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THE CORDIMARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF ST. ANTHONY MARY CLARET AND THE CLARETIANS

Thomas A. Thompson, SM

The study begins with an introduction to St. Anthony Mary Claret, his writings on the love of God, the Virgin Mary, and the charism he confided to the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Next, the missionary activities of the congregation during its first century are described, among which was the promotion of the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. After Vatican II, the congregation, especially through its general chapters, reclaimed and adapted its Cordimarian charism, an adaptation which appears to have been well accepted by the members of the congregation.

I. Introduction

A meeting of the Mariological Society of American devoted to the Heart of Mary is an opportunity to investigate the Cordimarian spirituality of St. Anthony Mary Claret and the Claretians. My interest in Saint Anthony Mary Claret came about through one document: the excerpt of his

writings now found in the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours for October 24:

A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set everyone on fire with God's love. Nothing daunts him: he delights in privations, welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander, rejoices in all the torments and sorrows he suffers, and glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. His only concern is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind (Autobiography 494).¹

This presentation begins with an introduction to St. Anthony Claret and his writings on the Virgin Mary and the Heart of Mary; continues with the Claretians' interpretation of their missionary apostolate and consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during their first century; and, finally, demonstrates the Claretians' inclusion of the image of Mary proposed at Vatican II and the renewal of their Cordimarian charism. (The issues here described—relating the Marian charism into the objectives or purpose of an apostolic missionary congregation—are common to all apostolic religious congregations that are in some way dedicated to the Virgin Mary.)

St. Anthony Mary Claret could be proposed as the “patron of communication”: he encouraged the establishment of libraries, printing presses, and reading

¹ Antonio Maria Claret y Clara, *Escritos autobiograficos y espirituales* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1959), #494 (English: Claret, *Autobiography*, ed. José M. Viñas, trans. Joseph Davies [Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1976], 494).

groups. Presently, the Claretians carry out their founder's wishes through their abundant communications, readily available online, including the *Autobiography* of St. Anthony Claret, communications from their general chapters, formation programs, and their revised Rule of Life.

Anthony Mary Claret was born in 1807, in Sallent (Barcelona). He entered seminary in 1829, and was ordained a priest for the diocese of Vich in 1835. He was attracted to the life of the Carthusians and, after ordination, he spent some time in a Jesuit novitiate, where he became acquainted with the Spiritual Exercises and with a significant Marian shrine in Italy, namely, "Mary, Mother of Divine Love."

He began preaching missions and retreats: he was an "apostolic dynamo," too big for one parish or one diocese.² He was recruited by the *Congregatio Propaganda Fidei* for missionary work, and, in 1842, he was named Missionary Apostolic for pastoral activity in Catalonia and the Canary Islands. Even from this very early period, he sought others to assist and participate in this missionary work. In 1849, he founded the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A few months later, he was named Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, where he dealt with slavery, corruption, polygamy, and

² In 1957, Cardinal Cushing wrote in a Preface to a work on Claret: "Anthony Claret was a century ahead of his time Teaching, writing, preaching missions, the direction of souls--all these works of the ministry were raised to unprecedented levels of perfection in the priestly life of Anthony Claret. His life was not that of a man who became a priest; it was the life of Christ our Lord, renewing itself in one who accepted, without reservation, the immolation of human nature which the priesthood demands." (Fanchón Royer, *Saint Anthony Claret, Modern Prophet and Healer* [New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1957], xi).

cholera. Over ninety percent of the people were illiterate; he established clinics, libraries, and the religious press.

At the time, there was much political turmoil in Spain, similar to the situation in France after the French Revolution. The liberal forces wished to reduce the political influence of the Church and to seize its property. Most of the dioceses in Spain were without bishops (it was the prerogative of the government to nominate bishops). In 1857, Claret returned to Madrid to serve as the “Queen’s confessor,” a position giving him some political influence. He recovered the San Lorenzo La Escorial, a monastery complex and the historic residence of Spanish kings. In 1868, church properties were seized by the Spanish republican government. At Vatican Council I, he made a strong statement in favor of papal authority. The First Spanish Republic issued a warrant for his arrest; he took refuge in the Cistercian monastery of Fontfroide, France, where he died on October 24, 1870, at age sixty-two.

II. Claret’s Missionary-Marian Vocation

In 1860, he wrote “under obedience” his *Autobiography*, which included notes from his missions and his own retreat resolutions. He was not a speculative theologian, but a dynamic, inexhaustible preacher of missions, familiar with contemporary spiritual and theological developments. His sermons were directed to the lives of the people. His missionary vocation has been explained as the result of a complex experiential process that began from his infancy. A recurring theme in his early writings was the primacy of the love of God in the spiritual life and in the missionary apostolate:

Love is the most necessary of all the virtues. Yes, I say it and will say it a thousand times: the virtue an apostolic missionary needs most of all is love. He must love God, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his neighbors. If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural endowments, he has much love, he has everything. (*Autobiography*, 438)

Love in a man who preaches the Word of God is like fire in a musket. If a man were to throw a bullet with his hands, he would hardly make a dent in anything; but if he takes this same bullet and ignites some gunpowder behind it, it can kill. It is much the same with the Word of God. If a Word is spoken only naturally, it does very little; but if it is spoken by a priest who is filled with the fire of charity—the fire of love of God and neighbor—it will wound vices, kill sins, convert sinners, and work wonders. (*Autobiography*, 439)

From the beginning, his vocation was related to the Virgin Mary, whose person and motherhood he saw as the primary exemplar of the love of God. Before Claret became acquainted with devotion to the Immaculate Heart, he spoke of Mary as “Mother of Divine Love.”

Mary, my Mother, Mother of Divine Love, I can ask for nothing more pleasing to you, nor anything that you are more ready to grant, than the love of God. Grant me this, my Mother and my love. My mother, I am hungry and thirsty for love; help me, satisfy my need. O Heart of Mary, forge me into an instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbor. (*Autobiography*, 5, 447, 587)

A prayer that he said at the beginning of the mission speaks of his confidence in the assistance of the Virgin Mary:

Virgin Mother of God, Mother and Advocate of poor sinners, I am your son your servant formed by you in the furnace of your love. I

am as an arrow in your hand, throw me with all your force against the prince of this world who has made an alliance with the flesh. The victory will be yours. You will conquer for you have the power to overcome all heresies, errors and vices (*Autobiography*, 270).

III. The Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart

In the mid-nineteenth century, events were occurring in the Rue du Bac of Paris which would influence Claret. In 1830, Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Labouré (1806-76), confiding to her the image that would be known as the Miraculous Medal. On one side were the words, “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.” And, on the reverse side, a circle of twelve stars, with the letter “M” uniting the heart of Jesus and the pierced heart of Mary. The archbishop of Paris gave permission for the striking of a medal, first coined in 1832; by 1834, over eight million were distributed all over the world.

Not far from the convent on Rue du Bac was the basilica of Notre Dame des Victoires, built in the seventeenth century to commemorate the battle of Lepanto, but now a church which few attended. On December 3, 1836, the discouraged pastor, Abbé Desgenettes, received a heavenly message to establish the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the Conversion of Sinners.³ He did so, and amazing events followed: conversions and miracles occurred, and the

³ Desgenettes frequently visited the chapel of the Sisters of Charity, and he knew Catherine Labouré’s spiritual advisor, M. Aladel (Cf. M. Aladel, *La Medaille Miraculeuse* [Paris: Pillet et Dumoulin, 1878], 230). Cf. J. M. Canal and J. M. Alonso, *La Archicofradia de Nuestra Señora de las Victorias: historia critica y contenido doctrinal* (Madrid: Editorial y Libreria Co., 1959); also, *Marienlexikon*, ed. R. Baumer and L. Scheffczyk, 6 vols. (St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS Verlag, 1988-94), 2:173.

church became a center for spiritual renewal. Many, discouraged by the rigors of Jansenism, returned to the sacraments. It was visited by John Henry Newman, St. John Bosco, Francis Libermann, Emmanuel d'Alzon, and Alphonsus Ratisbonne. St. Therese of Lisieux recovered from an illness after a novena of Masses were offered there for her intention.

The confraternity founded by Desgenettes had enormous influence: it became an archconfraternity and soon thousands of parish confraternities and religious organization were affiliated with it. (One estimate was that there were over 19,000 affiliated organizations.) Desgenettes wrote a *Manual of Prayers*, published in Paris in 1838, with prayers and texts of the Mass, and he also wrote the *Annals* (containing information about affiliated confraternities).

Upon learning of the events in Paris, Claret established the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart in Vich and Lerida, and, in 1853, in Santiago de Cuba.⁴ He had been planning to found a brotherhood (*hermanidad*) or a confraternity (*cofradía*), that is, an association of missionaries that would have three levels: the first level would be missionary priests and religious brothers, entirely available for the mission; the second level would be diocesan priests who have parish responsibilities; and the third would

⁴ Claret's interest in the Archconfraternity in Paris is evident in his work entitled *Breve noticia del origen, progressos, gracias e instrucciones de la Archcofradía del Sagrado Corazon de Maria, para la Conversiones de los Pecadores, junto con una novena para impetrarla del Corazon Inmaculado de Maria, todo compuesto por Antonio Claret, Arzobispo de Cuba* (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1858).

be lay people who wished to live their Christian life in a more dedicated way.

On July 16, 1849, at a gathering in the seminary in Vich, Claret founded, with five priests present, the congregation of missionaries. One account has Claret announcing, “A great work begins today.” A member responded, “What can its importance be, since we are so young and few in number?” Claret’s response was “You will soon see ... if we are few, God’s great power will shine brighter.”⁵ Claret later recalled that the founding of the congregation was entirely due to the Virgin Mary. “At your inspiration I would found this congregation of which I would be the last and the servant of all—for that reason I will kiss the feet, and serve at table and I will feel grateful for having the opportunity to render these services”⁶ (Introductory Notes, 1849; *Autobiography* 488, 490).

Within two months, he received a letter announcing that he was to become the Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba. He recounts how he learned of the appointment:

On August 11, as I was coming down from the pulpit after the closing service, lo and behold, I was told that His Excellency, the Bishop, wanted me to go to his palace. When I arrived there, he handed me a letter dated August 4, containing my royal appointment as Archbishop of Cuba. I was struck dead by the news. I begged the

⁵ <http://www.claretianformation.com/confundadores-jaime-clotet>. Antonio Leghisa, *El Corazón de María y la Congregación, en el momento actual* (Rome: Curia General, 1978), 19-20.

⁶ José Xifré, *Espíritu de la Congregación de Misioneros Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María* (1892), Introducción, II.

bishop to be good enough to answer for me, saying that I would by no means accept. (*Autobiography* 491)

However, he accepted the position on October 4, 1849, and was consecrated bishop in the cathedral of Vich on October 6, 1850, at the age of forty-two. The motto he chose for his coat of arms reflected his mission: “*Caritas Christi urget nos.*” The statistics on his activities during his six years and two months in Cuba are astonishing: he visited every parish at least four times; he confirmed 300,000 individuals (*Autobiography* 396, 515); and, at no cost, he distributed 200,000 books. He incurred much opposition, especially from slave holders, and two attempts were made to assassinate him.

In 1862, he returned to Spain and to the newly-founded congregation, and, at its 1862 Chapter, he firmly established its character: the Virgin Mary was the foundress of the congregation. He told her, “This congregation is yours. You yourself have founded it.” Mary was also the patron.⁷ The group’s title was to be “Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,” with the identifying initials CMF (*Cordis Mariae Filius*). Through Mary’s spiritual maternity, the members were to be “sons” of the Heart of Mary. He referred frequently to Mary’s motherhood and to her Immaculate Heart as the symbol of her love. A paper with his “definition of a missionary” was given to all the members: “A missionary was one who is enflamed with charity and configured after the example of Christ.”⁸

⁷ Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 20.

⁸ Cf. first page of this article.

At this point, Claret did not found a religious congregation; the members were diocesan priests devoted to missions. The formula of consecration composed by Claret was simple and direct: “I entrust and consecrate myself to the special service of God and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the object for which this congregation has been founded.” The concept included consecration to God and to the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, to membership in the congregation. It was at this time that Claret requested permission to celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to be celebrated on May 22; it was to be a communal, family feast, a gathering time for all the missionaries.⁹

IV. The First Century: Missionary Imperative and Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Anthony Claret died in 1869 at the age of sixty-two. The Marian character of the congregation continued to develop through the writings of Fr. Joseph Xifré, superior-general for forty-five years (1860-1906), and sometimes designated as a co-founder of the congregation.

God has confided a marvelous treasure to us—the Heart of Mary—that we may become her apostles and live her life ... Such is the Heart of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. Sons of the Heart of Mary is our official title ... So, remember who you are, you who belong to this Congregation of Missionaries: You are beloved Sons of Mary; to be a Son of her Heart (*filius cordis Mariae*) is that which distinguishes you.¹⁰

⁹ Leghisa, *El Corazón* 22-23.

¹⁰ Narcisse García Garcés, CMF. “La dévotion à la très sainte vierge dans la Congrégation des Missionnaires Fils du Coeur Immaculé de Marie,” in *Maria*:

Fr. Xifré was succeeded by Fr. Martin Alsina (1906-1922). At the Chapter of 1912, there was a movement to strengthen the Marian character of the congregation. The motto now included reference to Mary: “*Surrexerunt Filli Eius et Beatissimam Praedicaverunt.*” A proposal was made at the 1912 Chapter to insert a more explicit Marian dedication within the *objectum* (objectives, purposes) of the congregation. At the time, the *objectum*, stated in canonical terms, was threefold: the glory of God, personal salvation, and the missionary apostolate. The proposed addition (*retoque*) to the *objectum* was that the congregation was, “in a special way, to cultivate devotion to the Heart of Mary so as to gain souls for Christ and to contribute to the ministry of the Word.”¹¹

The proposal was not accepted by the general government of the congregation. “We were not founded to propagate devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Rather, in order to attain our own end, which is the apostolate, God has given us the sonship of the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a spirit, and devotion to her as a means of the apostolate. . . . Our consecration is made to the *objectum* for which the congregation was founded. There, the object, namely the external and specific aim of our Institute, is not the cult or service of the Immaculate Heart.”¹²

Etudes sur la sainte Vierge, ed. H. du Manoir (Paris: Beauchesne, 1954), 3:405-428, esp. 412 (citing Fr. Xifre, *L'Esprit de la Congregation*).

¹¹ Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 24: “Speciale vero Cor Mariae Immaculatum impensus colere necnon et animas Christo lucrifacere perficiere ministerio verbi.”

¹² John M. Lozano, *The Claretians: Their Mission and Spirit in the Church* (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980), 51-59. José Hernández Martínez, *Ex Abundantia Cordis: A Study of the Cordimarian Spirituality of the Claretian Missionaries* (Rome: Secretariat of the Heart of

This question would be considered again at the Chapter of 1922 and after Vatican II; it is an underlying issue faced by Marian congregations devoted to ministry, that is, how is the promotion of Marian devotion related to the fundamental purpose of the organization?

A. Apostolic Works

The congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart was devoted to the works of the apostolate: the ministry of the word, parish missions, catechetics, preaching, parishes, schools, confraternities, sodalities. Missions were established in Cuba (1880), Equatorial Guinea (1883), and Mexico (1884).

From the beginning, the congregation was engaged in promoting the knowledge of and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A project begun by Claret himself was the establishment of basilicas and major churches (*templos votivos*) dedicated to the Immaculate Heart in metropolitan cities. In 1863, Claret supported the building of the Cathedral of Monserrat. Other basilicas were those of Santiago de Chile (1879), Barbastro (1891), Bilbao (1894), Sao Paulo del Brasil (1897), and Madrid (1908). In 1923, Fr. Nicholas Garcia, then superior general, accepted the offer of Pius XI to build a basilica in Rome dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.¹³

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, a movement developed to promote the consecration of countries to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the last year of the nineteenth century, Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Annum*

Mary, 1991), 107.

¹³ Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 15, 36.

Sanctum; he spoke of “the divine love, symbolized by the Heart of Jesus, which prompts us love him in return,” and, on May 25, 1899, he consecrated the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This consecration was considered a preparation for restoring the world to Christ.

The movement to promote the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary arose in the late nineteenth century with the Marian congresses at Lyon and Einsiedeln. Largely through the effort of Fr. José Font, CMF, the congress at Tarrangona, in 1895, petitioned the Holy See to consecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This congress represented the “first step in the history of the memoranda and petitions formulated with a view to obtaining from the Holy See the consecration of the universe to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”¹⁴

In August 1907, the CMF superior general, Fr. Martin Alsina, sent Pope Pius X a message requesting the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The theme of consecration was promoted by Claretian publications—*Iris de Paz*, *Ave Maria*, and *La Estrella de Andacola*. After the Marian apparitions at Fatima in 1917, and the messages given to Sr. Lucía dos Santos,¹⁵ many members of the congregation interpreted their charism as one of promoting the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as requested at Fatima.

In 1942, the year commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the apparitions at Fatima, Pius XII, on October 31 (and again in Rome on December 8, 1942)

¹⁴ Hernández Martínez, *Ex Abundantia Cordis*, 94.

¹⁵ Arthur Burton Calkins, *Totus Tuus* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 1991), 96-98.

consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This was a great event for the Church and for the Claretians. After the event, a letter from the superior general recognized the congregation's effort to promote the consecration. "We have obtained that which was the object of the vows of all the members of the congregation: a consecration of the universal Church and of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary."¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, in 1943, the liturgical celebration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was extended to the whole Church, to be celebrated on August 22nd, the octave of the Assumption.

For the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the events of the 1940s and 1950s brought to culmination the goals and projects that they had promoted: consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart, the liturgical celebration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the dedication of the Basilica of the Immaculate Heart in Rome. The congregation celebrated its hundredth anniversary in 1949; Anthony Mary Claret was canonized on May 7, 1950. The dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was proclaimed on November 1, 1950, and 1954 was the Marian Year during which Pius XII issued his encyclical on the Queenship of Mary (*Fulgens Corona*).

Claretians also promoted scholarly theological studies. Fr. Narciso García Garcés, together with a group of Spanish theologians, founded the Spanish Mariological Society, with its publication *Estudios Marianos*. In 1954, the Claretian Secretariat of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was established for continued research and study of the Claretian tradition of

¹⁶ García Garcés, "La dévotion," 420.

the Immaculate Heart and for other topics related to Marian devotion; its influential publication. *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, continues today.

B. Vatican II and Renewal: Cordimarian Spirituality

Vatican II's *Perfectae Caritatis* called religious congregations to "a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time" (2). The Cordimarians entered the renewal called for at Vatican II: for the next twenty-five years, renewal and a deeper integration within the congregation of Claret's cordimarian charism would be considered at the General Chapters, by communications from the general administration, and in the formulation of the Rule of Life (1990). It was also during this period that the Chapters considered the congregation's response to Paul VI's apostolic letter on evangelization (1975) and John Paul II's letter on catechesis (1979).

The special Chapter of 1967, held in Costa Rica, studied the image of Mary and her role in the Church as presented at Vatican II:

The Council's doctrine concerning the relations between Mary and the Church allows us to discover the profound consequences that our special consecration to the Heart of Mary, Figure and Mother of the Church, has on our dedication to fulfilling the work of Christ and of the Church on behalf of all people, even to the point of sacrificing our entire life.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hernández Martínez, *Ex Abundantia Cordis*, 124.

The Chapter of 1973 spoke of the need for a “deeper understanding of the charism. ... We wish to review our manner of living the cordimarian spirituality of our charism which seems to have waned in the last few years and which deserves to be deepened in our piety and in our theological reflection.”¹⁸

In 1978, Fr. Antonio Leghisa, the superior general, addressed a significant letter to the congregation entitled “The Heart of Mary and Our Congregation at the Present Moment,” a document which contributed much to overcoming “the collective dark night” related to the cordimarian charism. The first part of the letter spoke of the origins of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and its role in the nineteenth century of combating Jansenism and atheistic humanism.

The letter then dealt with the founder’s concept of the Heart of Mary and its relation to the congregation. Claret had clearly indicated that Mary was the founder and the patron of the congregation: Mary was also the *formator (fragua)*, the mother, director, and spiritual guide. A Claretian was to be a “son of the Heart of Mary” (CFM). But how relate the notion of filiation to the Immaculate Heart? The response, simply explained, was that the Heart of Mary represented not simply the physical heart of Mary, but the whole person of Mary. The Heart of Mary was not simply an exterior symbol; rather it was an identification with the inner dynamism of apostolic love and charity emanating from the person of Mary.¹⁹ In the words of Claret:

¹⁸ Hernández Martínez, *Ex Abundantia Cordis*, 128.

¹⁹ Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 26-32.

In the Heart of Mary there are two things to consider: the physical heart and the formal heart which is the love and the will. The physical heart of Mary is the organ, sense, and instrument of love and will; just as we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our nose, and talk with our mouth, we love and desire with our heart.²⁰

It is not the physical heart alone but rather the “formal” heart which symbolizes the person of Mary, her faith, her obedience, her humility. Similar to the biblical notion of the heart which signifies the whole person, so the Heart of Mary represents her person and the totality of her love and faith.²¹

The Heart of Mary was also an integral part of evangelization. Missionaries announced the Paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. In doing so, they referred to the Heart of Mary as a manifestation of God’s mercy.²²

The congregation’s *Rule of Life* (1990) speaks of the Cordimarian charism in several articles, especially those dealing with the evangelical counsels and the missionary apostolate.

We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature (#4).

We answer this divine call by adopting Jesus’ way of life, a way which the Virgin Mary, too, embraced in faith. And so, in the

²⁰ Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 41.

²¹ *Letter to a devotee of the Heart of Mary*: EC, 2:1499; Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 27.

²² Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 32.

Church we have to manifest Christ's virginity, poverty and obedience in proclaiming the Good News. Through our profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows we dedicate ourselves to God and are consecrated by him, and thus we form in the Church an Institute which is truly and fully apostolic (#5).

We attribute the founding of our Congregation to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we honor as our Patroness under the title of her Immaculate Heart. Since we are called and truly are Sons of her Heart, we accompany her in love and trust and commit ourselves to her that we may be conformed to the mystery of Christ and may cooperate with her in her maternal role in our apostolic mission (#8).²³

V. Sharing Cordimarian Spirituality

By the later 1980s, the questions about the Cordimarian charism seem to have been resolved, and the efforts to understand the charism within the context of Vatican II had benefitted the whole congregation. During the 1987 Marian Year, the superior general, Fr. Gustavo Alonso, addressed a letter to the congregation entitled, "Let Us Share our Marian Spirituality." He asked the members to respond personally to questions related to their Cordimarian spirituality. The first question was: "How do you live your Cordimarian spirituality?" The second: "What suggestions would you offer to achieve a greater living of Cordimarian spirituality among the members of the congregation, and among God's

²³ Constitutions of the Congregation of Missionaries, 1990.

people?”²⁴ A small publication reproduced excerpts from a few respondents.²⁵ The following are a few of the responses:

I believe that we can best understand the Heart of Mary within the perspective of the history of salvation and in the life of the Church (#8).

I understand our Cordimarian spirituality much better when placed within our missionary evangelizing mission (#10).

Mary is present in my life urging me to be a true missionary ... Throughout my life, I have tried to deepen my experience through reading and reflection, which contribute to my missionary vocation (#14).

I believe that Mary will not permit me to grow old in my vision of the world and of the Church. Mary is always enlarging for me the horizon of the history of salvation. Mary has formed me in Christ (#27).

As the years passed, I found ways of deepening and living the presence of Mary, the *yes* of her faith and her obedience. Her fidelity in the history of salvation sustains me in my Claretian life (#36).

I rediscovered our spirituality as an experience of interiority which integrated contemplation, activity, prayer, life and ministry (#47).

²⁴ There were about 700 responses to the letter of the superior general (i.e., approximately one-fourth of the membership). José María Hernández provided an analysis of the responses, based on the age and past theological formation of the respondents. (*Ex Abundantia*, 15-42).

²⁵ Secretariado del Corazón de María, Rome, *Un Hijo del Inmaculado Corazón de María es ... 72 experiencias de nuestra espiritualidad Mariana* (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1989).

In the heart of Mary, I feel called to live a spirituality of commitment with the poor and the marginalized. Mary's Canticle gives me life and nurtures the desire of an authentic option for the poor (#53).

I keep asking myself if I am living the *yes* of Mary or if I consider Mary only as a protector ... Mary is for me the most credible witness of the merciful love of God (67).

The responses were influenced by the age and theological formation of the respondent. What strikes the English-speaking reader is that the superior general's letter did not speak of "Marian devotion," but rather of "living the Cordimarian spirituality." *Como vives tu espiritualidad cordimariana?* The second question requests suggestions for achieving a "better living experience" of the Cordimarian spirituality (*Qué sugerencias ofreces para lograr una mayor vivencia de la espiritualidad cordimariana*). The word *vivencia*, here and in other places, has a larger connotation than the word *devotion*.²⁶ *Vivencia* suggests a type of experience, a connotation which is reflected in a few responses:

I experience the Virgin Mary as the example of living the Word of God and the Gospel. Mary is a figure of the Church, a prototype for every Christian; she brings Christ, her Son, our Brother, to life within us. Cordimarian spirituality has become a type of gauge for living my religious and priestly commitment. From a devotional relationship, I have discovered Mary as the example of living the Word of God and the Gospel (#12).

²⁶ From the Chapter of 1973: "La vivencia de nuestra filiación cordimariana tiene para nosotros una dinámica peculiar en la realización del ser y de la misión que definen al religioso claretiano" (Leghisa, *El Corazón*, 40).

Simply put, Cordimarian spirituality is an experience without which I could not continue. Here I follow the meaning of *vivencia*, as described by José Ortega in 1913: *Vivencia* is a profound intense lasting experience which becomes part of one's personality. Our founder wrote that Mary's heart is love: the center of her love of God and all humanity (#18).

I prefer to speak of Cordimarian rather simply as Marian consecration—because Cordimarian puts me in contact with Mary's heart. Cordimarian filiation helps me enter into Mary's inner life, her message of tenderness and love for all people (#30).

I have rediscovered Cordimarian spirituality as an interior experience, leading to a more intense life of prayer which integrates life and apostolic action. This interior experience leads to an integration of action and contemplation, of prayer and life, of spirituality and apostolate which is an essential of our missionary charism. Our founder not only lived this experience but he confided it to us as part of our charism (#47).

In a communication of April 1988, Fr. Alonso noted that the testimony of the respondents was evidence of “a great interior richness assuring us that the Marian dimension of our spirituality is not just a concept that is more or less well defined in book, but rather that it is a genuine life-experience among Claretians.”²⁷

VI. Conclusion

A final word on Claret's Cordimarian spirituality: it has an ecclesial dimension, related to the Church's identity. At the center of the Church is the Heart of Mary, that is, Mary's

²⁷ Hernández Martínez, *Ex Abundantia Cordis*, 37.

love for God and for humanity. In a conference given in 1863, Claret spoke of Mary's position in the Church:

To whom should we turn for help in practicing virtue and charity, if not Mary? She is all charity. Wherever Mary is, there is charity. ... In the Christian world, the Head is Jesus Christ and the Heart is the Virgin Mary. ... For Mary is the Heart of the Church. This is why all works of charity spring from her. It is well known that the heart has two movements: systole and diastole. Thus, Mary is always performing these two movements: absorbing grace from her Most Holy Son, and pouring it forth on sinners.²⁸

Author Biography

Father Thomas A. Thompson, SM (Marianist), was Director of the Marian Library from 1987 to 2015. He has served as the Secretary of the Mariological Society of America and Editor of *Marian Studies* since 1990. He is a member of the faculty of the International Marian Research Institute.

²⁸ Juan Maria Lozano, *Mystic and Man of Action: Saint Anthony Mary Claret* (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1997), 226. Similar sentiments were later expressed by Matthias Scheeban: "Mary is the type (*Vorbild*) of the Church through the fact that she herself belongs to the Church and is at the same time its principal member, its root and its heart" (in his *Handbuch der katholischer Dogmatik* [Fribourg im Breisgau: Herder, 1882], 3:504).