passage through history will be collective because it is carried out by a whole community, and it will also be all-embracing, because no aspect of human existence remains outside the process."³³

³² S. Galilea, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, p. 66.

³³ G. Gutiérrez, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

The ecclesial and community dimension of Christian spirituality is expressed and carried out especially in small communities of believers in which one can really celebrate and share faith, fraternal love and Christian commitment. The small community is the environment in which the two dimensions of spirituality --mystical and political-- are carried out and strengthened. In community we encourage and mutually strengthen one another in the struggle to spread the Kingdom of God.

This is why Lay Claretian groups tend to organize themselves as small Christian communities (n. 17). And they are not content with just being a community by themselves, but are committed to the creation of new community core-groups: "we cooperate especially in the formation and development of small ecclesial communities" (n. 26).

In a society like ours, characterized by lack of solidarity of a few with regard to the impoverished masses, Lay Claretian communities must be a living witness of that "civilization of love" which, according to John Paul II, is the principal objective of the New Evangelization.

Against the selfishness that constitutes the soul of modern culture, where people are led by the lust for money, power and pleasure, Lay Claretian communities must proclaim by their own lives the eternal evangelical values of gratuitousness and solidarity, both inside the community and outside it.

In this way our communities, by their life and commitment to the transformation of humankind and of society, will *be* gospel, that is, a proclamation of the Good News that the Kingdom of God is already acting in us and that it aims at transforming the world.

3.3. The Political Dimension

In its third part, entitled "Spirituality," the Sourcebook devotes four numbers to the mystical dimension of our spirituality, but not a single one to the political dimension, because it presented this dimension in speaking of the Christian animation of temporal realities and of action to transform the world (nn. 22-23). The final number of the Sourcebook also refers to the political dimension of our spirituality in presenting the poor and communion with their struggles as "a sacrament of the presence of God and an unequivocal place for encounter with Him" (n. 40).

We do not experience God only in prayer and the sacraments, but also in our brothers and sisters, in the history of peoples and in the blood-drenched reality in which many of them live. God is present in everything and is trying to submit everything to His sovereignty. He wants to renew history and the world, and expects us to become committed in this task in communion with Him and moved by His Spirit. As we have just indicated, we carry out this commitment

in two ways: by means of the Christian animation of temporal realities and by means of action to transform the world.

3.3.1. The Christian animation of temporal realities

In this task, the laity are irreplaceable: "The effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which a person lives, is so much the duty of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others" (AA 13).

We animate the temporal realities in a Christian way and sanctify the world "by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity" (LG 31d) and by a life, both individual and social, that is "permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes" (GS 72). The pontifical document that sums up the deliberations of the Synod of Bishops on the laity affirms that "the vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit be expressed particularly in their insertion in temporal realities and in their participation in earthly activities" (CL 17a).

We animate temporal realities and tasks by the coherence between our life and our faith, thus overcoming what Vatican II called "one of the greatest errors of our time" (GS 43a); by giving "an example of a sense of responsibility and of service to the common good" (GS 75b), of "professional skill, family and civic spirit, and all the virtues relating to social behavior, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, kindness and courage, without which there can be no true Christian life" (AA 4h).

3.3.2. Action to Transform the World

In the light of faith "we learn to experience God in His presences (human and evangelical values that are ever-present in history), but also in His absences (hatred, sin, selfishness, corruption), since the negative and inhuman things in reality lead us to God out of a sense of absence and nostalgia. Evil is the experience of God in His absence."³⁴

The presence of evil in the form of injustice, of exploiting and of debasing poverty challenges the conscience of Christians and calls them to a serious commitment to justice, in order to build up the Kingdom of God.

The option for the cause of the poor leads believers to a sociopolitical commitment, because this cause is bound up in large measure with political, economic and social transactions.

³⁴ S. Galilea, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, p. 137.

If sociopolitical commitment is to be an effective love for the oppressed and not just verbiage, it demands that Christians should support concrete programs and become involved in them; it demands that they join organizations that defend the cause of the poor. All of this is a true commitment to spreading the Kingdom.

As Pope Paul VI so energetically put it: "We appeal in the first place to all our sons. In developing countries no less than in others, the laity should undertake as their proper task the renewal of the temporal order" (PP 81).

Pledging oneself unreservedly to commitments for liberation is the way of a new model of holiness: **political holiness**. "Christian tradition is well acquainted with the ascetical saint, the master of his passions and faithful observer of the laws of God and of the Church. But political saints and militant saints are almost unknown. In the process of liberation the situation arose for a new type of holiness: besides struggling against one's own passions (a permanent task), there is a struggle against the mechanisms that exploit and destroy community."³⁵

Political holiness, which is based on the practice of Christian love with a social dimension, is a model of holiness that still arouses polemics because of the absence of a strong social tradition on this point. The bishops who participated in the Synod on the laity, held in 1987, wrote in their final message: "The Spirit leads us to discover more clearly that holiness today is not possible without a commitment to justice, without a solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. The model of holiness of the lay faithful has to incorporate the social dimension in transforming the world according to the plan of God" (Final Message, n.4).

"In today's world, when we have become aware of the needy person not only along the lines of isolated individuals, but of social masses, there has appeared a new dimension in brotherly love: the sociopolitical dimension. Means for loving the individual are become evermore limited, and tend to leave things the way they are. Now it is necessary, for an effective charity, to work for the transformation of oppressive systems by going to work on economic, political, national and international institutions."³⁶

Structural sins, which creates and maintains grave situations of injustice, can only be effectively destroyed by political action, which, as Pius XI said, "is the most extended form of charity.

³⁵ L. Boff, *Vivir en el Espíritu según el Espíritu*. Bogotá 1985, p. 161.

³⁶ C. Maccise, *La espiritualidad de la nueva evangelización*, p. 53.

4. SOURCES OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

SOURCEBOOK



Our spiritual life is nourished, expressed and developed by the Word of God, liturgical praise, prayer and the sacraments, above all by the Eucharist and the sacrament of brotherhood and sisterhood.

< Keys to Understanding this section of the Sourcebook >

Keys to the best possible understanding of the sections that follow on the Sources of our Spirituality:

a. The Word of God

! The Bible, the Word of God in the words of men, is the reflection of a whole people, under the guidance of God, regarding God's action in history so that human beings might become the image of God through solidarity (- OT); by living it as Jesus did, by changing, through the action of the Trinity, the human person's greed-driven interior, so that a "new man" might appear, projecting oneself toward others by committing oneself as Jesus did in His passion and death, so as to achieve the resurrection (- NT).

! Through this vast range of content and all its implications, the Bible becomes an inexhaustible font of spirituality, above all when it is interpreted from the group that inspired it: an oppressed people who were in need of living their own liberty and self-realization, so as to keep attaining, through the solidarity of all their brothers and sisters, their inner conformity with the Son of the Father, and their outer dignity of being fully realized beings.

! The great teaching to which the Bible comes is the truth that Man is involved in the trinitarian life of God Himself: he should come to occupy, by transformation and mission, the post and very mission of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, namely, to be the savior or liberator of his brothers and sisters. To become fully conscious of this reality, to undertake it and live it on the deep levels of consciousness, is to pray.

b. Prayer

! For this reason, prayer touches the deepest reality of our own being: our very reason for being, the deepest motive of our own existence, the why of our presence in this world, which is to become another Jesus. A true prayer refers to this reality which touches not only our own being, but involves the whole Trinity in the transformation of our being. Seen within this vision, praying is opening and entering into times and spaces of deep self-awareness which allow us to become evermore aware of our reality and of our mission.

! Without wishing to deprive prayers of their pedagogical, disciplinary and introductory value, they should not be confused with true prayer. They profit and transform us in the measure that they open the way to a self-awareness of who we are, and offer us a place of inner quiet which allows us to achieve and ever-deeper self-awareness of being Christian. Otherwise prayers become routine, tiring and demotivating, if not false tools that seek to manipulate God and want Him to do in us, with us and for us things that are not proper of His Godhood.

! It is proper of the Godhead to create Man from within, causing him to live the very life of the Trinity, by being transformed in Jesus who hands Himself over and rises. This is exactly what is lived in the sacraments: God's transforming action on our inner being, which, since it is given only out of love or gratuitously, is called grace.

! But this grace or inner transformation is not given to us only for ourselves. This would mean that we could take hold of God only for our own advantage. The Trinity makes us like Jesus, to give ourselves for others as Jesus did, and thus transforms the world.

c. The Sacraments

! This explains why there are seven sacraments and why there could be more. The simple fact is that up till now, the hierarchical Church has deemed that the seven existing sacraments fundamentally cover the different stages of life in which one can and should behave like Jesus, in handing oneself over for others.

! A sacrament occurs or happens in the very moment when a person lives its grace, receiving it or giving it through the commitment one makes toward others or which others make toward him. Hence, the sacrament only occurs in persons and through persons, which are mediators like Jesus. The sacrament does not occur in things or through things. In sacramental liturgical acts, through signs and things, we celebrate the sacrament occurring in persons.

d. God revealed through our sisters and brothers

! Vatican II clarified all of this for us when it told us that the Church is the universal sacrament of the Trinity, just as Jesus, through the action of the Spirit in Him, is the sacrament of the Father. This means that every Christian, since the Church is made up of persons, is a

sacrament of the Trinity. Each man or woman, through the commitment of their lives for others, makes God occur or happen in themselves and in others. Every man or woman, every brother or sister, either by self-giving or by being the object of self-giving, reveals or discloses to us the happening of God.

The Sourcebook singles out as sources of our spirituality the Word of God, the sacraments, prayer, and our brothers and sisters, especially the poor. All of these are a place of encounter with and experience of God, and are hence sources that nourish life according to the Spirit.

SOURCEBOOK



The Word of God is the primary source of our spirituality. It discloses God's saving plan to us, and fortifies and encourages us in building up the Kingdom. Accepted with docility, it demands that we constantly change our lives in order to fulfill the Father's will and follow Jesus Christ.

4.1. The Word of God

The Word of God is the primary source of our spirituality. It awakens faith (cf. Rm 10:14), without which the experience of God is impossible.

The Word of God's revelation to man is not exhausted in the Bible. God speaks and reveals Himself in creation, in the life and history of Israel and of other peoples. The God of Exodus keeps intervening and manifesting Himself as liberator even today in the situations of slavery and in the exodus of the many oppressed peoples and groups who are in search of liberation.

The Bible, the written Word of God, was born of the interventions of God in the history of a people. For this written Word to really be God's Word for us today, we have to read it in the context of reality, especially in the context of the social level from which the cry of the poor reaches us.

The history of liberation which we call the Bible illumines the manifold pathways and exoduses that are occurring today in the world.

If we approach the Bible from an option for the poor, we will be capable of reading it not as past history but as a mirror of what is going on today in the life of our peoples. Reading the

Bible in the context of reality produces a sort of mutual illumination which helps us to discover God and His plans more clearly, both in the Bible and in reality.

The true follower of Jesus is the one who listens to the word and puts it into practice: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28). The Word of God in the Bible, when it is read in the light of reality, does not grow old but is ever present, it becomes a challenge that can radically change our life. The change that the Word produces in us depends, in great measure, on the reception we give it, as the gospel parable of the sower shows us (cf. Mt 13:1-23).

The Gospel must occupy a central place in our reading of the Bible. "The Gospels are the Word of God in the richest sense, since they enclose the words and attitudes of God in person... More than this, their proclamation or reading are a true sacrament of the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in us. To read the Gospels with the attitude of a disciple is to encounter Jesus. Together with the Eucharist, this constitutes the most intense experience of Jesus in Christian life."³⁷

It is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to understand the Word. "He unceasingly restores to the Word of Jesus its newness and its overwhelming force. He creates a new heart in us to understand it, meditate on it and internalize it. He helps us uncover its unfathomable riches, heretofore unknown by us."³⁸ Thus the promise of Jesus is fulfilled: "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). Without the action of the Spirit, the gospel would be a dead letter for us.

The Sourcebook highlights the importance that the Word of God has for the Lay Claretian. "The Word plays a leading role in our family spirit. Listened to and received, it evangelizes us; proclaimed to others - by all means possible, in all forms, and bolstered by the guarantee of our own life witness - it leads them to an encounter with the Word made flesh" (n. 20).

If we want the Word of God to really be a source of spirituality, we must open up channels for it, devote time to it and pay the greatest possible attention to it. The place where the Word fully receives its liveliness, its power and its actuality, is in liturgical celebrations or in its being read in the midst of the small ecclesial community to which we belong. Where even a few are gathered together in His name, Jesus is there in the midst of them proclaiming His Word (cf. Mt 18:20).

³⁷ Segundo Galilea, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, pp. 74-75.

³⁸ A. Fermet, *El Espíritu Santo en nuestra vida*, Santander 1984, p. 78.

As Claretians, we must awaken within us that love and passion for the Word of God that stand out so prominently in Saint Anthony Mary Claret.³⁹ The greatest manifestation of the Word of God is not in the Bible, but in Christ, the Word made flesh. Our spirituality is nourished above all in the loving contemplation of Jesus. Besides, we read the Word of God made history (the Bible), from the standpoint of the Word of God incarnate (Christ).

SOURCEBOOK



The sacraments are a privileged place of encounter with God in the risen Lord, and they are therefore irreplaceable sources of our spirituality.

In Baptism we receive new life in Christ, are unified to Him and to the community of the faithful, and begin our walk as followers of Jesus. Included in this same baptismal journey is Confirmation, in which the Spirit strengthens us to continue Christ's mission, to confess Him and bear witness to Him. Our encounter with the Lord in the sacrament of Penance, besides reconciling us with God and with the Church, activates within us the baptismal process of death and resurrection.

In the Eucharist we unite ourselves to the Lord in His paschal mystery, so that His sovereignty may destroy in us the power of the "flesh" and may strengthen the new life that began in our baptism. The Eucharist leads us to identify with the patient Christ, the Victim of his struggle to announce and spread the reign of God. It creates and nourishes fraternal communion.

This sacrament has for us, as it had for Claret, a markedly apostolic meaning, since it nourishes in us that charity which urges us on to evangelization and makes every Claretian a person "who sets fire wherever he passes."

Those of us who have received the Sacrament of Matrimony, by loving one another and experiencing the sacramental presence of Christ in our love, are united more closely to the Lord each

³⁹ SAMC, *Autobiography*, nn. 113-120, 132, 637, 645, etc.

day and help one another along the road of holiness and the apostolate.

4.2. The Sacraments

The Church is the original and over-arching sacrament of the presence and action of Christ. He has chose to remain present among us in the community of the Church. This overall sacramentality of the Church is expressed through the different sacraments. In each of them the Spirit is present, actualizing the presence of Christ in His paschal mystery. Without the Spirit, as we have already said, the sacraments would be rituals devoid of content. Thanks to this action of the Spirit, the sacraments are encounters with Christ, peak experience of faith and love that transform and liberate us. The sacraments kill life according to the flesh in us and strengthen life according to the Spirit.

We must live the sacraments as liberating events. In the liturgy we celebrate the life and struggles aimed at preparing the ways of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, our liturgical celebrations are all too often divorced from reality, ritualistic and merely functional. In them we do not share our faith, our life and our Christian commitment, and hence we do not come forth from them strengthened and sent to spread the Kingdom with greater daring. This ritualistic way of doing the liturgy does not befit the Christian priesthood, which is above all existential.

The Sourcebook presents the sacraments as sources of our spirituality and mentions all of them except Orders and the Anointing of the Sick.

(1) Baptism

The reference to **Baptism** in the Sourcebook is ample and rich. "Our baptismal consecration conforms us with Christ, makes us members of His body and sharers in His being and His priestly, prophetic and kingly roles. In virtue of this consecration and of the anointing of the Spirit which we receive in Confirmation, we become a new humanity through which Christ continues His mission in the world today" (n. 7).

"In Baptism, which makes the Father's plan explicit and puts it into effect, we have truly become God's children and sharers in the divine nature; we have put on Christ and have been united with Him to form one Body; we have received the Holy Spirit, who seals and bears witness to our status as sons, dwells in us, makes us temples of God and enriches us with His gifts" (n. 12).

Baptism, which is a lifelong task, lays the bases for our union with Christ and our walking as His followers. With Baptism begins the new life, which is life according to the Spirit

(cf. Rm 6:8). "In Baptism we receive new life in Christ, are united to him and to the community of the faithful, and we begin our walk as followers of Jesus" (n. 38b).

(2) Eucharist

The Eucharist is the principal source of our spirituality, because it is the most real and most profound encounter with Christ. In the Eucharist we commune with Christ himself; we share His death and resurrection which change our life, unleashing in it a process of death to living for ourselves and of resurrection to a new life and existence like that of Christ's in love for others.

The Eucharist creates and energizes the community. Our communities, like the first Christian community, are joined together and grow around the Risen Lord present in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist commits us to struggle for the spread of the Kingdom of God. In it we consecrate to God the temporal realities out of which the web of our life is woven (cf. n.8). It is the source of love and fortitude for following Christ and carrying on His mission. In it, "we communicate in and are nourished by that love for God and men which is the soul of every apostolate" (LG 33b).

In the Eucharist we are united with the Lord in His paschal mystery, so that His sovereignty may destroy the power of the "flesh" in us and strengthen the new life begun in Baptism. The Eucharist creates and nourishes fraternal communion. "This sacrament has for us, as it had for Claret, a markedly apostolic meaning, since it nourishes in us that charity which urges us on to evangelization and makes every Claretian `a person who sets fire wherever he passes'" (cf. n. 38e).

(3) Matrimony

Matrimony is an encounter with the life-giving love of Christ, symbolized by the mutual commitment of two human beings who love one another and want to make this love a lifelong project. "Those of us who have received the sacrament of matrimony, by loving one another and experiencing the sacramental presence of Christ in our love, are united more closely to the Lord each day and help one another along the road of holiness and the apostolate" (n. 38f; cf. LG 11b).

(4) Confirmation

The Sourcebook mentions the sacrament of **Confirmation** explicitly in nn. 7 and 38, and implicitly in n. 9. It presents Confirmation from a missionary perspective: it prepares us and enables us to carry on the mission of Christ (n. 7) and strengthens us to confess our faith and bear witness to Jesus (n. 9).

(5) Reconciliation

The sacrament of **Reconciliation** (n. 38) is an encounter with Christ in our condition as sinners, always tempted to live according to worldly values. It is like a repetition of Baptism. Through it the Spirit unites us to the death of Christ in order to put to death in us our selfishness and our tendencies to evil that are rooted in the depths of our being.

SOURCEBOOK

39

Moved by the Spirit, we seek in prayer to encounter God In Christ, and we ask the Father to lead us to accept His will and place ourselves without reserve at the service of His plan of salvation. In our prayer, liturgical praise holds a preeminent place.

Our prayer always has both a secular and apostolic thrust. In order to pray, we do not leave the world or forget it. Rather, our own situation in the world and our efforts to animate and order all things according to the plan, of God, is itself a part of our prayer. In dialogue with the Lord, we share the problems and needs of our brothers and sisters, and our dedication to their service.

4.3. Prayer

Another indispensable source of our spirituality is Christian prayer. We do not simply say 'prayer,' but 'Christian' prayer, because non-Christians also pray, and the prayer of Catholics is not always Christian. Christian prayer is prayer made in Christ.

Prayer is part of our following of Christ. Not only do we pray as He did, but we pray in Him, incorporated into His own dialogue with the Father. United with Christ and moved by the Spirit, we love the Father with that divine love which the Spirit has poured forth into our hearts. Christian prayer is always Trinitarian, it is a relationship of love with the Father in Christ through the Spirit. In this relationship the initiative comes from God, who first loved us. It is the Spirit, the true protagonist of our prayer, who makes our dialogue with God possible.

COMMENTARY

Within prayer, the Sourcebook (n. 39) highlights liturgical praise, which is nearly always a trinitarian doxology. Praise is the most genuine form of prayer because it is purified of all self-interest and is a prayer of pure self-sacrificing love.

Some Christians view prayer above all as a human activity, as an effort of a person to reach God and obtain favors from Him. But rather than a human activity and effort, prayer is a gift, an action of God in us.

Others view prayer as a means to obtain graces or to invigorate their own Christian life. Prayer is at once a means and an end in itself. It is above all an end, because we are created to be with God, and it is only in our definitive being with Him that we will attain to the fulness of our being and of our realization as persons. During our earthly life prayer is a very direct way of being with Him and of realizing the meaning of our life: to live in communion with Him.

Prayer is also a means, because it helps us to be freed of our selfishness and to put on Christ, to be identified with the Father's will and to grow in life according to the Spirit and in the following of Jesus.

No prayer, not even that of petition, should be self-seeking, because prayer is an oblation of love, an act of self-giving. In the measure that we want to "get something out of our prayer" or make it serve some interest of our own, in that same measure it ceases to be a prayer, because it ceases to be love.

The true prayer of petition does not aim at changing the plans of God, but rather to adjust our plans to His. What we ask for is that He will act in us and lead us to accept His will gladly. The efficacy of prayer is not measured by the graces we receive from God, but by the transformation that it brings about in us and by the Christian commitment to which it leads us. "Moved by the Spirit, we seek in prayer to encounter God in Christ, and we ask the Father to lead us to accept His will and place ourselves without reserve at the service of His plan of salvation" (n. 39a).

If prayer is to really become a source that nourishes our spiritual life, we must set aside frequent spaces for it in our life. The problem of finding time for prayer depends in great measure on our faith and our love. There's always time for something we value and love. By this we don't mean to suggest that the spirit and practice of prayer are exhausted in the times expressly set aside for it, because "the true lover loves everywhere and is always thinking of the Beloved! It would be a hard thing to bear if we were able to pray only when off in some corner."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ St. Teresa of Jesus, *Foundations*, 5.16.

"Save on rare occasions, prayer is not easy or spontaneous. It requires a renewed option every day. Many Christians pray 'when they feel the need.' But there are many people who never feel the need. To expect to pray only when some felt need calls for it, means, in practice, putting prayer off indefinitely. We pray, not because we feel the need, but out of a conviction of faith and in order to put on Christ through love."⁴¹

Some believe that it is not necessary to set aside special times for prayer, arguing that they have to pray in the midst of activities. "To pray in contact with others, to be contemplative in action, is a profoundly Christian attitude, but it must be said that this attitude is a pure illusion unless we add some moments in which we are simply with God, without doing anything."⁴²

Our dear brother, Peter Casaldáliga, has quite lucidly pointed out the need for peak moments of prayer in order to advance the process of growth in a contemplative attitude and in order to carry on a new and fruitful evangelization.

"We have got to the point of saying, 'Everything is prayer; struggling, too, is prayer.' Well, no. Struggling is not prayer. Not even the struggle for liberation. Struggle is struggle and prayer is prayer.

For me this is clear. On this point we ought to be very sincere and even demanding... It is evident that there are many brothers in the struggle, in action, in commitment with their brethren, are also praying. Explicitly open to God, sometimes even formulating an explicit prayer, and all that is prayer. What I mean to say is that we shouldn't fall into the comfortable simplification of saying that everything is prayer, in order to justify the fact that we are not explicitly making prayer.

⁴¹ S. Galilea, op. cit., p. 145.

⁴² E. Schillebeeckx, *Dios y hombre*, Salamanca 1968, p. 327.

Prayer also demands its hour, its time, its place. But it is evident that in the measure that we commit ourselves to God, in the measure that our friendship with Him grows, and in the measure that we are on more and better terms of friendship with Him, the more, normally, our life and our struggle will be prayer. We will keep on reaching a point of confluence where it will be hard to distinguish the waters. When that happens, we will be living what the ancients called the `state of prayer."⁴³

The Sourcebook states that "our prayer always has both a secular and apostolic thrust" (n. 39).

Its secular character is manifested in the fact that we pray in the midst of our temporal tasks and we pray in our effort to perform them according to the plans of God. "In order to pray, we do not leave the world or forget it. Rather, our own situation in the world and our efforts to animate and order all things according to the plan of God, is itself a part of our prayer. In dialogue with the Lord, we share the problems and needs of our brothers and sisters, and our dedication to their service" (n. 39b).

We view all events in the light of the gospel and in that light we pray to the Father. We make our own life and our struggle for the Kingdom the "subject matter" of our prayer. We listen to God in events and try to respond to them, not only in the dialogue of prayer but also in the life of service to others.

The apostolic end of prayer is inseparable from the secular, because the apostolate of the laity is above all the Christian **animation** of temporal realities, an **action** to transform the world. Our prayer is apostolic because it leads us to a growing commitment to evangelization by means of the word, of witness and of transforming praxis.

SOURCEBOOK



Because the Father has always shown himself to be the God of the poor, and because the Son who identified himself with them continues to be present in the poor, they are a sacrament of the presence of God and an unequivocal place for encounter with Him.

⁴³ P. Casaldáliga, *El vuelo del Quetzal*, pp. 53-54.

The Spirit, who is the deep force acting behind the historical processes of all oppressed peoples, impels us toward communion with them and with their struggle for liberation.

4.4. Our Brothers and Sisters

Thanks to the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, all persons have become a sacrament of Christ's presence and a place of encounter with Him. He is present in all of them, but whereas we easily and pleasantly discover Him in some because of their generosity, their kindness, their solidarity or their status, we find it very hard to see Him in others because of their hostility and selfishness. It is a great deal easier to see or believe that we see Christ is a beggar who asks us for a handout on a street corner, than it is to see Him in an unbearable family member or in a fellow worker who likes to contradict us or ridicule us.

The Sourcebook points out that our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, are a sacrament of God's presence because He himself has always manifested Himself as the God of the poor and, in Jesus Christ, not only did He identify Himself totally with their cause, but actually became one of them.

"Because the Father has always shown Himself to be the God of the poor, and because the Son who identified with them continues to be present in the poor, they are a sacrament of the presence of God and an unequivocal place for encounter with Him" (n. 40).

Here "the poor" are understood mainly in a collective sense. The wounded Samaritan of our days are the oppressed peoples and groups who are struggling for liberation. The Sourcebook underscores this in its closing lines:

"The Spirit, who is the deep force acting behind the historical processes of all oppressed peoples, impens us toward communion with them and with their struggle for liberation" (n. 40b).

The encounter with God and Christ in the poor leads us to the following of Jesus, who made them the first recipients of His mission and who is for us the source of our Christian commitment. From this perspective, we can say that the poor evangelize us, because they call us to conversion, to go beyond ourselves and make them and their cause the center of our concerns. They evangelize us because they spur us on to live the poverty that makes us blessed (cf. Mt 5:3) and to struggle against the poverty that makes people unhappy, that debasing poverty that destroys the human person.

"The presence of Jesus in the poor evangelizes the evangelizers by making them recall that Christ is also in them and by reminding them of the essence of the Gospel, which is summed up in the effective love of God and neighbor. By discovering with a contemplative eye the face of Christ in the poor, and by finding Him there, in a new way that questions us deeply and undoes our securities, we lay the bases for a renewed evangelizing service in consonance with the world in which we live."⁴⁴

R.Todd, CMF
ROME -
June 12, 1994

⁴⁴ C. Maccise, op. cit., p. 55.