

**Blessed
Stanislaus Papczyński**

Father and Guide
of the Marian Vocation

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*Documents of the General Convention
Rome, December 4-8, 2008*

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Jan Mikołaj Rokosz, MIC
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The Goal of the General Convention and the Paths Towards Its Realization

Introduction to the Proceedings

We have placed great hopes in the beatification of our Founder. Perhaps, some had even counted on the fact that it would automatically resolve all of the Congregation's problems, overcome the crisis, bring an instantaneous growth to our community, and most of all—contribute to an increase in vocations. But it has not come to pass. Instead, we have become more and more convinced that God, through the beatification of our Founder, wishes to draw our attention to something that concerns the essence of our vocation in the Church. Our discerning and accepting this gift may change the image of our Congregation.

“Dear Marians, never in the over three hundred year history of your Congregation, has the necessity to reconsider the life and charism of your Founder been more burning. (...) Rejoicing in the gift of the beatification, choose once again the path on which the Gospel calls you and which your Founder showed to you.”

I open this General Convention with those words, which Franc Cardinal Rodé, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, addressed to the Marians at the tomb of our Founder on the day after his beatification. The topic of this Convention is “Father Stanislaus Papczyński—Father and Guide of the Marian Vocation.” It seems that those words have a prophetic inspiration for us.

During this convention, we would like to take a fresh look at the life and the charism of our Founder and their timeliness for the modern world. Then, we shall seek to answer the question: how faithful are we to our Founder's legacy? This applies both to our present legislation (Constitutions and Directory) and to the quality and forms of our life and apostolate. Later, we shall reflect on what needs to be done so that our founding charism may enkindle a new strength within us. Therefore, the task of this convention is to discern this particular *kairos* for our Congregation—our Founder's beatification—and to formulate concrete proposals for our response to it.

The Second Vatican Council instructed all of the institutes of consecrated life to conduct a thorough revision of their life and laws in view of a renewed faithfulness to the Gospel and the original spirit of their founders in the context of our times. As for our Congregation, this process was formally opened by the Special General Chapter celebrated in 1969-1970, and it was concluded in 1984, with the ratification of our new Constitutions and Directory. The beatification of Fr. Founder and the studies related to this event, as well as the documents and writings pertaining to the founding of our Congregation, which were made commonly available for the first time after Vatican II, inspire us to do a new study in a climate free from any national bias of the original goals for which the community had been founded. Although this convention will be concentrating on the founding charism, this does not in any way diminish the creative contribution of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz who not only rescued Fr. Stanislaus's work from annihilation, but enriched it in new elements and provided a new impulse and drive. We call Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz's contribution a reforming charism. We will dedicate the Year of the Jubilee of the 100th Anniversary of Renewal and Reform of our Congregation, which is about to begin, to our reflection on it. In this way, the fruits of our reflection on the founding charism (our present convention) and the reforming charism (the historical and theological symposium in 2009), will offer us a synthesis of our charism in the coming years.

In our pursuit, we wish to be humble yet courageous. Our goal is to further strengthen our faithfulness to Jesus and the Gospel, to men and to our modern times; to the essential elements of the religious life and to the charism of our Congregation. This will be our way of following the path that the Church has indicated. We shall not exclude any motion or project, even possible changes to our Constitutions, should they lead to a more faithful realization of God's plan, conceived for us individually and communally in this stage of our history. Everything seems to indicate that our discernment of this sign of the times, which is the beatification of our Founder, will greatly influence our future.

I warmly welcome here each one of you. I thank you for coming and preparing your speeches. Participation in a convention requires great spiritual, intellectual, and physical effort. I thank you all in advance for the toil you undertook. Let us seek the will of God and let's not be afraid to follow any difficult or demanding path as long as it leads us to a greater faithfulness to Jesus, to the Gospels and to the our mission assigned by God in the Church and in the world.

Rome, December 4, 2008

*On the commemoration of Saint John of Damascus,
Doctor of the Eastern Church who, as early as in the 7th century,
gave praise to Mary as Immaculately Conceived.*

List of Abbreviations

Documents of the Vatican II

- AG Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church—*Ad Gentes*, 1965;
ChD Decree concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops—*Christus Dominus*, 1965;
LG Dogmatic Constitution on the Church—*Lumen Gentium*, 1964;
PC Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life —*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965;
PO Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests—*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1965.

Papal Documents

- CT John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, 1979;
DCE Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 2005;
EN Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii muntiandi*, 1975;
ET Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, 1974;
EV John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, 1995;
MC Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, 1974;
NMI John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 2001;
PDV John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 1992;
VC John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 1996.

Other Documents of the Apostolic See

- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997;
CCL *Code of Canon Law*, 1983;
MR Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae relations*, Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation For Bishops, 1978.

RdC Instruction: *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (Ripartire da Christo)*; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2002.

Marian Documents:

- C *Constitutions of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, Stockbridge, MA, 2006
- D *Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, Stockbridge, MA, 2006
- GI General Idea of the Congregation and Its Spirit, in: Instructions of Archbishop George, typeset
- IC *Inspectio cordis—Wejrzenie w głębi serca*, in: Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*, Warszawa 2007
- J George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, Stockbridge, MA, 2003
- NV Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Rule of Life (Norma vitae)*, Stockbridge, MA, 1980
- PRA *Prodromus Reginae Atrium—Zwiastun królowej sztuk*, in: Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*, Warszawa 2007
- T II *Testament II*, in: Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*, Warszawa 2007
- TDM Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God, (Templum Dei mysticum, Stockbridge, MA 2006.*

**INTERPRETATIONS
OF THE MARIAN CHARISM**

The Marians: Where Are You Coming from and where Are You Going? Ways of Interpreting the Founding Charism

On February 18, 2008, addressing the members of the Council for Relations between the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the Men's and Women's International Unions of the Superiors General gathered in the Consistory Hall, Pope Benedict XVI said: "Rediscovering the spirit of the origins, deepening the knowledge of the Founder or Foundress, has helped to impress upon the Institutes a promising new ascetic, apostolic and missionary impetus. There are long-established works and activities that have thus been revived with new nourishment; there are new initiatives of an authentic actualization of the Founders' charism. It is necessary to continue on this path, praying to the Lord that he will bring to fruition the work he has begun."¹

Rediscovering and interpreting afresh the founding charism, which must be realized today in a new manner, is the "homework" that all institutes must do to preserve their vitality and the timeliness of their beginnings.

Classification of Charisms

During the Second Vatican Council, a spark was re-enchanted in the Church: the realization that various charisms existed. The term "charism," which is now having quite "a career" [or becoming very popular] in the lay parlance, had survived primarily thanks to the ascetic and hagiographic literature. For this reason, I will begin with a brief historical sketch on this term and specify its usage and meanings.

¹ *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Council for Relations between the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the Men's and Women's International Unions of Superiors General*, Rome, February 18, 2008 (www.vatican.va).

“Charism” in the Bible

Biblical scholars unanimously agree that St. Paul used the term “charism” precisely the same way we’re doing it today: to define the gifts, which the Holy Spirit gave to men so they may serve God in the community of the faithful. This term is almost completely absent from the classic Greek or the mystery religions of the Hellenistic societies and its sporadic appearance is unrelated to the topic. In the biblical Greek, this word was used 17 times in the New Testament: 16 times by St. Paul and just once by St. Peter in his First Letter (4:10).

Admittedly, the word “charism” does not appear in the Old Testament, but we find many passages speaking about the presence of the Holy Spirit in persons carrying out special functions in the history of salvation and the special gifts imparted to such people. There is Moses who passed on the Divine Spirit by laying hands on Joshua; there are the judges Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, the kings Saul and David, and the prophets called “men of the spirit” (Hos 9:7).

In St. Paul’s letters, we find four listings of 20 different charisms (1 Cor 12:8-10; 1 Cor 12:28-30; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11). However, it seems as if the Apostle to the Nations claimed the right to making a complete list of the Spirit’s gifts which God had offered the faithful.

Describing the charisms present in the Corinthian community, St. Paul divides them into four groups:

- gifts of grace (*charismata*), to which he attributes all phenomena mentioned in this listing (1 Cor 12:4-31);
- spiritual gifts (*pneumata*), which are a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit: the wisdom of speech, knowledge, and faith (1 Cor 12:1; 14:1);
- gifts of service (deacon’s), which are strictly defined, permanent functions and tasks to be performed (1 Cor 12:5; 2 Cor 9:12);
- gifts of various manners of action (*energemata*), in which the power of God is particularly manifested (1 Cor 12:6).

In these charisms, the Apostle to the Nations sees the effectiveness of the action of Divine grace offered by the same Spirit to the individual faithful, regardless of their offices and functions in the Church. Charisms are granted in an individual and diversified manner, in order to enable the faithful to carry out a special mission or a special service essential for the life and growth of the entire Mystical Body (cf. 1 Cor 14:12; 1 Cor 12:4-11.12-27.28-31).

Saint Paul strongly emphasizes the fact that charisms, although granted as personal gifts to particular individuals, are not for their exclusive personal use: they are not to benefit the recipient alone. Charisms fulfill a social function: they are given with the communal good in mind, to enrich the community and to stimulate

its activity. Saint Paul even cautions that if those gifts are appropriated or put to improper use, they will become short-lived and fruitless and may be regarded as foolishness: “If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:1-3). He calls for vigilance and discernment of the gifts lest they might be overrated or ignored: “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thes 5:19-20).

Charisms may be provisional or long-lasting; they may be ordinary (general) or exclusive (special), depending on the mission or service their recipient must perform in the Church.

Charisms are not same as talents. While the latter are natural gifts and abilities strictly related to the person’s nature, charisms are supernatural gifts that God grants to the faithful in a totally free manner. The Holy Spirit influences a man, releases his energy so that he, using his natural talents and God-given abilities, may participate in the work of salvation according to the given charism and inseparably related to his special vocation.

The charism also differs from grace. Both terms have a common topical root (*charis*), which means a gratuitously performed good deed. However, grace has a more general character and applies to all gifts of God, while charism is a particular grace, a special gift granted in view of the common good, an enrichment of the community and a stimulation of the Church’s activity. In this case, the adjectives, “particular” and “special” defining grace as a gift, denote “distinctive characteristics,” and do not express the rarity or singularity of the gift. A grace may be granted occasionally, depending on the needs of the faithful, while the nature of charism involves a certain degree of continuity and stability. Grace is a gift that may be granted as a result of prayerful supplication. Charism is the consequence of God’s free offering. It cannot be extorted, nor foretold or procured in any way, but only accepted in docile obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Charism of the Religious Life

The official Church documents stopped using the term “charism” early on, although it was sporadically applied to some incidents of an extraordinary, miraculous, supernatural character, as well as to supernatural and transitory gifts and abilities, which the Apostles of the Early Church passed down by the laying on of hands.

After the First Vatican Council, references to the special gifts of the Holy Spirit granted in the Church began to also reappear in papal documents in regard to the establishment of new religious institutes, new ecclesial movements as well as special graces granted to saints in particular. However, it was the Second Vatican Council that initiated a profound theological reflection on charisms, using St. Paul's teachings. As to the means, which the Holy Spirit uses to guide and to sanctify the People of God, Vatican II deliberately separates sacraments and offices from charisms, emphasizing the essential role of the latter for the growth and renewal of the Church. In its teaching, the Council also stresses the universality and ordinariness of "special graces" and the equality of the faithful of all walks of life in the face of the actions and gifts of the Holy Spirit.²

The term "charism" is used 14 times in the documents of Vatican II, but not even once in relation to the religious life. Instead, there are comparable definitions such as "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit";³ "the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvelously working in the Church";⁴ "gifts ... differ according to the grace which is allotted to them";⁵ "according to his proper vocation";⁶ "original spirit";⁷ "their founders' spirit and special aims";⁸ and "according to the spirit of their founder".⁹ However, it did not take long for this term to be applied to the religious life.

Speaking before the members of General Chapters of the Congregation of Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Congregation of St. Louis de Montfort in 1969, Pope Paul VI used the phrase "charism of the founders" to define the special gift of the Holy Spirit granted to women and men to raise up new communities of Christian life and new forms of imitating Christ in the Church. Whereas in the Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* of 1971, he used three definitions: "the charisms of your founders,"¹⁰ "charism of the religious life,"¹¹ and "charisms of the various institutes,"¹² thus introducing it permanently into the official documents of the Teaching Magisterium. The papal teaching finds its continuation in the consecutive documents, such as: *La scuola cattolica* (March 19, 1977); *Mutuae relationes* (May 14, 1978), *Optines evangelicae* and *Dimensio*

² Cf. *LG*, 12.

³ *PC*, 1.

⁴ *LG*, 44.

⁵ *PC*, 8.

⁶ *ChD*, 33.

⁷ *PC*, 2.

⁸ *PC*, 2; *LG*, 45.

⁹ *AG*, 40.

¹⁰ *ET*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

contemplativa (August 12, 1980), *The Code of Canon Law* (January 25, 1983), *The Renewal of Religious Life* (May 31, 1983); *Redemptionis donum* (March 25, 1984); *Los caminos del Evangelio* (June 29, 1990); *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* (February 2, 1994); *Vita consecrata* (March 25, 1996), and *Ripartire da Christo* (May 19, 2002).

Describing the nature of the charism of the religious life, the Pope explains that “In reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.”¹³ This gift is a special calling to follow Christ on the road of the profession of the Evangelical Counsels, to imitate Christ “more precisely” and to dedicate oneself totally and sacrificially to God “who is loved most of all,” and to “the upbuilding of the Church and the salvation of the world.”¹⁴ The charism is given to serve the community of the entire Church and to strive for holiness and perfect love, while following this path. Through the charism of the consecrated life, the Church is able to better reveal to the world the “Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.”¹⁵ What is more: the charism of the consecrated life is a specific way of participating in the mystery of the Church and her sacramental nature.¹⁶

Founding Charism

The charismatic character of the consecrated life—as a particular grace of the Holy Spirit for the People of God—is revealed in its historic growth through the founding charisms (charisms of the founders). As I mentioned before, this term appears for the first time in 1969, with its fuller definition found in the Congregation’s document *Mutuae relationes* (11-12). It transpires that the founding charism is an exceptional gift of the Holy Spirit granted to select individuals and enabling them to found a community of consecrated life in the Church. Three basic elements define the founding charism. First, it is a personal gift that transforms its recipients and awakens their abilities, predispositions, and skills, thus preparing them for a special calling and mission in the Church. Second,

¹³ *ET*, No. 11.

¹⁴ *CCC*, can. 573, §1.

¹⁵ *LG*, 46.

¹⁶ Cf. *LG*, 44, 46; *MR*, 2.

this gift—although granted to a single person and non-transferable as such—is, however, not a personal but a communal gift, because it involves more than one person in the historic realization of God’s plan. Third, it is an ecclesial gift, because, through the mediation of the founder and the new community, it is being offered to the Church for her new dynamic development, growth in holiness, and the undertaking of new challenges in a constantly changing world.

It seems important to distinguish between a charism, which the founder has for his new community and his personal charism. In Italian this difference is marked by the use of the article: *di fondatore* [founder’s] or *del fondatore* [of the founder]. The first defines the person and the special gift granted by the Holy Spirit to be at the foundation of the new religious family, regardless of its future historic realization and characteristics of its spirituality. The other defines the specific matter of the charism of the founder that needs to be understood, accepted, interpreted and realized in a concrete historic situation. The personal gift is non-transferable, but what can be transferred is the specific path of the spiritual life of the disciples and the initial community, which are rooted in the so-called “founding experience.”

Four principal elements can be identified in this gift:

- 1) a special manner of perceiving and experiencing Jesus with a singular accent on some aspect of His mystery;
- 2) a singular manner of imitating Jesus and making Him present by practicing the evangelical counsels with an emphasis on their certain aspects;
- 3) specific paths of action, defined by the environment, outreach, and specific goal, the historical context of which influences the choice of means for its attainment;
- 4) a specific form of the communal life, which involves the current needs of the apostolate.¹⁷

It is necessary to emphasize that the founding charism’s authenticity is also manifested though “a certain element of genuine originality and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church. In its surroundings, it may appear troublesome and may even cause difficulties.”¹⁸ The charism does not guarantee a peaceful entry into any established situation, especially if it upsets the comfort of those who accepted the situation and either see no need for changes or believe them to be too risky.

¹⁷ MR 11, 12, 51.

¹⁸ MR 12.

The Charism of the Founder's Generation and the Charism of the Institute

The founding charism—as the experience of the Holy Spirit—must be passed on, shared and lived out together. For an institute to come into being, it needs disciples and companions, endowed with a special grace. The grace gathers them around the founder and lets them share in his spiritual experiences, calling, and initiative, so they may live by the same ideals and lay foundations for a future religious community. This grace may be called the charism of the first generation, the charism of the founder's generation, or the charism of the co-founders. It contains both the charism of the founder and the charism of his first disciples. It plays a very important role in the founding and development of the religious family of a singular, unique personality: it helps us to more precisely read the signs of the times, to specify the vision and the ideas, to construct the projected foundation, to inspire further plans of life and work, to create the framework of the community, and to define the domain of the apostolic work in the Church. In the track of the founder and his disciples' communal life, an unalterable spiritual nucleon of the charism is created, which makes it possible for this gift to express the potential of the original founding experience at various times and to survive amidst transitory things.

If the charism of the founder and the first generation is passed down from generation to generation, it becomes the charism of the institute. This is the gift of the Spirit who enables the members of the institute to faithfully read and update the founding charism, to bring it to life according to current needs and the understanding of their generation. On the one hand, this gift refers to the original idea and legacy of the founder and the first generation; while on the other hand, it allows drawing from the pool of sound tradition worked out throughout the history by various collective bodies (chapters, conventions, committees, councils) as well as single individuals. Goals and challenges which were timely during the founder's life may not be the only ones today, while the specific evangelical values that he practiced may not be exhaustive of the institute's charism. However, the continuity of the bond with the founder and faithfulness to the original idea are always essential. Thus, the charism of an institute is not static but a dynamic reality: it is characterized by evolution and movement. This evolution goes in two main directions: *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The first concerns the faithful imitation of Christ and striving for unity with Him. The second puts an emphasis on the openness to the Holy Spirit, active participation in the history of the world and acceptance of the new challenges of the time. Evolution and renewal will only be authentic when the institute realizes both of them in harmony.

The consecrated life is also enriched by so-called functional charisms related to a specific function or office. Formerly this gift was known as “the grace of

state.” The Catechism states: “Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the *graces of state* that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church.”¹⁹ The functional charism is the power of God that enables people to attend to their duties in such a manner that would produce good results, contribute to the glory of God, personal sanctification, and the good of others.

Essential Elements of the Founding Charism

The founding charism is worth being closely studied and described as it appears to a direct observer. Clearly, a founding charism is not unlike fingerprints: both are unique and inimitable; however, it does not mean that certain general factors and elementary rules are absent from the phenomenon of the founding charism.

Inspiration for the Cause

It seems that the entire incident of founding an institute begins with an inward impulse. This impulse won't let the founder rest and it prompts him to enter a new path in the Church that no one has walked before. This impulse indicates a special calling and an ensuing important task. This kind of impulse may be “sent” to everyone: to a man, a woman, a bishop, or a priest, to a bachelor or a family man, to a nun or a widow, to an old person or a young one, to a sinner or a saint. Naturally, this impulse is of a variable intensity and appears in different times and manners. Sometimes it comes quite unexpectedly and surprises its recipient. Other times it laboriously drills its way through the shell of doubt and skepticism: in this case, the realization of the gift, by which a person is distinguished, takes years to grow and to mature.

Elevated by faith to a higher level of conscience, this impulse, as an inspiration, becomes an undeniable obligation on its recipient. The inspiration is a supernatural gift bestowed only on chosen people. The Holy Spirit enlightens and awakes the mind of a prospective founder and makes him understand God's plans and intentions. The Holy Spirit tunes up this person's ears to receive messages on God's frequencies. He gradually opens this person's eyes and heart to the road and the goal before him, endows him with intuition for a proper reading of the signs of the times and makes his conscience more sensitive, his faith

¹⁹ CCC, 2004.

deeper, his courage stronger so that he may better understand that he is God's instrument, used in a new and unknown manner.

The various ways in which the founders experienced the Spirit may be divided into direct and indirect inspirations. To the first group we may attribute mystical visions, inward revelations, inner voices, spiritual movements that often come in prayer. The other group would contain specific historical circumstances, social and religious events, various external impulses and conditions (such as witnessing the tragedy of the sick and the poor, neglected youth or abandoned children). It may also be a meeting with someone whom the Lord uses to communicate His intentions to the founder, which would later become his inner light, intuition, vision, and challenge. However, in the founders' perception it is always the Divine intervention, which they invoke while looking back on their work and their history of spiritual experiences.

Understanding that founders are guided by the Holy Spirit is the foundation, on which they become convinced of their calling to create a new religious family. "To emphasize this Divine intervention, they do not hesitate to compare the riches of God's gift to their own poverty. The more noticeable their insignificance, the greater and freer is God's powerful action in them." In this way, they express their conviction of being only instruments, which God uses the way in which He pleases. Acting "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,"²⁰ the founders become men of the Spirit.

Turning to Christ and Thirsting for Holiness

The founding charism is always accompanied by a longing for perfection, a desire to change one's life and to improve oneself, a zealous thirst for holiness. It is the Holy Spirit who fosters the growth of this thirst, turns it to Christ, opens the people to His words, enables them to understand and accept them with special sensitivity and concreteness. Thus the founder becomes something like an interpreter of Christ's teachings for his times, which consequently makes him a "living Gospel." Prompted by the Spirit to lead a fully evangelical life, he strives to imitate Christ in His words and actions as faithfully as possible, thus becoming ever more "the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord".²¹ And thus, from the outset of the consecrated life until the present day, the Holy Scriptures have always been the first and most important "rule of life". In these powerful words, the Second Vatican Council recapped: "Since

²⁰ *PC*, 1.

²¹ *VC*, 19.

the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule".²² Becoming like Christ—chaste, poor, and obedient—is the communal foundation for imitating [Christ] for all people in the consecrated life. However, each founder, guided by the Holy Spirit, goes further, discovering in the Gospels his own treasure: a treasure especially precious and important, which later influences the spirituality, community, and mission “which accentuate and represent one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ”.²³ The 1994 World Synod of Bishops also emphasized it in the document “The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World—*Instrumentum laboris*”: “Discipleship, which seeks to imitate Christ and to live out in a particular fashion some of his words, appeared gradually under the influence of the Holy Spirit like a Gospel manifested in time and space” (43). Striving untiringly toward holiness is the great dynamic gift that enables the founder to maximize his life plan: to do more, or more precisely, to do better, to go further and deeper. The departing point for such an attitude is the abandonment of everything to Christ, placing Him above everything else in order to imitate Him more closely.

Striving for holiness goes along with an internal process of continuous conversion. It is the process of turning away from all sin and creating ever-expanding room in one’s heart for God in total submission to His will. Generally, ongoing conversion is a result of spiritual experiences and a consequence of gradually understanding one’s mission. It occurs in stages of different intensity and is usually preceded by one great conversion based on an individual encounter with Christ and a deep experience of God’s love. This is the reason why each founder possesses an acute sense of his own sinfulness and egotism, while he always feels a deep need for God’s mercy and its importance. Therefore, continuously striving for renewal and growth of the spirit, he also strives to give himself fully to God, to trust in Him, to love Him above all, and to serve Him unreservedly, faithfully fulfilling His mission.

The Power to Attract Disciples

The existence of the founding charism is further confirmed by an unusually strong power of attraction emanating from the founder. This particular grace endows him with some mysterious magnetism and it causes potential candidates for the founding generation to adhere to him. They are “sent” by the Holy Spirit

²² *PC*, 2a.

²³ *VC*, 93.

to gather round him and his idea, to live in spiritual communion and to contribute to the development and the maturation of the new institute.

This action of grace is made manifest in the founder's openness to other people, in his predisposition to read "other people's signals," in his protectiveness, in his ability to "transplant" his original inspiration and ideas, in his capability of influencing people, in his gathering and implementing "human power". It is the gift of discerning vocations and choosing candidates, "radiating paternity and fraternity"; it is an enthusiasm for God's causes, a zealotness in apostolic work, and an immunity from ill treatment.

Thanks to this "grace of attraction," the first cluster of disciples is formed, the germ of the future institute is sown. The founder's special role in the emerging institute transpires through his relations with the companions. He occupies the central place and is the binding element of reference for all. This first occurs when he becomes the leader of an informal group of initially "attracted" friends, and later when he appears as the creator and superior of the community.

The relations between the founder and his companions have been depicted in many ways: as a process of planting, as a spring, as a river, and as a construction. The founder has been depicted as a shepherd and as a father figure. The most frequent image is that of planting which points, above all, to the Lord's direct intervention at the onset: it was He who planted the seed of new life in His Church, out of which a tree developed and grows ever taller. In this very sense the image of a tree entered the Council documents: "as if on a tree which has grown in the field of the Lord, various forms of solidarity and community life, as well as various religious families have branched out in marvelous and multiple ways from this divinely given seed."²⁴ However, the oldest depiction is that of the father, which inscribes itself perfectly into the image of a religious family. These two pictures complement each other: "the family" underlines the horizontal (fraternal) bonds between the community members, while "the father" points out to the vertical (hierarchical) relations with the founder. The founder is the father who gathers his sons/disciples and passes on to them the legacy of the new family, his own example and rules, which specify the goals of the spirit, norms of life and governing.

Yet, all those pictures tell us the same thing: there are special bonds between the founder and his first companions based on faith, love, and mutual trust. All founders realize that God entrusted them with a specific and unique role and that no one can replace them in its fulfillment.

²⁴ *LG*, 43.

Immersing in a Specific Aspect of Christ's Mystery

An unusual experience of Christ's mystery lies at the base of the founding charism. Christ enchants, enraptures and attracts them with such power that nothing is able to impede them in realization of their vocation.

Fascinated by the person of Christ, the founders strove to imitate Him fully. At the same time, each of them was aware of his own special path which existed within the framework of all of the various Christian ways of imitating Christ. This path led the founders to find and contemplate a specific aspect of Christ's mystery. This truth may also be depicted as follows: all founders live and proclaim the entire Gospel; however, the Holy Spirit gives to each one the Gospel opened to a different page so that he and his disciples would go through time and through the world, carrying this opened book.

Thanks to this specific aspect of the selected Christ's mystery, founders are confident that they call to life a new institute within the Church, which is needed, original, and unique. They are sure that they create an original spiritual physiognomy, through which shines a fragment of Christ's image. This conviction is the principle element of the identity of the founder and his institute. Every new religious family is different from the other and each possesses its own profile, order, and spirit.

The most expressive characteristic of the identity is the definition of the special aspect of Christ's mystery. The inspiration, which the Holy Spirit gives to the founder, also sheds a stronger light on the specific fragment of the Gospels which the founder practices in his or her life. In this way, the Lord Jesus' specific features are reflected in it. For example: the poor and humble Christ of St. Francis differs from St. Dominic's Christ who teaches and prophesizes. Saint Alphonse's Christ, who evangelizes the poor and the abandoned, is unlike St. Ignatius's Christ, who fulfills the will of the Father in total obedience, or St. Adalbert's Christ, who serves the most poor.

This particular emphasis on some aspect of Christ's person or a single passage from the Gospels is not a selective, diminishing or abating approach. It serves as a key to interpret the entire Gospel; it is, in a way, an observation point, from which the entirety of Christ's work is contemplated. It is also a ray of light poured down, which allows one to more clearly see God's plan for the founder and his institute. And finally, it is the criterion for choosing the forms of future realization of the community's special mission.

Finding the Domain of Apostolic Work

Another gift of the Holy Spirit, common to all founders, is the ability to properly read the signs of the times and to discern the current needs of the Church and the world. It is also the awareness of current challenges and the ability to point out solutions. Immersed in Christ and His Word, they weigh the facts and circumstances, as John Paul II said: “From familiarity with God’s word, they draw the light needed for that individual and communal discernment which helps them to seek the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times. In this way, they acquire *a kind of supernatural intuition*, which allows them to avoid being conformed to the mentality of this world, but rather to be renewed in their own mind, in order to discern God’s will.”²⁵

Looking at the world with the eyes of the spirit, they saw shortages and the new needs of the Body of Christ as well as social problems and ailments. They discovered the deep sense of historic events and the challenges of their times. Courageously, dynamically, and judiciously responding to circumstances, they sought a free apostolic domain, thanks to which they could contribute to the salvific mission of the Church.

It seems that rising up new forms of consecrated life has been always a precise response to the Church’s current needs. All models of consecrated life known throughout history— anchorites, cenobites, clerics regular, knightly orders, mendicants, canons regular, congregations, lay institutes—manifest a specific manner of responding to the new circumstances within the Church and the world. Some founders—especially those who lived at turning points in history, such as St. Benedict, St. Francis, and St. Ignatius—demonstrated in this aspect an extraordinary originality and insight. They brought important and radical changes into the religious life thus sowing the seeds of future great reforms in the Church and the world.

This ecclesial outlook on the founding charism lets us see its three strata that create a solid internal unity and enrich the Church. First, it brings Christ and His message closer in a new manner, as seen from the charism’s own perspective. Then, this new presence of Christ’s particular aspect begins to show itself as a response to specific needs of the times. And finally, it is the influence of the community’s spirituality and mission over its form. Showing how the Gospels may be applied to life and making Christ “closer to us,” the founders become authentic apostles as well as an actual response sought by their contemporaries. We’d venture to say that in his way, each founder is a forerunner of a new evangelization, which is—as John Paul II said, addressing the Council of the National

²⁵ *VC*, 94.

Conferences of Bishops of Latin America on March 9, 1983—“new in its zeal, methods, and expression.”

The Birth of an Institute as an Institution

Seeing that each charism is given in the Church and for the Church, it must be subordinate to the Church’s shepherds. Their duty is to discern and evaluate the charism. This is the reason why the founders strive to get their charism recognized by the Church. This ratification is a condition upon which the charisms may work for the communal good in the Church, in the entirety of their diversity and mutual complementarity.

Therefore, the important element of the founding charism is the founder’s concern for its being authorized by the Church, which means its legal recognition as a gift of God and its protection, as well as the official birth of an institute and giving it a name. Naturally, nothing occurs automatically, spontaneously or all by itself. It is necessary to petition and to endeavor for it, while ascertaining the institute’s quantitative and qualitative growth. It is necessary to secure the favor of the local Church, to seek the protection and the acceptance of the hierarchy, to manifest a steadfastness of intentions, and to prove its usefulness and originality. In regards to ratifying new foundations, the Church is cautious and careful in granting approval to the founders’ proposals. The whole process often takes years and thus the founders and the founding generation must arm themselves in patience and humility, obedience, steadfastness and determination.

Clashes between the charism and hierarchy ought to be seen in the light of the mystery of the cross. The following words may be applied to every founder: “The true relation between genuine charism, with its perspectives of newness, and interior suffering, carries with it an unvarying history of the connection between charism and cross, which, above every motive that may justify misunderstandings, is supremely helpful in discerning the authenticity of a vocation.”²⁶ It is actually in agreement with the Gospel: in is necessary to die to produce fruit. This process of “dying,” experienced by every founder (which may last throughout the good portion of his life and sometimes even after death) is important for the “life,” in other words: it helps to decide the development of the charism and the fruits that it will produce in the Church.

In spite of the “way of the cross” that the founders had to follow to get the Church’s approval, they always had, as John Paul II noted: “a *lively sense of the Church*, which they manifest by their full participation in all aspects of the

²⁶ MR, 12.

Church's life, and in their ready obedience to the Bishops and especially to the Roman Pontiff." The Pope particularly emphasizes in this context "the devotion of Saint Francis of Assisi for «the Lord Pope», the daughterly outspokenness of Saint Catherine of Siena towards the one whom she called «sweet Christ on earth», the apostolic obedience and the *sentire cum Ecclesia* of Saint Ignatius Loyola." In his opinion: "They are examples which consecrated persons need constantly to recall if they are to resist the particularly strong centrifugal and disruptive forces at work today."²⁷

The Church attributes such an importance to the rule or constitutions because they reflect the main features of the founder's spirituality. They are the best transmitters of the principle elements of the founding charism and the concrete experience of the community that lives out this charism for some time. Naturally, the entire patrimony is essential: counsels, conferences, sermons, letters, writings, the spiritual testimony of the founder and his first disciples, but the constitutions are most important of all. For they contain elements that decide about the identity of an institute. Among these are: the founder's thoughts on the essence of the charism (its nature, goals, spirituality), sound traditions, fundamental norms (religious vows, ascetic practices, discipline, communal life, formation, governing structures) and the essential characteristics of the apostolate. "The Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church. A greater regard for the Rule will not fail to offer consecrated persons a reliable criterion in their search for the appropriate forms of a witness which is capable of responding to the needs of the times without departing from an Institute's initial inspiration."²⁸

The Church continuously calls for faithfulness to the founders' charism and for abandoning all superficiality. For each institute this faithfulness is a key of importance: it warrants for its following the right road, ascertains the spiritual unity with the founder, contributes to the community's vitality and dynamism, authenticates the challenges, and helps the Church to grow in holiness. Sure enough, to remain faithful to the charism, it is necessary to get to know it. Thus, every effort is important (chapters, formation meetings, academic conferences, house meetings, academic research, etc.) which helps to go back to the "roots" and to rediscover and further specify with passion and love their essence and nature; to strengthen the identity, to deepen the spirituality and to improve the quality of apostolic work and the communal life.

According to John Paul II, this fidelity has to have three attributes: courage, dynamism and creativity²⁹: courage to overcome the fear of novelty, change,

²⁷ *VC*, 46.

²⁸ *VC*, 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

growth combined with readiness and the ability to do good even when it's costly and demands fortitude of spirit; dynamism in actions, vigor, power, flexibility, vitality; and creativity in a constructive and wise search for new forms of an efficient response to human needs and to the signs of the times of the modern world.

The Document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life *Ripartire da Cristo* [*Starting afresh from Christ*] reminds us that “It is fitting to remember the ability of holy foundresses and founders to respond to the challenges and difficulties of their times with a genuine charismatic creativity.”³⁰ The secret of their “success” lays in their openness and submission to the Highest Creator—the Holy Spirit: “Today, too, an openness and docility to the Spirit’s action, which is always new and creative, is required. The Spirit alone can keep alive the freshness and authenticity of the beginnings while at the same time instilling the courage of interdependence and inventiveness needed to respond to the signs of the times.”³¹

³⁰ *RdC*, 13.

³¹ *RdC*, 20.

***Sequela Christi* by the Marian Community**

We often speak about the consecrated life as a following of Christ or imitating Christ. We use this phrase without carefully thinking about its meaning. What is this *sequela Christi*? What meaning does it have specifically for us, the Marians?

I would like to open this conference by showing the biblical sense of the phrase “following Christ,” which must be the basis for all further reflections. Then I will attempt to show the synthesis of what the documents of the Teaching Magisterium say about *sequela Christi*. And finally we’ll examine the sources of the Marian tradition.

The Holy Scriptures

Following God as Shown in the Old Testament

Psalm 128 begins with: “Happy are you who fear the LORD, who walk in His ways!” These words are the best summation of the Old Testament’s teaching about following God. To follow God who is unfathomable and cannot be seen, means to walk in His ways—the paths on which He led His people.

The journey of Israel through the desert, which is the point of reference for the entire successive history of Israel, and which was regarded by the patristic catechism as the path of the Christian life, has been a model example of walking in the ways of God. Yahweh led His people through the desert in the daytime by means of a column of cloud and at night by means of a column of fire. Thus the end of the Book of Exodus states: “Whenever the cloud rose from the Dwelling, the Israelites would set out on their journey. But if the cloud did not lift, they would not go forward; only when it lifted did they go forward. In the daytime, the cloud of the Lord was seen over the Dwelling; whereas at night, fire was seen in the cloud by the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey” (Ex 40:36-38). Another passage of the Book of Exodus states that God announced the sending of His angel to go before the people and to pave the way for them

(see Ex 23:20, 23). They were forbidden to either stop on the way or to go further of their own accord. In the Book of Numbers, we read that, fearing the pagan people, the Israelites refused to enter Canaan. As a result of their rebellion, God orders them to remain in the desert for 40 years. Then the Israelites showed contrition and willingly declared their readiness to enter Canaan. God, however, does not trust their readiness, thus making them unable to enter the Promised Land.

Thus, *following* is an expression of entrusting oneself entirely to God, in other words: it expresses faith and obedience. The prophet Samuel would tell Saul: “Does the Lord so delight in holocausts and sacrifices as in obedience to the command of the Lord? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission than the fat of rams” (1 Sam 15:22). The attitude of obedience goes hand-in-hand with heeding the voice of God. The Israelites’ profession of faith, which is still a part of their daily prayer, starts with the exclamation: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!” (Dt 6:4), while in the Book of Isaiah, the Servant of the Lord, which is the person of Jesus Christ, says: “Morning after morning He opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back” (Is 50:4-5).

Following Christ as Shown in the New Testament

If following God in the Old Testament meant walking in the ways by which He led His people, in the New Testament it means to walk in the ways pointed out by the Son of God.

From the beginning of His public life, Jesus selects His disciples and tells them: “Come after me” (Mk 1:17). To follow after Christ means not only recognizing His teachings, but above all sharing His life and destiny. In the passage describing the appointing of the Twelve, the Evangelist says: “He appointed twelve [whom He also named apostles] that they might be with Him and He might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mk 3:14-15). Thus, the first reason for appointing the Twelve was not for their tasks, but keeping Jesus’ company, sharing His destiny.

The Gospels, especially the Synoptics, present Jesus as walking towards Jerusalem. Thus, in the New Testament, following Jesus or keeping Him company and sharing His destiny takes on a very clear paschal meaning, connected to the passion. The disciples who follow Jesus think about their personal benefits, which they will derive from their participation in His glory, but Jesus corrects their ideas. To Peter, who expects to be rewarded for giving up all he had, Jesus says that there is no one who has given up everything for His sake who will not

receive a hundred times more, including persecutions (see: Mk 10, 28-30). To James and John who directly requested to be seated at His right and left in the Kingdom of Heaven, He says: “You do not know what you are asking” (Mk 10:35).

It is very significant that the topic of following, coming from Jesus’ lips, appears in a particularly clear manner in the context of the cross. In the commissioning of the Twelve, Jesus says: “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:38). Having predicted His Passion for the first time, He utters these words: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25). A few days prior to His Passion, in His conversation with the Greeks, Jesus prophesizes His elevation on the cross, and then adds: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be” (Lk 12:26).

In the Gospel according to St. Luke, we encounter the scene describing Jesus’ meeting three candidates for discipleship, one of whom wishes to follow Him on his own accord, while the two others are called to it. It is very meaningful that this incident took place at the very beginning of Jesus’ road to Jerusalem, in other words—to the cross.

Talking with Peter at the Sea of Galilee after His Resurrection, Jesus assigns to him the authority to tend His sheep; and then come the words: “‘Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ He said this signifying by what kind of death He would glorify God. And when He said this, He said to him: ‘Follow me.’” (Jn 21:18-19). Here, we once again see the theme of coming after Christ appearing in the context of the cross.

For St. Paul and other authors of the Letters, to follow Christ means to become like Him in the mystery of His death and resurrection. As St. Paul tells us in his Letter to Romans, we’ve been predestined from eternity “to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). The path to becoming conformed to Christ begins at baptism, by which we are immersed in His (Rom 6:3), it deepens through our continuous imitation of Christ by voluntarily uniting with Him in His Passion, during which the power of the Resurrection is being fully disclosed. We are “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). “... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His footsteps” (1 Pt 2:21).

Just like the Apostles who had to grow in comprehension of the following of Christ as the participation in His Passion, so have the Christians who yield to the

temptation of attaining Christ's glory by taking shortcuts and omitting His cross. This was the problem of the Corinthian community, which St. Paul addressed in his Letter in very powerful words: "You have become kings without us! (...) For as I see it, God has exhibited us apostles as the last of all, like people sentenced to death, since we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and human beings alike. We are fools on Christ's account; but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clad and roughly treated, we wander about homeless and we toil, working with our own hands. When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently. We have become like the world's rubbish, the scum of all, to this very moment. I am writing you this not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. (...) Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:8-14.16). Here St. Paul calls us to imitate him; however, it is quite obvious that it is a matter of imitating Paul in the measure of his imitating Christ and for the sake of Christ.

The imitation of Christ is attained through faith based on His word only, not through outward signs. It is worthy of note that the biblical theology of imitating the Paschal Christ cannot be perceived exclusively as a characteristic of the consecrated life. It is a reality that concerns every Christian.

There are also passages on chastity, poverty, and obedience that contain the theme of imitating Christ or following after Christ. The clearest of all is the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians speaking about obedience. Saint Paul calls the recipients of his letter to have the same aims that Jesus Christ had, and then he sings a hymn to Christ humbled and elevated, which says that Christ was obedient to death, even a death on the cross (see Phil 2:8). Two passages speak about poverty in the context of coming after Christ. Jesus' words to the rich young man connect giving up everything with coming after Him: "Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor (...); then come, follow me" (Mk 10:21). Those words also have a paschal aspect, being spoken in the context of His being about to enter Jerusalem. Instead, the texts speaking of chastity required for the Kingdom of God lack clear references to imitating Christ. Rather, they are dominated by the theme of freedom from earthly attachments (i.e. 1 Cor 7). The Revelation to St. John speaks of the chaste followers of the Lamb (Rv 14:4); however, it seems that chastity must be understood metaphorically in this context as a symbol of being faithful to God. In biblical symbolism, idolatry is often descriptively presented as adultery (i.e. Ez 16).

To sum up, we may say that the Scriptures depict life in God's presence as a path. Following after Christ is a response to His call. It means entering into a close relationship with Him and following in His footsteps. The path in the footsteps of Christ is a paschal one and it leads to the glory of the Resurrection

through the kenosis of the cross. In the New Testament, this passion/paschal dimension of following after Christ is so strong and clear that it must be taken as the basis for every reflection about the *sequela Christi*.

The *Sequela Christi* in the Contemporary Documents of the Teaching Magisterium

We are going to attempt here a synthesized presentation of the passages reflecting the various ways in which the theme of following after Christ is presented in the Magisterium's documents. The following documents have been studied: The Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* of Vatican II (1965), the *Rite of Religious Profession* (1970), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the Directive of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life *Congregavit nos in unum* (1994), the Exhortation of John Paul II *Vita consecrata* (1996), and the directive of the Congregation *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002).

In those documents the theme of the *sequela Christi* appears in several contexts:

- religious consecration through vows;
- communion with Christ;
- mission in regards to the world;
- the *sequela Christi* as a response to anticipated grace;
- eschatology;
- the passion and paschal dimensions.

Naturally, the above approaches to treat the topic are not singled out, but interconnected. They are different angles of looking at the same reality.

The *Sequela Christi* through Religious Consecration

This is decidedly the most frequent aspect. It has been emphasized that the consecrated life means a special manner of following Christ by choosing His way of life. This is a following of the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ. The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, particularly emphasizes this aspect. It treats the matter of religious consecration and the *sequela Christi* in the context of the Trinitarian life and the communion of love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. This aspect deals not only with the matter of the vows, but also with the fraternal life: "The *chastity* of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with *an undivided heart* (cf. 2 Cor 7:32-34), is a reflection of the *infinite*

love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Rom* 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.

Poverty proclaims that God is man’s only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, “though He was rich ... became poor” (2 Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of that *total gift of self*, which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in His redemptive death.

Obedience, practiced in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father’s will (cf. Jn 4:34), shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons.

The consecrated life is thus constantly called to enrich the gift of the evangelical counsels with an ever-stronger and more genuine love lived out in the *Trinitarian* dimension: love *for Christ*, which leads to closeness with Him; love *for the Holy Spirit*, that opens our hearts to His inspiration; love *for the Father*, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life. The consecrated life thus becomes a proclamation and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life.

Also the *fraternal life*, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims *the Father*, who desires to make all of humanity one family. It proclaims *the Incarnate Son*, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by His example, His prayer, His words and above all His death, which is the source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered humanity. It proclaims *the Holy Spirit* as the principle of unity in the Church, wherein He ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities.”¹

Earlier in the exhortation, the Pope writes: “The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share his experience as the chaste, poor and obedient One, call for and make manifest in those who accept them *an explicit desire to be totally conformed to Him*. ‘Living in obedience, with nothing of one’s own and in chastity,’ consecrated persons profess that Jesus is the model in whom every virtue comes to perfection. His way of living in chastity, poverty and obedience appears as the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called *divine*, for it was embraced by Him, God and man, as

¹ *VC*, 21.

the expression of his relationship as the Only-Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.”²

The *Sequela Christi* as a Communion with Christ

Following after Christ implies a communion of love with Him. If we are to omit this aspect, our following after Christ and accepting His way of life through religious consecration would be nothing but an outward *imitatio*. As the instruction *Starting Afresh From Christ* emphasizes: “... consecrated life is a special following of Christ, (...) which implies a particular communion of love for Christ who has become the center of their life and the continual source of every initiative. (...) The whole life of consecration can be summarized by this point of departure alone: *the evangelical counsels* make sense only in as much as they help to safeguard and foster love for the Lord in full openness to his will.”³

The *Sequela Christi* as a Response to the Call of Christ and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

In the present day, the primacy of the grace of God and the priority of His initiative in regards to all human actions are underlined more strongly than before. Following Christ is possible only when it is based on the power of a preceding call. The Church documents emphasize not only the Christological aspect (Christ’s “Come after me”), but also the pneumatological one. This is the Holy Spirit who lets us recognize the voice of Christ and this is the Holy Spirit who enables us to follow Christ.⁴ The role of the Holy Spirit is emphasized, for example, in the Consecration Prayer of the *Rite of Profession of Religious Vows*: “The voice of the Spirit has drawn countless numbers of your children to follow in the footsteps of Your Son. (...) Send them the Spirit of holiness; help them to fulfill in faith what you have enabled them to promise in joy.”

The Missionary Dimension of Following Christ

Jesus Christ came so that His followers might have life and have it more abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10). Christ’s mission is carried out by the Church. The

² *VC*, 18.

³ Cf. *RdC*, 22.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid*, 20.

Church exists to evangelize, and people called to the consecrated life are not excluded from this mission. One of the characteristics of our times is a renewal of the awareness of the universality of the missionary vocation. This aspect is very clearly emphasized in the Church documents speaking about the consecrated life.

The instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ* states: “In imitation of Jesus, those whom God calls to follow him are consecrated and invited to continue his mission in the world. Indeed, consecrated life itself, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes a mission. The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in history for the salvation of all. Open to the needs of the world as seen through the eyes of God, they point to a future with the hope of resurrection, ready to follow the example of Christ.”⁵

To this, John Paul II adds an important specification in *Vita consecrata*: “Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all. Thus it can be said that consecrated persons are ‘in mission’ by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their Institute. When the founding charism provides for pastoral activities, it is obvious that the witness of life and the witness of works of the apostolate and human development are equally necessary: both mirror Christ who is at one and the same time consecrated to the glory of the Father and sent into the world for the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: *fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission*. Thus, men and women Religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the Institute’s specific mission.”⁶

The Eschatological Aim of Following after Christ

The consecration and the mission of religious order members are oriented in an eschatological direction. Being reminded of this is very important in the context of the horizontalism which is so frequent today even in the Church [a theory

⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁶ *VC*, 72.

or system that advocates the creation, development and maintenance of social structures for the equitable distribution of power—related to anarchism—note of the proofreader]. John Paul II speaks very explicitly about it in *Vita consecrata*, while reflecting on the Gospels’ passage describing the Transfiguration (see Mt 17:1). The Transfiguration is, on one hand, the foretelling of the tragedy of the Cross; and on the other hand—the glory of the Resurrection. The Pope writes: “It is the duty of the *consecrated life* to show that the Incarnate Son of God is *the eschatological goal towards which all things tend*, the splendor before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart. In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one’s whole heart, of loving him ‘more than father or mother, more than son or daughter’ (cf. Mt 10:37) — for this is required of every disciple — but of living and expressing this *by conforming one’s whole existence to Christ* in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection, to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms.”⁷

The Paschal Dimension of the *Sequela Christi*

I left this dimension of following Christ for last not because it is the least important one, but because it seems to be the summation of all of the above-considered aspects, as well as a necessary context for the remaining dimensions.

The paschal mystery is inscribed into the very essence of the religious consecration. We read in the Catechism: “In the Church, which is like the sacrament—the sign and instrument—of God’s own life, the consecrated life is seen as a special sign of the mystery of redemption. To follow and imitate Christ more nearly and to manifest more clearly his self-emptying is to be more deeply present to one’s contemporaries, in the heart of Christ. For those who are on this ‘narrower’ path encourage their brethren by their example, and bear striking witness «that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes.»”⁸

In the *Rite of Religious Profession*, the alternative formula of petition for the candidate’s admission to the novitiate is thus given in the text: “Drawn by God’s mercy, we have come here to learn your way of life. We ask you to teach us to follow Christ crucified and to live in poverty, obedience and chastity. Teach us to persevere in prayer and penance, in the service of the Church and of humankind.

⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁸ CCC, 932.

Teach us to be one with you in heart and mind. Help us to live out the Gospel every day of our lives. Teach us your rule and help us to learn to love our brothers as Christ commanded us.”

***The Sequela Christi* in the Marian Tradition**

Having examined the idea of coming after Christ as given in the Holy Scriptures and documents of the Teaching Magisterium, let us see how this thought is presented in the tradition of our Congregation. In the first place, it must be said that the Marian sources do not contain any new or totally original interpretation of this matter. Indeed, it would be highly suspicious, should the Marian tradition contain some radically new ideas as compared with the biblical and Magisterium’s teachings. However, it is worthwhile to find out how the Marian sources reflect the idea of following Christ and if any of the above-mentioned aspects are being presented in our tradition in some special way. In *Vita consecrata*, John Paul II invited us to make such a reflection, urging all consecrated persons to rethink their Constitutions and Rules, which contain the program of following Christ.⁹

Let us examine in turn three sources of the Marian tradition: Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, our Founder; Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, our Renovator; and our current Constitutions.

***The Sequela Christi* in the Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński**

For this section, I mainly used excerpts from Fr. Andrzej Pakuła’s Doctoral thesis entitled *Religious Spirituality According to Stanislaus Papczyński and the Early Tradition of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*.

Four aspects seem to be particularly characteristic of our Founder: centering our formation on Christ—Christ as the model for the consecrated man; the dynamism of the relationship with Christ; the passion and paschal dimension of following Christ; and the eschatological dimension.

Christ as the Model of Consecrated Men

Blessed Stanislaus decidedly places Christ in the center of religious spirituality, presenting Him as the norm of the consecrated life. Christ is, above all, the Bridegroom, with whom the Religious are united through the vows and whom

⁹ *VC*, 32.

they must please by their way of life. For the Religious, Christ is the Master, but also a kind, divine, loving Teacher. He is the Master of evangelical perfection who not only teaches the truth, but confirms and fulfills it in His life. He is also the Master of the virtues who, by His word and example, shows us what they are and how they must be practiced. In Him the wisdom and sense of the religious life are contained, and especially the example of living by a true love for God and neighbor.

The Dynamism of the Relationship with Christ

Along with demonstrating Christ as the model, Blessed Stanislaus also emphasized the dynamic relationship of love that arises between a Religious and Christ. He frequently quoted passages from the New Testament containing Christ's calling to follow Him; out of which he drew conclusions for real life. It means that Fr. Stanislaus dynamically understood the need to follow after Christ as a path and to walk in His footsteps which lead a Religious to transformation and to becoming like Christ. The inner motivation that urges one to imitate Christ has its source in the actions of Christ Himself and of the Holy Spirit.

Our Founder also stresses the moral dimension of imitating Christ. Coming after Christ is a path of personal conversion. It also has a dynamic character similar to a path which passes from the basics marked by sin, faults, and imperfections towards becoming like Christ. Thus, the touchstone of a true coming after Christ is the authenticity of one's conversion.

The Passion and the Paschal Dimension of Following Christ

Following after Christ is inseparable from a participation in the mystery of the cross. Although devotion to the Suffering Christ was popular in Blessed Stanislaus's times, it seems that an important role in the matter was played by the Founder's personal experience, especially during the times of his studies, his life in the Piarist Order, and during the founding period of the Marian Order. The idea of following the Suffering Christ is clearly depicted in Fr. Founder's writings and presented as a characteristic feature of the spirituality and as its criterion. In his *Inspectio cordis* Fr. Stanislaus writes: "God wishes the Religious who serve Him, to follow Him in suffering. They have to carry not only courageously but joyfully whatever cross may be imposed on them."¹⁰

The passion is an inseparable aspect of the religious vows. This characteristic of the passion is specifically emphasized in the *Norma vitae* along with the discussion of the vow of obedience. Blessed Stanislaus recalls St. Paul's image of Christ humbled and obedient until His death on the cross (see Phil 2:8)

¹⁰ *IC*, p. 903 (footnote is given after the Polish source).

and presents Him as an incentive and an example of obedience. The sign of the greater perfection of a Religious—writes Fr. Papczyński—is his inner readiness to guiltlessly suffer with Christ, even when he’s being unjustly treated by his superiors.

In his *Inspectio cordis* Fr. Stanislaus says: “You’ll find out easily enough if you are indeed following Christ, should you ever bear His cross and sometimes give yourself up for the love of Him. Because remaining in the world of possessions, riches, merits, relations and close friends has no great value for attaining perfection and the summit of all holiness, unless you leave yourself and your will behind by joining a religious order. Christ did not save the world by simply leaving heaven, stepping down to earth, and taking on a human body. It was because He was put to death while carrying out the will of the Father.”¹¹

The idea of suffering for the sake of suffering is totally alien to Blessed Stanislaus. Following after the Crucified Christ is necessary for the spiritual transformation of man and his becoming like Christ. Similarly, the cross is not the goal, but a path to the glory of resurrection.

In his *Inspectio cordis* Fr. Stanislaus writes that the Religious fulfill the sense of their vocation only if, having become like Christ, they would die for everything that is not of God, so that they may only live for God, just like Christ. Recalling the example of St. Paul’s conversion, Blessed Stanislaus emphasizes that it is the process of passing from a life lived according to one’s own will, to a seeking and fulfilling the will of God. Somewhere else in the same work he underlines the fact that people who have accepted Christ’s cross out of love will be seated in His Kingdom at His right side.

The Evangelical Dimension of the *Sequela Christi*

The evangelical dimension—to use a modern phrase—is inseparably linked with becoming like Christ and following the road of the cross. The religious life is following after Christ in total dedication to the Father and out of love given entirely for the salvation of man. Sharing in the work of salvation is one of the basic signs of truly becoming like the Master. It is not only a matter of actively proclaiming the Gospels, but essentially of making Christ present by giving the witness of one’s own life.

Imitating Christ is cooperating in the work of salvation of every person. Just like his Master, the disciple must have in him the desire for redeeming man. In *Inspectio cordis*, Blessed Stanislaus says: “For your sake, your Savior, the greatest Shepherd, dedicated His life, gave up His spirit. He has done it largely in order that you, once you have been redeemed, would not hesitate to give up

¹¹ Ibid., p. 987.

your life for His sake and your neighbor's. This is what He asks of you when He says: "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Ex 25:40). On what mountain?—On Golgotha. What has been shown?—Christ, the Son of God, crucified for your sake and the sake of the entire human race."¹²

The *Sequela Christi* according to Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz

Blessed George's lifetime passion was the spreading of the Kingdom of God, which arose from his deep union with Christ. For this reason, he gave his confreres a two-fold goal: striving for holiness and evangelization. The way to holiness is the imitation of Christ, in which one has to discover in oneself the living image of the whole Christ. Since the goal of Christ's life on earth was to introduce the Kingdom of God, thus it has to become the goal of the life of a Religious united with Christ.

In the *Guiding Idea*, Blessed George thus writes about imitating Christ: "May they strive for perfection by imitating our Lord, Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. May they contemplate His private and secret life and the public and apostolic one, as well as His life dedicated to prayer and work, reward, and sacrifice. May they make efforts not only to obtain some of Christ's virtues, but rather to get to know Him better, to be imbued with His spirit, to conform their will to His and their lives to His so that they may discover within themselves a living image of Christ."¹³

An entry made on October 15, 1910, in his *Journal* perfectly reflects the evangelical goal of following Christ: "Therefore, if I really want to follow in the footsteps of the saints, I too must make the goal of Christ's life my own. And the instruments and means that He used must become mine as well. What did Jesus want most of all?—To bring the Kingdom of God into this world, i.e., our holy Church. What way did He follow to achieve this? The way of complete self-sacrifice—of hard work, humiliation, hardship, persecution, and suffering. He followed this road up to the point of laying down His life, of being nailed to a cross. What follows, then?—*That each of us must freely and with complete self-denial devote and consecrate himself entirely to the Church.*"¹⁴

The above fragment of the *Journal* brings us also to the passion aspect of both following Christ and of evangelization. The mystery of the cross was present in the life of Blessed George very strongly and in various ways. Father Mat-

¹² IC, p. 922 (footnote is given after the Polish source).

¹³ *General Idea*, 11.

¹⁴ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, p. 32, Stockbridge, 2003.

ulewicz did not run away from suffering, but he perceived its profound meaning in his own mission and in the mission of the Congregation. For him, the cross is not something to be borne passively, but needs to be sought out. The cross is inseparable from following Christ, because Christ walked the way of the cross. At the same time, the cross is also inseparable from the proclamation of the Gospel. Naturally, it does not mean the morbid pleasure of remembering old sufferings, for Blessed George was not an adherent of any special mortification practices. To him, taking up of the cross primarily meant accepting toils, challenges, and persecution related to the spreading of the Kingdom of God. The reason for taking up the cross is above all the love of Christ and the apostolic zeal that is derived from it.

He thus writes about it in the *Instructions*: “When we think about Christ toiling and suffering for our sake in His earthly life, we must allow the desire to toil and suffer for Christ to enrapture us. Because the perfect following of Christ demands that a soul, ignited by the love of God and in abnegation of itself, put all its talents and strength, its riches and even its life into concern for the greater glory of God. May it magnanimously forget itself and undergo various trials, not sparing any efforts or dodging any dangers for the sake of God’s cause. May it not shun difficulties and strive to overcome courageously all obstacles in order to bring Christ everywhere and to make Christ known, loved and recognized as the Lord everywhere.”¹⁵

In his *Journal*, he recorded the following prayer: “My Lord and my God, I offer You my work, troubles, worries, all my sufferings, trials, and crosses. Grant, O God, that for You and for Your Church I may work, labor, and suffer even more. Grant that I may be consumed, like the candle on the altar, by the heat of labor and the fire of love for You and for Your Church.”¹⁶

The Marian Constitutions

Rules and Constitutions are a program for members of a particular institute for following Christ, just like John Paul II said in the above-quoted fragment of the Exhortation *Vita consecrata*. How then do the Marian Constitutions reflect the theme of imitating Christ?

¹⁵ J. Matulewicz, *De meditantis Christi vitae mysteriis, Instructiones*, Archiwum Generalne Marianów w Rzymie, nr 10, s. 22-23. Cyt. za: S. Matulis MIC, *Marianie za błogosławionego Jerzego Matulaitisa-Matulewicza* (Studia marianorum 11), Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, Warszawa-Lublin 2008, s. 93 (footnote is given after the Polish source).

¹⁶ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, p. 132, Stockbridge, 2003.

Basically, in our Constitutions the aspect of the imitation of Christ is very close to what we find in Blessed George's writings. The theme of imitating Christ and coming after Christ mostly appears in relation to religious consecration. Christ is the Master and model for both the entire Congregation and for each individual member. Evangelical perfection, as defined by §5 of the Constitutions, may be attained by courageously and faithfully following in the footsteps of Christ. Paragraph 144 (Part IV, Formation) points to Christ as the Highest Master of the formation of souls. Seeking Christ and becoming like Him are attained through reflection on the word of God and active participation in the life of the Church.¹⁷

Becoming like Christ is achieved through practicing the evangelical counsels.¹⁸ Vowed chastity means following after Christ who is the only One needed;¹⁹ while poverty and obedience are shown as sharing in the poverty and obedience of Christ.²⁰

At the same time, imitating Christ is inseparable from our apostolic goal. It has been emphasized, in the spirit of Blessed George Matulewicz, that striving for evangelical perfection and concern for the salvation of people have to become one goal, one aspect which supplements the other (C §11). The process of following Christ and becoming like Him has an evangelical character. As it is stated in §5, which is based on Blessed George's *Instructions*: "They [the members] strive to know, love and imitate Christ, (...) to be imbued with and directed by the spirit of Christ, to spread the Kingdom of Christ with all their zeal and effort."

Religious consecration itself confronts the world with the mark of a visible sign of the Kingdom of God.²¹ Vowed chastity confronts the world with a living, eschatological sign of the future world.²² Poverty also has the character of giving witness, although this topic wasn't further developed.²³ Obedience works towards a union with Christ's salvific will.²⁴ This ultimately means our complete dedication to serving all of our brethren in Christ.²⁵ Our apostolate has its roots in unity with Christ who desires the salvation of all. For this reason, §115, which opens the part dedicated to the Apostolate, emphasizes that all of the faithful are called to participate in this salvific mission based on the power of their baptism

¹⁷ *Constitutions*, 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43. 55.

²¹ Cf. *Constitutions*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

and confirmation. Religious consecration and priestly ordination are just additional reasons for undertaking this duty.

The passion and paschal dimension of following of Christ, which is the basic element of the Holy Scriptures and clearly present in the writings of Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George, is also explicitly stated in our Constitutions. This topic is treated in a way which is very similar to Blessed George's approach—it is united with the evangelical aspect. It is particularly emphasized by §26 of the Constitutions: "Faithfully and courageously following Christ, let each one be ready, whenever necessity demands it, to suffer and endure heat, cold, thirst, hunger, lack of the necessities of life, hardships, injuries, contempt and humiliations as often as these seem to contribute to the greater glory of God, the spiritual benefit of others and the salvation of their own souls." In the very same spirit, we must understand §12 of the Constitutions, which speaks of the marks of a true Marian: "They should especially try to excel in a spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice; in humility, piety and industriousness; in a lively, firm faith and fervent charity; in a mutual fraternal union and perfect obedience to the Superiors; in an apostolic spirit and active zeal."

It seems to be possible to sum up the Marian tradition in this manner: the *sequela Christi* means a living relationship with Christ leading to a gradual transformation of life and a total resemblance to Christ. Communion with Christ leads to a total dedication of one's life to Christ's salvific mission, which is the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Priority of the Spiritual Life

The most recent post-conciliar teaching of the Church regarding the religious life especially emphasizes the primacy of the spiritual life by frequently dedicating particular sections to this matter. This is most evident in such documents as *Vita consecrata* and *Ripartire da Christo*. They contain clear statements of an obligatory nature, e.g.: “The spiritual life must therefore have first place in the program of Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality. Apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth in personal and communal commitment. It is precisely *the spiritual quality of the consecrated life* which can inspire the men and women of our day, who themselves are thirsting for absolute values. In this way the consecrated life will become an attractive witness.”²⁶ The same teaching, although in a more developed form, may be found in *Ripartire da Christo*, whose third chapter is entitled *Spiritual Life in the First Place*. It must be said at the outset, that when speaking about the matter of the primacy of the spiritual life, neither of these documents defines it, perhaps assuming that the matter is generally understood. However, by reading and entering into the spirit of the document *Ripartire da Christo*, especially for the benefit of our reflections during this convention, it will become possible (and probably necessary) to define and to comprehend the meaning of the spiritual life. In this way, it will become easier to grasp what the modern Church means when she speaks of the primacy of the spiritual life, as well as to understand what the priorities should be.

What is a Spiritual Life?

Basing only on the above-quoted documents, it is possible to deduce that the spiritual life is “life in the Holy Spirit;” it is “an openness and docility to the Spirit’s guidance,” in order to follow Christ more closely, to enter into intimacy with

²⁶ VC, 93.

Him, and to fully share in His mission. It is an experience similar to the experience of the founders at the foundation of a religious institute—“their experience of the Spirit must not only be preserved by those who follow them, but must also be deepened and developed. Today, too, an openness and docility to the Spirit’s action, which is always new and creative, is required. The Spirit alone can keep alive the freshness and authenticity of the beginnings, while at the same time, instilling the courage of interdependence and inventiveness needed to respond to the signs of the times.” The spiritual life is also a *consent*: “We must therefore allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to a constantly renewed discovery of God and of his Word, to a burning love for God and for humanity and to a new understanding of the charism which has been given.”²⁷ To compare: other documents define the spiritual life as “a life enlivened and led by the Spirit toward holiness or the perfection of charity,”²⁸ or even as “a life in Christ.”²⁹ Therefore, baptism is at the foundation of the spiritual life, God’s sharing Himself in the Holy Spirit; a human experience of the power and the guidance of the Spirit, and a voluntary acceptance of God’s life combined with a growing in the Holy Spirit. All of this is needed to reproduce Christ’s principles in ourselves and to be like Him in order to become sons of the Son in the Spirit and thus to establish a close, heartfelt, and filial union with the Father after the example of Christ.

The Primacy of the Spiritual Life is the Primacy of Living with Christ in the Spirit, for the Father

As we can see, the emphasis on the primacy of the spiritual life is an emphasis on the priority of the Holy Spirit, that is, on the grace, the charism, the imitation of Christ and the relationship with Him in the Holy Spirit. It is not the primacy of something subjective, some personal, internal experiences of a religious order member, but rather the primacy of what is objective, in other words—God and His grace, an externally manifested faith and a dedicated love. The primacy of the spiritual life is nothing less than giving God such a priority in our personal and communal life that it may be defined as *the key principle of the Christian vision of life*. It has been extremely well articulated in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*: “If in the planning that awaits us, we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: *the primacy of grace*. There is

²⁷ *RdC*, 20.

²⁸ *PDV*, 19.

²⁹ *PDV*.

a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that ‘without Christ we can do nothing’ (cf. Jn 15:5). It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness.”³⁰

Consequently, the primacy of spirituality understood as living by the Holy Spirit and growing in the Holy Spirit strives, on the one hand, to deepen one’s intimacy with Christ and to share in His mission, and on the other hand—to imitate Him, that is to recreate Christ’s way of life in oneself in all of its aspects. This can be realized thanks to the Holy Spirit who acts in the community of the Church and in the hearts of the people who are obedient to the Spirit. “It is the Spirit who allows us to recognize the Lord in Jesus of Nazareth (cf. 1 Cor 12:3) who makes us hear the call to follow him and who unifies us in him. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Christ (cf. *Rom* 8:9). It is the Spirit who, making us sons and daughters in the Son, gives witness to the paternity of God, makes us aware of our status as sons and daughters and gives us the courage to dare to call him “Abba, Father” (*Rom* 8:15). It is the Spirit who instills love and gives birth to communion. (...) It is such an interior newness, entirely animated by the strength of the Spirit and reaching out to the Father, seeking the Kingdom, which will allow consecrated persons to *start afresh from Christ* and be witnesses of his love.”³¹ Therefore, the call of the recent documents of the Church to give primacy to the spiritual life is above all a reminder of the origins of the spirituality contained in the very essence of the religious vocation. It is an appeal to give priority to following the path of becoming like Christ, which would then become a life in the Holy Spirit and according to the Spirit for the glory and love of the Father. Intriguing questions arise which are still unanswered: how did our Blessed Founder regard this primacy? How (if ever) was this matter treated by our tradition? How did our Renovator, Blessed George Matulewicz and our current Constitutions treat this matter? And finally, we must ask ourselves: which are the proper Marian means to implement this primacy or what is it that impedes us from living in the manner which is described above?

³⁰ *NMI*, 38.

³¹ *RdC*, 20.

The Primacy of the Spiritual Life versus Contemplation and Action Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński's Views

Discussing the story of Martha and Mary (cf. Lk 10:38-42) in his *Inspectio cordis*,³² Father Founder deals with the matter of the mutual relations between contemplation and action, something which has been ongoing since the origins of the religious life. We know that it has not only been debated on a theoretical level, but it has also been applied in practice in the daily life of religious order members, and this has led to the production of a concrete definition of the place of the spiritual life in both the theory and the practice of the religious life. We must add that such debates are present in our Marian life also, although they may not be thus understood or articulated.

Blessed Stanislaus follows the traditional way of thinking expressed by St. Augustine, which sees in the person of Martha all those people who lead an active life, while in Mary—all those given to the contemplation. We should note at once that our Founder does not present the contemplative life as a more perfect form of the Christian life; instead he strives to balance both aspects. He writes: Jesus “loves the contemplatives with the same love as those who lead an active life, provided that the former and the latter honor Him with the same disposition through their service and their works. He rewards the people given to praying constantly the same gift of blessing as those in the service of their neighbor. He used to impart the same beatific vision to the hermits, dedicating themselves to reflection, as to those working in His Vineyard.”³³ This approach is worth remembering as a somber evaluation of the religious life, because the circumstances in which a Religious may find himself—be it apostolic works or spiritual exercises—have a subjective character. They are only the means of manifestation of the religious life, which depend on vocation and character of the religious institute. Father Stanislaus seeks to demonstrate that it is not the practices (religious means) that redeem and sanctify, but Christ Himself when He becomes the true center of the life of a Religious, his point of reference, his domain of life, and his nourishment. However, according to Father Founder, the religious order members involved in apostolic works are in a special position. Although their form of life is regarded as the most similar to the life of Christ and the Apostles, yet they are exposed to the danger of one-sidedness and overvaluing their activities. In his opinion, to give oneself to fervent pastoral work is to follow in the footsteps of Christ and the Apostles who travelled through towns and villages carried by the desire to proclaim the Gospel to all creation. However, if

³² Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, *Inspectio Cordis*, p. 905-907.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 906.

this is detached from the life-giving connection to the Father in the Holy Spirit sustained by God's grace following the example of Christ, this work becomes merely fruitless activism. Because the true fruit is a spiritual one which comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, of which the Apostle is no more than a tool. At the same time, the Religious himself is the first to suffer spiritual damage, and that becomes a sign of sorts: when he lives with God and in God, he becomes a sign of God's power and His close proximity in human life. But should he cut himself off from God and start acting willfully, he'd also be a sign to the others, but this time it would be a sign of spiritual death born out of sin and ultimately a sign that there is no life, joy or happiness without God. Consequently, right at the beginning of his *Norma vitae*, Blessed Stanislaus thus writes: "First, consider diligently and assiduously what the aim of your Congregation is. [It is] the one that all the Orders have in common with you: the greater increase of God's glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection. What does it profit a man, teaches the Savior, "if he gains the whole world, but suffers the detriment of his own soul?" (cf. Mt 16:26)"³⁴.

A life in which the first place is given to concern for "the greater increase of God's glory, and to care for your own salvation," is not possible without Christ's salvific and close presence in a Religious' personal life. Blessed Stanislaus makes it quite clear in his *Inspectio cordis*, when he comments on Martha's attitude: "There is a lesson for you: you must frequently unite and come into Christ's presence through ongoing interior recollection, even though you may be driven to distraction by your numerous tasks. Just as in the case of the solicitous Martha or of very busy people, God likes to be present and He rejoices, when room is made for Him in a heart occupied with various matters."³⁵ So that "a heart occupied with various matters can be opened to Jesus,"—as our Founder puts it—a certain level of the spiritual life understood in the categories of the religious practices such as prayer, a basic level of asceticism, regular reception of the sacraments, etc., must be present. Father Papczyński consequently seeks to prove that the appropriate level of the spiritual life is obligatory: "frequently uniting and coming into the presence of Christ through frequent interior recollection," non-submission to various distractions caused by outside occupations, and carefully weighing out one's earthly and bodily needs in order to stop them from overshadowing the spiritual values. We must add here that the idea seems to emerge from the general tone of the documents that Fr. Papczyński praises the active way of life dedicated to the work of salvation and skillfully mixed with a necessary contemplative aspect; this is supported by some of his statements

³⁴ *NV*, I, 2.

³⁵ *IC*, p. 905-906.

(e.g.: “in fact, righteous are also those who, while leading an active life, co-operate with Christ in the salvation of souls”³⁶). The ideal is a disciple constantly united with the Master; keeping his eyes on Jesus Christ, he (the disciple) steadfastly gives himself to the work of salvation. As Fr. Papczyński remarks in *Norma vitae*, the fundamental condition for this lifestyle is the Religious’s resolute orientation towards evangelical perfection (*cum seria ad perfectionem tendentia propriae salutis cura*);³⁷ while its special characteristic is his adjustment to the Congregation’s character. To rephrase this, in Fr. Stanislaus’s outline of the primacy of the spiritual life, which he calls a “concern for the greater glory of God and for personal salvation, combined with a resolute striving for perfection,” we have a lifestyle that preserves the essential harmony with the individual vocation as defined by community’s laws. This is not the primacy of just any generic spirituality, but rather, the spirituality of the Marian Religious Order, as determined by the character of the community and its Constitutions, ratified by the Church. In our Founder’s opinion, an inner peace (*interna tranquillitas*) will come only when the strictly Marian way of life is preserved by individuals and by the entire community and it will give its members a confidence (*securitas conscientiarum*) that their actions are conformity with the will of God and their station in life.

The Primacy of Living with God and Striving for Personal Sanctification The Marian Tradition and Blessed George Matulewicz

Although our Congregation has been approved in the Church as an apostolic institute, nonetheless our Fathers’ concern for a necessary level of the spiritual life has always been clear. Father Stanislaus pointed out that the “greater glory of God and personal salvation combined with a resolute striving for perfection” must be the basic and essentially the only goals of the life of a Religious, as well as of every apostolic work for which a Marian lives. Practically the same point of view is found in the life and works of the Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszynski. Having great concern for his personal sanctification, he thus wrote in one of his letters to the community in preparation for the general visitation: “Prepare the way for the Lord by worthy deeds of your spiritual life. Make straight the paths for our Lord by following your personal vocation, for you have been found worthy of it.”³⁸ It is necessary to say at the outset that by “deeds of the spiritual life” he mainly understood upholding the Gospel, as stated in the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*, and the adaptation of the Marian way of life. Reading his

³⁶ Ibid., p. 907.

³⁷ *NV*, I, 2.

³⁸ Letter of July 27, 1747 (reference is given following the Polish source).

letters, one cannot fail to notice their markedly Marian character, characterized by submission to the Holy Spirit, religious discipline, fraternal love, concern for the salvation of souls, and assisting the deceased suffering in Purgatory, but most of all—by an individual and communal effort to give glory to God through striving for personal sanctification, following the example of Mary.

In the writings of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, we see a similar vision of life, but put in more familiar terms. Sketching the Marian way of life in his *General Idea and the Spirit of the Congregation*, he states at the very beginning: “The motto of the Congregation is: ‘For Christ and the Church.’ Therefore, desiring to be imbued with the spirit of Christ and the Church, the members should try to seek God in all things, to please God in all things, to do all things for the greater glory of God and to bring God into everything, so that God would truly be the center of the life of the whole Congregation and of its individual members.”³⁹ Reading and entering into the spirit of this document, as well as bearing in mind the other writings of the Blessed, one cannot fail to notice that he thought this way of life was possible on only one condition. This condition is to live Christian faith, hope, and charity zealously, and to strive for personal sanctification and evangelical (religious) perfection. Further in the quoted document, Blessed George states: “They [the members] should always place their own sanctification and perfection first.”⁴⁰ To support his argument, he promptly quotes excerpts from the Scriptures (N.B. some of them have been also quoted by Father Founder in his legislative texts). These quotes are: “This is the will of God, your holiness” (1 Thes 4:3); “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mt 16:26), and “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). The idea of the Marian way of life, outlined by these passages from the New Testament, is further emphasized in the consecutive parts of the *General Idea*, where Blessed George writes: “Hence they should all try to advance constantly in the way of perfection and divine service. Seeking their own perfection in everything they attempt, they should also consider how they might be able later to help others seek their salvation and sanctification more effectively and easily.”⁴¹ It is fitting to add that Fr. Renovator considered “deepening our spiritual lives”⁴² as fundamental for the true spiritual life, and he saw its essence in the imitation of Christ. In his *Journal*, he wrote: “Therefore, if I really want to follow in the footsteps of the saints, I, too, must make the goal of Christ’s life my own, and the instruments and means that He used must become mine as well.”⁴³

³⁹ *GI*, 1.

⁴⁰ *GI*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁴² Cf. *Journal*, October 17, 1910, p. 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1910, p. 32.

We can easily notice a great concordance between this statement and Father Founder's emphasis on Christ's way of life; he encouraged the imitation of Jesus in His union of love with the Father in the Holy Spirit and His salvific concern for men. As to the correlation between the apostolic and contemplative aspects of the religious life, Blessed George occupies a position which shows a rational balance between the two of them as expressions of the same religious spirituality. Consequently, he writes: "Thus, they [the Marians] should, on the one hand, be thus engaged in prayer, contemplation and other pious exercises and on the other hand, so dedicated to the salvation, perfection and care of others that both of these goals become as one—that the desire for greater personal perfection and the desire for the salvation of their neighbor would so unite into one that neither goal would not only not impede, but would rather aid the other."⁴⁴ Let us note this very interesting position of Blessed George's, because we'll come back to it in our further analysis. Blessed George's certainty that the initiative of a religious vocation comes Christ, not man is unquestionable. It is Christ who imparts the special grace of a vocation and who invites someone to follow in His footsteps. Yet, Blessed George points out that there is need for human effort in response to the gift of God. This response must be rational, well-balanced and well-organized as to its means. In turn, these means must be proper to the character of the vocation. Here we may also find certain similarities to the vision of spirituality which was expressed by Father Founder.

The Means to Achieve the Primacy of the Spiritual Life as Shown in the Marian Tradition and Present Constitutions

Our present Constitutions, which are based largely on the laws from 1930 written by Blessed George, essentially express Father Renovator's views, presented above, both as to the manner of describing the place of the religious life, as well as (at least) a general conception of spirituality. Sometimes we can notice some sporadic direct references to Father Founder's writings. The matter of the spiritual life in its strictest aspect is treated in Chapter Five of the Constitutions entitled *Sources of the Spiritual Life*. In its seven paragraphs, our legislator presented foundational matters. First, he stresses a concern for the spiritual life.⁴⁵ Then, he points out the importance of reading and reflection on the Scriptures,⁴⁶ the sacred liturgy,⁴⁷ the helpful role of Marian devotion in leading the spiritual

⁴⁴ *GI*, 6.

⁴⁵ *C*, 65.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

life,⁴⁸ the celebration of the liturgy,⁴⁹ the reception of the sacrament of penance⁵⁰ and spiritual direction⁵¹, and concludes with rules of administering and receiving the anointing of the sick.⁵² Corresponding paragraphs of our Directory do not treat any new matters; instead, they draw attention to certain details of the practices mentioned by the Constitutions. For example, speaking about the celebration of the sacred liturgy, the Directory reinforces the necessity of preparation and thanksgiving;⁵³ and in the case of confession, it further specifies that one should go to confession twice every month, etc.

Our present Constitutions do not tell us how we ought to understand the meaning of the phrase “the spiritual life.” However, the said paragraph of our laws, which encourages concern for the spiritual life, is constructed in such a way that it allows one to form at least a general opinion about the legislator’s idea on the matter. Defining the “spiritual life” in general, one would mention “above all the search for and love of God, leading a hidden life with Christ in God,” in guiding oneself by “the love for one’s neighbor for the salvation of the world and the upbuilding of the Church.” At the end of the same paragraph, the legislator says that only the one, who is able “with constant effort [to] cultivate the spirit of prayer and prayer itself, drawing on authentic sources of Christian spirituality,”⁵⁴ can lead such a life. We must also see in the categories of the spiritual life, the statement made at the beginning of the Constitutions, in which the legislator calls the Congregation of Marian Fathers “a fraternal community of clerics and laymen in the Church who, bound together by mutual charity and their apostolic mission, promote the glory of God and strive for evangelical perfection.”⁵⁵ Doubtless, this excerpt echoes the point of view expressed by Father Founder in his *Norma vitae*, and is then almost identically repeated by Father Renovator, first in his *General Idea*, and then in the Constitutions of 1930.

The document, *Ripartire da Christo* [*Starting Afresh from Christ*], dedicates more attention to the primacy of the spiritual life than any other modern document of the Church. Using this as a measure to analyze our rule, one notices that our current law puts a stronger emphasis on the personal (if not the subjective) dimension of religious spirituality along with some devotional aspects.

The Word of God—as the basic source of the spiritual life—is mostly presented in our law in individual and prayerful categories serving the Religious’

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

⁵² Ibid., 72.

⁵³ *D*, 26.

⁵⁴ *C*, 65.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1.

personal relationship with God and building up his own spirituality. *Ripartire da Christo* reinforces the *objective* character of *heeding the word of God*, which shows the true image of Christ and the radical principles of imitating Him. This document presents the Word of God as an objective norm, a mirror reflecting Christ's truth and—in its light—the truth about the disciple: “It is there, in fact, where the Master reveals himself and educates the mind and the heart: It is there that the vision of faith matures, learning to look at reality and events through the eyes of God, to the point of having ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16).”⁵⁶ And all this is done to enter truly into the footsteps of Christ and to imitate Him; to submit our hearts, thoughts, and deeds to His judgment. Consequently, “The Word of God is nourishment for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle which unifies the community in oneness of thought, the inspiration for ongoing renewal and apostolic creativity. The Second Vatican Council had already indicated that the first great principle of renewal is a return to the Gospel.”⁵⁷ Within the same limits of *heeding the Word of God* is also located the need for continuously referring to the religious rule of life, because—as the same document further tells us—«in the Rule and in the Constitutions ‘there is a map for the whole journey of discipleship in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church.»”⁵⁸ We find there to be a certain analogy between this statement and that of Father Founder. He puts great stress on faithfulness to our own religious rule which, being ratified by the Church's authority, provides the principles of life for the greater glory of God as well as to define the unquestionable criteria for personal improvement. A program of imitating Christ, defined by the religious order's rule, “translates the particular interpretation of the Gospel given by the founders and foundresses as the result of a particular prompting of the Spirit and it helps the members of the Institute to concretely live according to the Word of God.”⁵⁹

The need for prayer and meditation, strongly articulated by both our rule and the documents of the Church, is another indispensable condition for the true primacy of spirituality in the religious life. What is more: prayer and contemplation, as the “the ambient for the reception of the Word,”⁶⁰ become a real place where primacy is accorded to Christ and to His Word. Because in prayer, the Religious turns to the One from whom comes both the very gift of the religious life in the heart of the Church, as well as the grace of the individual vocation. Thus, by learning through prayer to place Christ—whose Words one heeds and

⁵⁶ *RdC*, 24.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; *VC*, 37.

⁵⁸ *RdC*, 24.

⁵⁹ *RdC*, 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

on whose Image one gazes—at the center of one’s life, all of the other various actions that one undertakes may be then reproduced in the image of Christ. Since “every vocation to the consecrated life is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and from a deep relationship of friendship with Christ, from the beauty and light which was seen shining on His face,”⁶¹ contemplation introduces a Religious into the reality of God Himself. It gives the Religious a foretaste of the eschatological reality, it liberates him from egotism and a mere existence on the earthly level. Blessed Stanislaus fully grasped this, when he writes: “Indeed, among all of the gifts granted to people, there is no better good or no better gift from God than the good and the gift of contemplation. For the happiness of the saints comes from seeing God. For this reason, people who, in an intent and attentive mindset, contemplate God, themselves, and God’s actions, somehow sample this happiness, have its foretaste, and become its partakers. Holy contemplation is the eye of the soul: seek it wholeheartedly, claim it with all your strength, and ask for it in constant prayer. And when you receive it, guard it lest you should forfeit it. Take care not to lose it in the multitude of excessive tasks. Remember, you must protect it as carefully as people safeguard their bodily eyes.”⁶²

In turn, both our tradition and our rule dedicate a great deal of attention to the Eucharist, which *Ripartire da Christo* speaks of as having “a central place” in religious spirituality and as being “a privileged place of encounter with the Lord.”⁶³ The document also provides many detailed regulations as to the preparations for it, the manner of its celebration, its meaning, etc. It is worth mentioning that Father Founder was also a great venerator of the Eucharist and he encouraged his companions to properly celebrate and to live it out in faith. The Founder dedicated his work *Inspectio cordis* to the mystery of the Eucharist, and particularly to Holy Communion. Almost every meditation is divided into two sections - before and after Holy Communion and each of those is composed of three parts. We should add here that Blessed Stanislaus’s manner of presenting the sacrament of the Eucharist aims at proving that it is the sacrament of Christ’s personal presence and an invitation to receive Him as nourishment. What is more: it is Christ Himself who enters into a personal and intimate dialogue with those who receive Him with faith in the sacramental way. For Blessed Stanislaus, Christ’s personal presence is the manifestation of His giving Himself lovingly to man. The Blessed emphasizes that our Redeemer comes to people in the Eucharist and gives Himself entirely to them so that people would give themselves entirely to Him with love and faith, in the whole entirety of their personhood. A gift calls

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *IC*, p. 660.

⁶³ *RdC*, 26.

for a gift, giving prompts giving, love calls for love. Thanks to this, the Eucharist becomes a special place of God's personal meeting with man in the atmosphere of true love. The Eucharist leads man to a union with God and consequently, to the primacy of Christ in the heart of a Religious. However, if Christ still does not have the prime place in the heart of a sinner, the Eucharist shall awaken a desire for it. "O love! O tenderness! O generosity, thanks to which You impart Your body to us, O Jesus! You invite us, wretched mortal men aware of our unworthiness, to bravely approach Your Divinity. You encourage us, people with defiled lips, to fearlessly partake of the most sacred Banquet. You tell us, awestruck by Your Majesty, to confidently eat the Bread of Angels: 'Take it and eat it.' And a proof of love and generosity of even greater weight is the fact that You do not bar anyone from this holy table, but instead say to all: 'Take it.' Thus, won over by this great kindness and graciousness of the host, I, although a man of unclean lips, open my mouth and heart to You, my dearest God; may it be done onto me according to Your word. "

Summing up, we may venture to say that Blessed Stanislaus leads us to the conclusion that the priority of spirituality is revealed thanks to the Eucharist. On the other hand, the communal character of the Eucharist leads to a new understanding of the fraternal relations in a religious community and the entire Church as a community of the faithful, where the primacy of God ought to reveal itself and where love ought to become the basis for all relations.

Basically, we could say that all of the domains of the religious life ought to be subordinate to the primacy of the spiritual life understood in the above-presented manner. However, among the previously mentioned means there is one, which is traditionally recognized as indispensable, also by our Marian tradition. It is a certain irrevocable dimension of asceticism. This is undertaken not so much as a special exercises leading to perfection (as asceticism is usually and commonly regarded), but more as an asceticism understood in the context of the primacy of the spiritual life. In other words, there is a close cooperation with a well-understood religious spirituality for the purpose of its deepening, or eliminating everything that impedes giving priority to God. In this sense, life's toils and trials accepted in faith and love of God, suffering caused by illness, age, misunderstanding, or work-related difficulties and problems in ministry, which give the feeling of "fruitlessness," can also have an ascetic character. Actions of self-restraint that are closely linked to one's religious vocation have an extraordinary importance: the Religious undertakes them in order to give real primacy to the spiritual life and to genuinely place Christ in the center of everything. Asceticism undertaken in total awareness—as reinforced by the document *Ripartire da Cristo*—contains the elements crucial for the veracity of a religious spirituality, because it is a manner of becoming like Christ, while its various forms "have

been and continue to be a powerful aid to authentic progress in holiness. Asceticism, by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross.”⁶⁴ Carefully preserving the experience of bygone centuries, we must seek ever new forms that would better match our times, especially within the context of new cultural and social conditions.

It’s worth noting that there is certain minimal dimension to asceticism, to which our Founder alerts us. It is the very chance to lead a spiritual life, including dedication to prayer, and which concerns the human disorganization in the domain of heart, thoughts, desires, and longings that have been upset as a result of sin. We know that sin is the anti-thesis of the spiritual life and its contradiction; therefore, undertaking asceticism directed against sin and its consequences is a basic and necessary element of the process of giving primacy to Christ. Seeing that sin is often rooted in the human heart and egotism, Father Founder therefore demands an internal discipline focused on the real primacy of Christ: “If you want to burn with love for God, you must stop loving yourself; you must abandon your own will if you wish to fulfill the will of God. Finally, you must renounce yourself without fail, if you desire to merit the invaluable heavenly treasure, which is the whole Christ.”⁶⁵ Thus understood, asceticism contains some irrevocable dimension of *kenosis* as to the plans, desires and needs of a Religious, as well as his reasonable aspirations. However, the primacy of spirituality, understood as the real primacy of Christ and His lifestyle, may be verified only in confrontation with the cross.

Hindrances in Giving Priority to the Spiritual Life

First, we must say that the hindrances may be of both a personal and a communal character. Naturally, there are differences arising from specific cultural or social environments (e.g., hindrances appearing in the Ukraine may be different from those in the U.S.). However, it is possible, even necessary, to speak about incidents that have common roots, unrelated to the above-said differences. For guidance, we shall refer to contemporary Church documents. I would like to draw your attention to two kinds of attitudes, most common in our religious life. Naturally, behavioral types described below are rarely met in their pure form.

⁶⁴ *VC*, 38; cf. *RdC*, 27.

⁶⁵ *IC*, p. 895.

Most commonly, we see their elements inter-mixed. My presentation remains on a general level, without involving conclusions or debates.

1. Secularism and extreme subjectivism. A simply shocking statement, defining contemporary secularism and nearly devoid of all contact with reality, may be found in *Pastores dabo vobis*, where John Paul II remarks that a “religiosity without God”⁶⁶ is widespread in the modern-day world. The failure to see God as an objective reality results in assigning the highest and ultimate values to personal states. A Religious that thoughtlessly adopts this way of thinking withdraws ever further into himself, isolates himself from everything that could disrupt his state of religiosity, which he believes to be life by faith. In fact, this person lives without faith and realizes his own plans. There is no room for God in his world. Instead, his personal experiences, thoughts, reflections, ideas, plans, etc., become God. Consequently, the person can no longer be obedient and is being pushed more and more to the “sidetrack,” while he feels misunderstood, etc. What’s important here is that the only hope lies not in further multiplication of pious practices (because they will be tainted by subjectivism anyway, in which the person excels), but in proclaiming the Word of God and appealing for conversion. Help can come only and exclusively from outside, because this Religious’s internal faculties (mind, will, feelings) are ill. This Religious is quite incapable of seeing things in any way other than his own. And he sees things through the prism of his own ego (here we deal with a certain primacy of subjectivism, one’s own ego, but dressed up as the highest religious form). Only the Word of God, proclaimed and interpreted from the outside, by something other than the ailing ego, may help this Religious to break the vicious circle of his own ideas, feelings, thoughts, etc., generally speaking—to come out of one’s personal idolatry, in which one lives for the glory of one’s own idols and personal perfection, but not for the living God. The Word of God has the power to destroy this poorly woven—often through the course of many years—fabric of idolatry; or, as it comes down to, the cult of oneself, of one’s ego.

2. A false modernity, which is, in fact, consumerism. It is some kind of a factual relativism in comprehending both the Gospel and the essence of the vows, draped in the practical motivations of modernity, adaptation to modern situations, the indispensable needs of the religious life, of pastoral ministry, of a pseudo-ideology of the religious vows, etc. In fact, what is behind it is a thirst for goods, a consumerism modeled after the present-day Euro-Atlantic civilization. If there is any wisdom in it, it is the wisdom of the world, not of the Gospel.

⁶⁶ *PDV*, 6.

Inside the person, a mechanism of self-justification is at work and the person begins to believe that basically everything can be reconciled for the sake of a so-called “higher good,” because it is the intention that is the arbiter of everything. In practice, this attitude results in accumulation—quite clearly seen in religious houses—of the goods of a purely materialistic nature for both communal and so-called personal use, which are in fact personal property. Can I give examples? Here are some: a computer must be new and state-of-the-art, and it’s personal of course, just like one’s underwear. It must come with uninterrupted and unlimited Internet access directly to one’s own room. It would also be best to have the latest-model cell phone; limitless use of a car, quality food of the so-called “healthy” variety; a sufficient amount of pocket money (it would be best if there would be no need to give an accounting of this, because there is really no need to account for “ridiculously small sums”). Also, the Superior must be attuned to the Religious’ personal situations lest he appear “inhuman” (“one has the right to be tired” and “one doesn’t need to like the tasks assigned by the Superior”). I could’ve given more examples, but this is not the point. The essence of the matter is that a totally different priority, unlike the one of Christ and His cross is behind this attitude. In the face of this extreme and well-concealed consumerism, it is quite futile to talk about primacy of the spiritual life, because the spiritual life itself is understood in the categories of consumerism. The only way out, is it to point to Christ and His primacy in practicing the religious life according to St. Paul’s words from his Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:2): “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

Conclusion

It is necessary, above all, to strongly emphasize that the contemporary Church’s appeal, calling consecrated persons to place the spiritual life on the first plain, does not mean a quest for new instruments or means of spirituality (piety). The means are well known and have been used for centuries by various religious institutes. However, today they seem to have become forgotten or undervalued. As we’ve said earlier, these means are: the Word of God, prayer, contemplation, the Eucharist, asceticism or abnegation and work, striving for communion, as well as—something that has been being particularly reinforced by our rule—benefitting from the sacrament of penance and spiritual guidance. Thus, the Church’s appeal is not so much to multiply or search for practices, but to live in accord with the character of the institute, in order to rediscover the sense of the religious life and one’s individual vocation, “to adhere ever more closely to Christ, the center of consecrated life and once again take up the path of

conversion and renewal which, like the initial experience of the apostles, before and after the resurrection, was a *starting afresh from Christ*.⁶⁷ Ultimately, it is not a question of the primacy of man and his internal riches of the religious life no matter how spiritual, but of an absolute priority of Christ in all dimensions of the religious life, in its individual and in its communal aspects, in its life of faith and in apostolic service, in its work and in relaxation.

⁶⁷ *RdC*, 21.

I do not consider myself a sage; I do not have such reserves of wisdom, but it seems to me that we should take life seriously, not allow any neglectfulness, and constantly discern the signs of the times given us by God.¹

The late Fr. Witold Nieciecki, M.I.C

With gratefulness for the example
of a search for the Marian path, Lichen

Janusz Kumala, MIC

The Immaculate Conception of Mary: a Gift and Task in the Marian Spirituality and Apostolate

With great joy, but also with a trembling heart, I bend over to study the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. This is a mystery of faith in which my existence as a Marian is deeply immersed. The light of the grace of the beatification of the Founding Father has caused the power of the Immaculate Conception of Mary to be revealed ever more clearly to me as a *gift and task on the path of vocation*. The mystical experience of Blessed Father Founder in which he recognized God's call to set up a new religious community in the Church is very closely related to the mystery of Mary Immaculate. In this mystery, I can find myself today, called by God to follow the path of the Marian life. A daily question about *who I am and where I am* is a question about my participation in the mystery of God's love, and a search for the reason for my existence. The Immaculate Conception is, in turn, a constant response of God to these questions and searches. Mary, in her Immaculate Conception, tells me that my existence has its beginning in God's love, and that I exist because I am loved and desired by God at every moment, daily experiencing the transforming grace of His mercy. I then discover the value of my life as a gift of God, and I can hear a calling to lead a life according to the logic of God's love and mercy.

¹ W. Nieciecki, M.I.C, W poszukiwaniu mariańskiej drogi (*In Searchs for the Marian Path*), Lichen 2004, p. 346.

In the realm of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, I ground my faith in the fact that I am loved by God.

I would like to share with you a few reflections on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as a *source of inspiration for the Marian presence in the Church*. Certainly, this is not an exhaustive study, but rather an *attempt* at showing the depth, beauty, and richness of our Marian path which we discover in the experience of Blessed Father Founder. So we are not to *search* for a Marian path, but rather to *find ourselves on it*. And this is the path on which the Immaculate Conception is our *sign, strength and joy*.

The Immaculate Conception—The Beginning of the Road *A Marian is a Person Called by the Lord*

Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński accepted the grace of founding a new religious community as a gift of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. His living the mystery of Christ and the Church brought him into the Marian dimension of the Christian life in which the *guiding light* was the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. This mystery of faith and the Marian way of spiritual and apostolic life are closely tied with this organic link, thanks to which the community may develop and fruitfully serve the Church. The experience of the historic development of the Marian Congregation, including the time of the renewal and reform in 1909, reveals a fundamental fidelity to the mystery of Our Lady in her Immaculate Conception. To comprehend the significance of this mystery for our spirituality and apostolic involvement is undeniably a process which may be called *growing in fidelity*. This takes place in unison with the rhythm of the life of the Church and her awareness of the mystery of Mary Immaculate, our openness to the light of the Holy Spirit, and dedication to living the evangelical counsels. This path, initiated by Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, was followed by generations of Marians, whom Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz led toward the new epoch in 1909.

At the source of creation of the Marian Congregation, we encounter the amazing work of the Holy Spirit, who, bringing a new religious community to life, “points” to the figure of Mary Immaculate.

The Spirit of God found in the person of Father Stanislaus a heart on which to imprint the seal of the new religious congregation. The spiritual experiences of Father Stanislaus reveal a certain drama inherent in the process of founding a new community in the Church: in its inception (in the mind and heart of Father Stanislaus), in its birth (the difficulties with starting the work), and in its growth (the adversities which he encountered).

Let's recall the words of Father Stanislaus who remembers the beginnings of the Marian Religious Community in the following way: "There were many very noble orders which invited me to join their ranks, me—the reluctant one—seeking greater perfection. Yet God's vision which was carved out in my soul and concerned the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary ... impelled me to pursue my goal."² Further in the same document we read: "I have been looking for opportunities to start the Association of the Immaculate Conception, which the Spirit of God had already shaped in my mind."³

Let us draw our attention to the words: "vision which was carved out in my soul." This is the "vision" which defines the uniqueness of the new religious community, its identity and place within the Church, all that we now refer to as the "charism of the founder." This charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit which Father Stanislaus with fear and trembling, yet magnanimously recognizes in his "soul." He can see it "impressed" ("carved") as a seal on the document to legalize it. The one who "sealed" the soul of Father Stanislaus was the Holy Spirit, which means that the mission he received comes from God. When God seals a man with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), He officially takes him in His possession. Father Stanislaus receives a new mission, to give birth to what had been conceived in his soul for the Church that is to be the Father Founder of the new religious community. Since the seal is a type of signature, which guarantees the validity of a document, Father Stanislaus could be positive that everything he takes up according to his internal vision was true and expected by God.

Can we read anything from that analogy between the "conception" of the congregation in the mind of Father Papczyński and the Immaculate Conception of Mary? It seems we can. At first, it shows us that the gift of the new community and the gift of the Immaculate Conception of Mary are the fruit of the selfless work of God who bestows them upon the Church.

Further, the mysterious act of the Holy Spirit reveals the truth that the Immaculate Conception of Mary is to be the inspiration of the new religious community, the inspiration as to the essence of the vocation (it is a gift, given for free, a program to follow, a direction for the mission in the Church), as well as to the path for its fulfillment (following the example of Mary Immaculate). Pointing to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as the *inspiration*, in a way justifies the lack of many external signs, which would be necessary to express the identity of the new congregation. The most important among the signs is the white habit, a sign of an immaculate life, the beauty of which reveals itself in fidelity to God's grace. The symbol of the "white habit" is a sign both for the Marians themselves

² *Założenie domu skupienia (Founding of the House of Retreat)* in: Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane [Collected Works]*, Warsaw 2007, p. 1458.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1460.

and for other people. It is a sign which reminds (of the vocation which has been received), shows the way (of chastity, of the fight against sin) and foretells the future (complete holiness in heaven). But it is also a sign pointing to the source of strength for those treading the Marian path: the love of God which embraces us and the Eucharist which feeds us.

In *Norma Vitae* [*The Rule of Life*] Father Stanislaus commanded the Marians to wear a habit “white in color, in honor of the pure Conception of our Lady”⁴ and ordered that it not be changed.⁵ This care of the Father Founder for the external sign of the Marian community should be read today as a calling to faithfully keep all that refers to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the spiritual and apostolic life of the Marians. The exhortation of Father Stanislaus is clear: “But lest you remain without work in the vineyard of the Lord, to the utmost of your strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God.”⁶

“Lest you remain without work. . .” How to understand these words? Are other pastoral works meaningless? Why is there a reference to “without work”? Deeper reflection allows us to discover the intuition of Father Founder, who thus *stresses the fundamental sense of faithfulness to the charism of the congregation*. The idea is that if someone “parts” from his charism, does not live or fulfill it, no matter how much good he will do, he will be perceived as “without work.” In the religious life, faithfulness to the received charism is of primary importance, because this is what the Church expects, the Church who ratified a particular community and wants its charism to enrich the life of the Church.

Father Papczyński lived during the time of the still painful ripening of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Two tendencies prevailed among theologians: one which rejected the truth of the Immaculate Conception and the other which defended it. In the 17th century, the popes sided with the *immaculatists*, those who embraced the Immaculate Conception. Yet, for the truth to become a dogma, we had to wait until 1854. Father Stanislaus, in the spirit of the Ecclesial Magisterium, was on the side of the advocates of the Immaculate Conception and was ready to defend it even with his own life. He considered it his mission to defend and promote it among the faithful.

The very existence of the Marian Congregation, whose name contains the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, was a defense and promotion of this mystery of faith. Moreover, a very particular form of its defense and promotion was making it an inspiration for the Marian life, which was supposed to mean

⁴ *Regula życia* (*The Rule of Life*), Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, Ch. 4, p. 4.

⁵ *Testament drugi* [*Testament Two*], in: Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane* [*Collected Works*], p. 59.

⁶ *Regula życia* (*The Rule of Life*), Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, Ch. 1, p. 2.

following Mary according to *Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*.

In fact, Father Founder left to his Congregation, a general, yet explicit recommendation in *The Rule of Life* to spread devotion to the Immaculate Conception (next to assisting the souls of the deceased faithful and aiding pastors). Up until 1909, *The Rule of Life* and *Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary* shaped the spirituality and apostolate of the Marians. In the *Statutes* of 1723, we can read that the main aim of the Marians is “spreading a particular devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Elect Mary Mother of God, and following her virtues described in the *Rule*.” While the Constitutions of 1791 define the goal of the order as follows: “First, to most zealously praise and promote the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin, not only superficially by wearing a white habit to express this mystery, but also embracing it with one’s whole heart even to the point of losing one’s life and spilling blood.” During the ceremony of acceptance for the novitiate and profession, Marians solemnly pledged to: promote (exalt) the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, follow Mary, and devote oneself to God and Mary as an “eternal slave.”⁷

It is easy to realize that the mystery of the Immaculate Conception belongs to the spiritual heritage of the Marian Congregation, and it is a duty derived from faithfulness to the Marian charism to advocate and promote this mystery. John Paul II reminded us of this when he addressed the members of the General Chapter in 1981: “I am . . . delighted that, by zealously spreading among the faithful, devotion to the Immaculate Conception, you greatly contribute to the effective strengthening and enlivening of traditional Marian piety that is so particular for the Catholic faith.”⁸ Further on, the Pope pointed to our apostolic work and a Marian love and zeal as “fundamental aspects” of our “vocation in the Church.”⁹

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception marks our charismatic way in the Church. It should shape our presence in the Church and for the Church, as a reference point for our spiritual and apostolic life. The Immaculate Conception is a “mirror” in which we can see what we should be like and what we should do in the Church. This task seems to overpower us (at times it seems abstract or thoroughly incomprehensible), and most probably it should be that way. Only

⁷ Cf. Z. Proczek MIC, *Kult Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny [Devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin]*, in: *Marianie 1673-1973 [Marians 1673-1973]*, Eds. J. Bukowicz, MIC, T. Górski, MIC, Rome 1975, pp. 319-330.

⁸ Address of the Holy Father John Paul II to the members of the General Chapter on August 16, 1981.

⁹ *Ibid.* John Paul II points also to a specific way of fulfilling this Marian charism by the Marians: “you shall promulgate a renewed, enlightened, and suitable devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.” *Ibid.*

what we call an ideal may inspire, mobilize, and allow us to grow. Nowadays ideals are not highly prized, practicality is what counts (but then the spiritual life does not feed upon ideals and it perishes). It is certainly hard to find a harmony between the charism and everyday, practical life, yet we have to look for it. Nevertheless, the rejuvenation and renewal of the structures and institutions always require people who are fired by the ideal and the bond to the charismatic tradition of the community, not just organizational decisions.

An awareness of the common charism is crucial for the common work of the Congregation. The charism unites different people, while a particular task gathers only similar ones, those who are interested in that particular task. The charism inspires many works, while the work does not breed any new ones but spreads itself. Community which lives its charism remains in unity, even though it may take up many works. On the other hand, when there is the lack of the charismatic tie, the works may divide, breed mutual distrust, waste potential and not allow the community as a whole to grow.

I am certain that the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is an inspiration able to embrace our entire life. *In this salvation event, I see the essence of the Marian vocation and of the charism of our life.*

Care for the development of the Congregation includes not only the effort to maintain its structures and its works but to assure their cohesion, their clear connection with the charism, their being a source of unity rather than of division. Our Marian charism is expressed through an “idea,” a truth of our faith, not any particular work. Thus, we cannot look at the entire Congregation through the perspective of a particular apostolate, we cannot identify the charism with a work, we cannot draw a charism from any work. Quite the opposite, we should draw works from the charism, confront them with the charism, whether they remain in agreement and in the same spirit.

In this context, it seems very important to clearly present the Marian Congregation as a religious community in which the Marian charism is based on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. It is important to testify that the spirituality and the apostolate of the Marians are shaped by this very truth of the Immaculate Conception and to also point out that the primary task of the Marians in the Church is to take care of the Marian face of the Church, which is “holy and immaculate” following the example of Mary Immaculate (John Paul II reminded us of exactly this in 1981). What is at stake here is the clarity of the apostolic work so as to make it evident that the main task of the Marians—along with the will of their Founder—is spreading the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. It should be clear that the Marians are the ones who belong to the Immaculate Mother of God. It is her mystery of the Immaculate Conception that constitutes the leading idea of the Congregation, the one which we find at the beginning of

the Marian path and which we admire in the life of Blessed Stanislaus, the Father and Guide on the way each of us has been called on.

Following the Marian path we would like to ask: how to live the mystery of the Immaculate Conception? What horizons of spirituality and apostolate does this mystery of Mary open before us?

The Immaculate Conception as a Gift of the Merciful God *The Marian as a Man Who Accepts the Gifts of God*

Theology views the Immaculate Conception of Mary as a “gift” and counts it among the “great deeds” performed in Mary by the Triune God. The Mystery of the conception of Mary becomes for us an inspiration to thank and glorify God in His incomprehensible love for man, to glorify God for the works performed in the history of salvation for the good of man.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary reveals in particular the amazing initiative of God the Father, the salvific work of the Holy Spirit, and the complete redemption of Christ. Mary, from the very beginning, is enveloped in the love of God which is always a Triune one: the love of God, in the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ. In this way, Mary becomes an example for us of total gift from God. We receive everything from Him, freely and undeservedly.

God’s gift of the Immaculate Conception introduces us into the mystery of vocation, the ancient choosing of man by a loving God. Since, as St. Paul teaches us in the Letter to the Ephesians, “God chose us in Him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Eph 1:4). It means that although the history of man is marked by sin which painfully shapes human existence, it does not reach us as deeply as the Creator, whose love decides the true beginning of man. The power of the grace of salvation is “from the beginning” much stronger than the power of original sin. In the Immaculate Conception, we most fully discover the essence of our Christian vocation, which becomes more specific in the Marian vocation. We discover our identity here who we are for God—beloved and chosen from time immemorial.

God’s bestowing the fullness of grace upon Mary becomes a source of joy for her following the invitation of the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation. Only God’s gift of grace is the source of true joy. Grace means love and the gift of God alone—a gift given completely freely and for free, in which God alone offers Himself to man. Christ is the fullness of grace. Mary is Immaculately Conceived because she received Christ. Therefore, a Marian who lives the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is full of joy since he knows that he has received everything from God, and as an endowed person, he tries to receive Christ—to

live in Him and for Him: “The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Gal 2:20).

God’s gift of the Immaculate Conception should be perceived not as a static, restricted gift, given only at the beginning of Mary’s life, but rather as a dynamic one which embraces all of Her life. Thus, for Mary, her Immaculate Conception is not the end of her salvation, but the beginning, opening the way to fulfillment in eternity. Therefore, we perceive this gift as a task which Mary fulfills in Her co-participation with Christ in the work of salvation. Each grace is the beginning of the road we have to take. It is a task which God entrusts to us. We discover here a call for a dynamic experiencing our bond with God, which is zealously striving for holiness. The ability to accept God’s gifts with responsibility, and to rejoice in them in a spirit of thankfulness is a sign of the spiritual life inspired by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

The Immaculate Conception as a Sign of God’s Love *The Marian as a Man Who Is Loved and Who Loves*

Thanks to the exceptional gift of the Immaculate Conception, Mary experiences the power of God’s love in a unique way, since she participates most fully in the intimate life of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mary, *full of grace* appears to be “particularly beloved by God—completely pervaded with His love, grounded in it completely, as if entirely formed by it: the highest love of God.”¹⁰

Mary “completely pervaded with the love” of God becomes “a perfect reflection of God’s image,” yet—to be more precise—“not by nature as is the case with her Son (cf. Col 1:15), but as “the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38) by the power of grace.”¹¹ Endowed with the fullness of God’s love, from the first instant of her conception, Mary becomes the witness to the mystery of God’s love, His selflessness with which He “chose” each man before the creation of the world, and the sanctity which He wants to bestow upon him.

This experience of God’s love which we contemplate in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception has great significance for our spiritual lives as well as for our apostolate.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Salus Populi Romani*, Homily delivered at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, December 8, 1980, in: *Jan Paweł II o Matce Bożej* [*John Paul II about the Mother of God*], vol. 2, Warsaw 1998, p. 125.

¹¹ Jan Paweł II, *Matka Zbawiciela* [*Mother of the Redeemer*], Letter to the participants of the theological symposium devoted to the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, May 22, 1988, in op.cit., vol. 3, p. 58.

The one and only desire of God is that man would believe in His love, accept it and live it. The one who loved us first, expects only our love. This central message of the Scripture was decoded by our Fr. Founder who, fascinated with God's love, made it a foundation of the spiritual and apostolic life, both for himself and for his newly created religious community to whom he entrusted after Saint Paul: "Do everything with love" (1 Cor 16:14).

Love means giving which is a sign of *communion*, because to love someone is not so much to give him *something* as to *be with him in love*. Love lies at the source of the apostolic work of Fr. Stanislaus. He loved people. Having experienced God's love, he wanted to *be for them in love*. Each apostolic work has a Christian meaning when it springs from love, when it is a sign of the God who loves, when it reveals His loving and merciful face.

But there is also a path of false love. One may serve others, but only to manifest love for oneself, to draw satisfaction and a feeling of superiority. Breaking from the source of God's love, it is easy to lose one's selflessness in meeting people and in serving them. Thus, it is vital to nurture a close relationship with God, to care for the beauty of one's heart, for spiritual transparency. Beauty and love seem to condition each other. True love may be only beautiful while beauty which enchants may only come from love. The Immaculate Conception constantly reminds us of this.

A Marian of the Immaculate Conception is a man who believes in God's love and who tries to live it in his everyday life, keeping in mind the words of Saint John the Evangelist: "We have to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God" (1 Jn 4:16). The example of Father Founder is clear and convinces us that to "abide in love" means to serve others, caring for their salvation, to be anchored in love which endures the drama of death. Only the man fascinated with God's love may successfully resist the evil of the world, persevere in overcoming the obstacles of life and zealously help the needy.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception serves as an inspiration to care for one's Christian identity, the essence of which is *the love received from God and offered to people*. This makes me capable of admitting: *I love, therefore I am*, which aptly explains the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa: "Our Creator gave us love as the essence of our human face." It is impossible—the Immaculate Conception tells us—to accept the gift of life without attempting to live with love, since "each one is like his love" (St. Augustine).

The path of the spiritual life traced out by the truth of the Immaculate Conception involves just such a fascination with God's love which helps me to understand myself, my place in the world and which allows me to meet others in such a way that it will be the germ of heaven, *being in love*.

The Immaculate Conception as the Icon of the New Man *The Marian as a Man Who Lives the New Life*

A key to understanding the Marian charism is the mystery of Christ which the charism expresses or makes present.¹² We need to remind ourselves that each religious institute is based on Christ “poor, chaste and obedient” and reveals some aspect of His mystery in a particular way:¹³ Christ the Poor One (the Franciscans), Christ the Teacher (the Dominicans), Christ the Healer (the Camillians), Christ the Man of Prayer (the contemplative orders), etc. We should ask ourselves which Christ is revealed through the Marian charism? Contemplating the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, as well as service to the Church, and assistance to the deceased as the *charismatic signs of the Marian vocation*, it seems justified to say that the Marians reveal in the Church the mystery of *Christ the New Man*.

Christ, as the new Adam, bestows life on everyone and completes the work of the renewal of man and the world. He accomplished this through the Incarnation and the Cross. In Christ, the mystery of the *beginning of new life* is revealed, the mystery in which every human being participates through Holy Baptism.

In the realm of this mystery of *new life*, we find Mary in her Immaculate Conception. This Marian mystery proclaims the Incarnation of the Son of God, that is the work of the renewal of man and the world, being at the same time its first and most perfect fruit. The mystery proves that “God loves man” and wants to bestow new life upon him. In the Immaculate Conception, Mary experiences the power of the Holy Spirit which gives her new life and makes her the *new creature*. Mary Immaculate appears in the womb of humanity as “fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.”¹⁴ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception “reveals to the man of today, the ideal of humanity meant by God in his plan.”¹⁵

The fulfillment of the Marian charism would entail proclaiming and spreading the mystery of Christ, the New Man; so that each man redeemed by Christ would be brought through baptism to life in communion with God (mission and evangelization) and he would become ever more fully “the new man” (educational

¹² The Holy Spirit “in every age shows forth the richness of the practice of the evangelical counsels through a multiplicity of charisms. In this way too, he makes ever present in the Church and in the world, in time and space, the mystery of Christ.” John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 5.

¹³ cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 46.

¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

¹⁵ Jan Paweł II, *Tyś wielką chlubą naszego narodu* [You are a great pride of our nation], Homily on the Jubilee of the 600th Anniversary of Jasna Góra, April 19, 1983, in: *Jan Paweł II o Matce Bożej* [John Paul II about the Mother of God], vol. 2, p. 182.

work). How to accomplish this? There is only one path: to develop a communion with Jesus Christ, to remain in Him. Man who is freed from sin through Christ's grace is immediately elevated to "the new life." As St. Paul teaches us: "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). Christ, the Redeemer is the Author of the "new humanity," the Giver of the abundance of new life participating in God's life (Jn 10:10). The "new man" is the one who has experienced spiritual transformation through Christ's grace (Rom 7:6; 8:1-16; Gal 5:16-25) and renewed the primary "image and likeness" of his Creator in himself (Col 3:10; Gn 1:27), that is, he put on Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14).

Mary Immaculate is the example of the "new man." Her presence in the spiritual life opens up new paths of apostolic engagement in the world. It can be summed up with the words close to the heart of Blessed George Matulewicz: *Instaurare omnia in Christo* (to renew everything in Christ). As we know, the above words, coming from the letter to the Ephesians (1:10), constituted a program of Church renewal at the beginning of the 20th century which was undertaken by Pope Pius X.

Firstly, living the "new life", we have to create a *new community* with God and our brothers, that is, the *Church*. Thus, on the path of our apostolic engagement, we are guided by the notion of *caring for the Church*, her beauty being modeled on Mary. She is, after all, the image of the Church, since in her the Church "has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle."¹⁶ This truth is proclaimed by the Church in the preface of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th: "She [Mary] is the image of the Church, the Bride of Christ, immaculate and shining with beauty," and recalled by John Paul II: "In Mary, we can see the immaculate conception of the Church who is the temple and the bride."¹⁷ Experiencing the truth of the Immaculate Conception is, therefore, closely linked with *love for the Church*, which is not a fleeting feeling, but readiness to give one's life for her. It is worth remembering here the example and words of Blessed George Matulaitis: "It is in this that I see the core and essence of our vocation: to renounce the self freely and willingly—one's desires, inclinations, comforts, and pleasures; to give up the world—its riches, goods and vainglory and to devote and give our whole selves—all our gifts and talents both natural and supernatural—to the welfare of the Church—her defense and preservation, her propagation and growth."¹⁸

The *new community*, the Church, should be viewed in the eschatological perspective of her completion and fulfillment in the glory of heaven when "the

¹⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 65.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Początki nowego Ludu Bożego (The Beginnings of the New People of God)*, *L'Osservatore Romano* (1983), no. 12, p. 6.

¹⁸ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, October 15, 1910.

time of the restoration of all things” comes (Acts 3:21).¹⁹ This goal matures in the hearts of those who are still pilgrims on this earth, as well as in those who “having died and are still being purified.”²⁰ Prayer for the deceased is then a very special expression of apostolic engagement, so that the entire Church, all the redeemed in Christ, achieve the glory of heaven. Mary, who is “entirely holy” (*Tota pulchra*) in her Immaculate Conception, inspires us. While we are growing toward the fullness of holiness of heaven, we can help others to achieve it, as well.

Through the *new man*, the work of the *renewal of all mankind* takes place. This work has been started already in the Immaculate Conception and it will be fulfilled by the end of time in the “new heavens and a new earth where . . . the justice of God will reside” (2 Pt 3:13). Renewal takes place through the power of Christ’s grace, the fullness of which was bestowed upon Mary as the “first of the redeemed,” becoming a paradigm for the acceptance of grace by man and the example of unity with the Triune God. In Mary the Immaculate, we admire the sign of God, the Icon of the promised and fulfilled salvation, the most perfect creature. The sign is addressed to the entire creation which is in need of salvation. In the Immaculate Conception of Mary, God already gives us a guarantee of the final victory of goodness over evil, grace over sin. Our pastoral work should be then the announcement of Christian hope, which seems to be of particular significance and need in the contemporary world.

Any renewal entails returning to the source, to the “original love.” The Immaculate Conception “draws” to itself, to see in this “holy beginning” the love of God which alone has the power to change human hearts and minds. The *love of God is first*, constitutive, creating. This love accompanies man even when he wanders the paths of sin and reveals itself as a merciful love. Contemplation of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception helps to better understand the depth of God’s mercy which is revealed in Mary Immaculate as *prevention* from the evil of sin. The example of Mary Immaculate marks the style of the *apostolate of mercy* which entails not only *freeing* man from the captivity of sin but *preserving* him from it. It is just this care to preserve from sin (oneself and others) which best explains our merciful God’s way of acting in the Immaculate Conception.

The new man, through entering into relationships with others, creates a *new culture*, a new way of life based on the Christian values of love and truth. To participate in the process of creating this new culture means undertaking the toil of *bringing forth the new man* and introducing into our interpersonal relations the new moral order and the new system which is constituted by the

¹⁹ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

resurrection of Christ. It entails creative engagement in the transformation of all aspects of human life—cultural, social, economic and political. Living as new people, we cannot put aside this “newness” and not include it into different areas of our lives and our environment. Such an apostolate was probably envisioned by Blessed George Matulewicz when on October 15, 1910, he wrote: “Animated by the Spirit of Christ, we must try to gather together and organize people of good will—to train and prepare them to work, and then, together with them and through them, to bring Christ everywhere, to restore and renew all things in Christ . . . to attract all to Christ.”²¹

A Marian is the new man who has accepted Jesus as his Savior and His Mother as a gift at the cross, so as to live according to the *new law of love*, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the boundless richness of God’s mercy as the Good News for everyone.

The Immaculate Conception as the Sign of the Primacy of Grace *The Marian as a Man Who Proclaims God’s Grace*

The truth of the Immaculate Conception of Mary reveals the path of the presence and the work of God in the history of salvation; God, who selflessly offers Himself to man, meets him half-way to offer Himself to him. The grace with which Mary was filled in the first moments of her existence is “the grace of Christ” (*gratia Christi*), which is bestowed by God due to the redeeming death of Christ. In Mary Immaculate, we discover the newness of grace of the New Covenant which means that *God Himself is grace*. Grace then is not only “God’s loving care” but *His sanctifying presence*.²² Remaining in grace means staying in the sphere of God’s love, that is *in relation with God*. If someone stops accepting this love—he dies in spirit.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary reveals the mystery of one who “has not known the history of a life without God,” but rather, from the very beginning and completely, is permeated with God’s love, becoming for us the “mirror and reflection of the life of God alone.”²³

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception shows us the gratuitousness of Christ’s salvation. Mary is Immaculate not by the power of her merits, but by

²¹ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, October 15, 1910, 3.

²² Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *Maryja zwierciadłem dla Kościoła* [*Mary, the Mirror for the Church*], Warsaw 1994, p. 30.

²³ Jan Paweł II, *Maryjny wymiar Kościoła* (*The Marian Dimension of the Church*), (address to the College of Cardinals and members of the Roman Curia, December 22, 1987), in: *Jan Paweł II o Matce Bożej* [*John Paul II about the Mother of God*], vol. 3, p. 13.

the will of God whose salvific act *always* precedes a human response. Thus, in the Immaculate Conception, we can admire the absolute primacy of God and His redemptive will toward each man and the *primacy of grace* in the relationship of God with creation.

John Paul II reminded us about the principle of the primacy of grace at the dawn of the Third Millennium, strongly stressing its indispensability in the life of the Church. In the Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Inneunte* we read: “There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with His grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that “without Christ we can do nothing” (cf. Jn 15:5).”²⁴

The principle of the primacy of grace, which we discover in the Immaculate Conception, introduces order into our pastoral work and sets the appropriate pastoral priorities. All attention and pastoral work should focus on *receiving God’s gift of grace and remaining in God’s presence*. This leads to the most important pastoral priority which is *prayer*, understood as *remaining in the presence of God with an open heart*. There is no more important pastoral work than prayer. In this context, we can see the pastoral power of the influence of a Religious dedicated to pastoral work. Their faithfulness to prayer, that is, their remaining in Christ in the community of the Church, is an absolute priority in apostolic engagement. Isn’t it exactly what Blessed George Matulewicz testified to when he wrote: “These are the wellsprings of our life! The more deeply a person becomes immersed in the Spirit of Christ and of the Church, becomes soaked in it, saturated with it, the more complete will be his holiness and the more fruitful will be his work”²⁵ or “unless constantly nourished by prayer, the soul wilts and withers. Our energy burns out, our spirit is dissipated, and our work turns incredibly sterile.”²⁶

Dedication to the principle of the primacy of grace insures that in our pastoral work we will give priority to the spiritual life and to striving for sanctity. And it means objecting to Christianity in its *light or insubstantial* form, which is less demanding, devoid of any evangelical radicalism. Thus, the basis for the pastoral program for the new millennium—as John Paul II pointed out—is leading the baptized on the road of the vocation to sanctity.²⁷ Mary Immaculate is the example on this path. She completely fulfilled this calling to sanctity. Accepting

²⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inneunte*, 38.

²⁵ George Matulaitis Matulewicz, *Journal*, January 6, 1913, 87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1910, 27.

²⁷ cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 31.

in our pastoral work the particular “pedagogy of sanctity”²⁸ about which John Paul II taught, ensures that our life will begin to be perceived from the perspective of eternity. Presence is then lived out as the path to the house of the Father who is Love.

In our pastoral work, which is inspired by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, we should also pay particular attention to objecting to contemporary pelagianism. This means that we ought to oppose the conviction that God’s grace is not necessary, that man by himself can perform no less than he could with the help of grace.²⁹ External zeal without cooperation with God’s grace becomes fruitless activism. The most important message in preaching becomes the message of grace and God’s assurance given to St. Paul: “My grace is enough for you” (2 Cor 12:9). This is grace which defines the *manner of being human*, as growing to the fullness of harmony of the love with God. We respond to grace, that is to the Love of God, with our love.

Submitting to the rule of the primacy of grace breeds and strengthens absolute trust in God’s Providence, that is, the conviction that God directs the history of man and the world. Moreover, it breeds trust in God’s support in every circumstance of life. God is always the first. He first offers grace and then He invites us to take up the work.

The primacy of grace which we realize in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception reveals the *most important condition for the successful apostolate* to us. “Mary was created immaculate—as John Paul II teaches—to better serve us through her intercession.”³⁰ Just as the “fullness of grace” of Mary was directed toward her mission in the history of salvation, so man’s remaining in God’s grace, is linked with his life mission. Thus, any form of apostolic work depends not so much on action and applied tools as on the quality of the spiritual life of the pastors. The closer the cooperation with God’s grace, the more fruitful and more devout the apostolate. So, the *primacy of the spiritual life* is a condition for authentic pastoral work. Blessed George Matulewicz was aware of this when he wrote: “When our spirit has cooled, nothing is left to fire our zeal and then even our good works lose their vitality. That is why our spiritual life should always come first.”³¹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ R. Cantalamessa, *Maryja zwierciadłem Kościoła*, p. 33.

³⁰ Jan Paweł II, *W wigilię Niepokalanego Poczęcia* [On the Eve of the Immaculate Conception], Dec. 7, 1983, in: *Jan Paweł II o Matce Bożej* (John Paul II about the Mother of God), vol. 2, p. 38.

³¹ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, Oct. 24, 1910, 11.

The Immaculate Conception as a Way of Being the Paschal Man

I am a Marian

The paschal event which Mary experienced in the first moments of her existence, called in dogma the “Immaculate Conception” constitutes the “way of existence of the Marian Congregation.” We can say even more. It is the “way” of existence for the Church which resulted from the Paschal mystery of the Word Incarnate. The Church, born of the mystery of Christ, reveals itself as “holy and immaculate.” The paschal-ecclesial mystery of the Immaculate Conception received a cosmic-eschatological dimension. The “newness” initiated in the Immaculate Conception proclaims the transformed face of the universe, renewed and deified, revealing the “new heaven and earth.”

Using the notion: “Immaculate Conception” which by necessity is abstract, we cannot forget that we are talking about a person, that it is Mary, one of us, who brings for us the reality of the “new way of existence.”

The breakthrough event, which should also be called paschal, in the life of each of us was undoubtedly accepting the gift of “being in Christ,” the grace of the Christian vocation initiated by baptism and confirmed with our choosing the good following the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth.

It has pleased God to speak to the world in many different ways, to bring people to Himself through many different paths, but always in Jesus Christ. The face of the Church reveals the traits of each of us. The clearer they are, the easier it is to recognize the Lord, while their variety and uniqueness which make up her reality, confirm the impenetrable richness of Christ. Out of this richness of Christ, the Church receives the gift of the Marian vocation, so that those who receive Him are witnesses to the new way of existence, in Christ, for Christ, in the Holy Spirit, toward the love of the Father in heaven. Mary, as the first, received this vocation and in her we can also see its complete fulfillment. We have also been invited to take up this path. In our “starting point” or “fiat” which is the response to the invitation of the Master of Nazareth, our new name has been revealed—*Marian*.

Due to God’s predilection, it expresses a new way of existence and a mission to fulfill. We have accepted the gift and enriched ourselves with it and we have to pass it on to others with joy. This gift—the charism which constitutes our name is: the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of our Lord. Only this gift allows me now to understand who I am and who I should be. Only this gift defines my place within the Church and in the world. It alone is the “key” to reading my everyday life. It alone is the icon which opens to the horizon into future in God. It is also the language in which Christ wants to lead a dialogue of love and salvation with me.

Help for the Faithful Departed in the Marian Charism Historical and Theological Aspects

Introduction

In its Constitutions, published in 1723 and 1787, the Marian Religious Community founded by Blessed Father Stanislaus Papczyński (1631-1701), clearly stated that the Marian devotion and assistance for the deceased are its “vocation and profession” (VIII.1).¹ When Fr. Casimir Wyszyński was trying to obtain the privilege of indulgences in Rome (1752), he simply showed the Constitution and added: “we are an institute bringing help to the deceased.”² One of the forms of realizing the thus defined charism was to offer devotions for the deceased at “all churches run by the afore-mentioned Fathers” during the Octave of All Souls’ Day.³

In his “Rule of Life” (1687 and 1694/98) the Marian Founder thus defined his Order’s special goal: “... to the utmost of your strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, and with

¹ *Statuta Patrum Marianorum Ordinis B.M.V. sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Defunctis et Parochis In Cura Animarum suffragantium Congregationis Polonae*, Romae 1723: “vestra vocatio et professio est totis viribus Suffragium praestare fidelium defunctis carentibus auxilio” (VIII.1); cf. *Constitutiones Ordinis Immaculatae Conceptionis B.V.M. Clericorum Regularium Marianorum*, Romae 1787: “vestra vocatio et professio est totis viribus suffragium praestare Animabus Fidelium Defunctorum” (VIII.1).

² See: *Diariusz czynności w Rzymie i Portugalii*, in: *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, transl. and edited by Z. Proczek MIC, Warsaw-Stockbridge, 2004, p. 296.

³ In 1752, the above-mentioned Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszyński, then the General Procurator of the Order, prepared something like instructions as a way of introducing the indulgences and organizing devotions for the deceased. He drew his inspiration from the custom of the Roman Confraternities. See: *Diariusz czynności*, pp. 292-295 (after the entry on May 20, 1752). We have a brief press account of the solemn introduction of this “new devotion” at the Church of Our Lord’s Cenacle in Góra [Kalwaria] on Nov. 2, 1757. The event was presided over by Fr. Krzysztof Krakier, Canon from Warsaw, then residing at the local parish, which was run by the Congregation of Clerics of the Communal Life (informally known as the Communists or the Bartholomists). The author of this account mentioned that the new devotion takes place in all Marian churches and stated that the Marians took steps towards the Beatification of their Founder. See: “Kurier Polski”, 1757, Nr. 46, p. 2. Cf.: S.M. Sydry, *Organizacja Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów w XVIII wieku*, Warsaw, 1930, p. 68.

utmost zeal, piety, and fervor assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains—especially the souls of soldiers and those who have died of pestilence” (I, 2).⁴ The Founder also put those two elements of the Marian vocation into the formula of professing religious vows, which he personally wrote and included in the original Constitutions (because our own ritual was not yet written). The profession was a legal and ritual act of offering oneself to God and Mary Immaculate: “for His greater glory and the honor of the Virgin, for the assistance of the dead who lack suffrages [in other words for those for whom no one offers prayers and good works of propitiatory value], especially soldiers and those who have died from pestilence” (I, 6).⁵ The introduction of these elements of the charism into the brief version of *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*, which Fr. Mansueto Leporini, OFM prepared specifically for the Marians’ use, was confirmed by Fr. Stanislaus’s personal signature made on June 6, 1701, at the Nunciature in Warsaw.⁶

The examples given above demonstrate that assistance for the deceased has been an essential part of the Marian charism from the start.

The first question which arises regards the factors which sharpened Blessed Stanislaus’s sensitivity to the eschatological (once called the *All Souls*’) aspect in his spirituality and the founding initiative. It also needs to be explained that special attention was given to two groups of people embraced by this assistance, because the victims of wars and epidemics are mentioned “particularly.”

The second question concerns the title or the patronage of Blessed Stanislaus since they are traditionally given to prominent personages. Thus, we may ask: what title was attributed to Fr. Papczyński and with what mission or patronage was he associated in literature and works of art?

Finally, there is the matter of the Marian tradition of assisting the deceased. We need to answer the questions: how did the Marian community live by its charism in the matter of helping the deceased, and how do they do it today?

We will conclude the matter with a theological reflection on the sense and meaning of the assistance for the deceased.

⁴ S. Papczyński, *Rule of Life*, Documents of Marian History and Spirituality, Stockbridge, MA, 1980, p. 10.

⁵ *Rule of Life*, Documents of Marian History and Spirituality, Stockbridge, MA, 1980, p.11.

⁶ Synopsis Regulae Imitationis Decem Virtutum BVM, No. 17-18; see: Capitula generalia marianorum, ed. W. Makoś MIC, Puszcza Mariańska, 2001, p. 10: *Fratres in hoc Ordine debent esse in onere seu exercitio exhibendi pia Suffragia pro Animabus in purgatorio existentibus...* [The confreres of this Order have the obligation and task to give suffrages to the souls remaining in purgatory...].

Roots of the Founding Charism

The search for the causes and the conditions that gave birth to Fr. Papczyński's particular religious zeal for the deceased and the idea of giving assistance to the Poor Souls in Purgatory allow four factors to emerge. They are: 1. The Marian spirit of his times and its association with the apostolate on behalf of the Poor Souls; 2. The social and political circumstances of Poland in the 17th century; 3. The religious experiences of the Marian Founder; and 4. The climate of the polemics with the Reformation, which rejected the truth of faith regarding Purgatory.

Marian Devotion and Prayer for the Deceased

The association of Marian devotion with the prayer for the deceased was a phenomenon known in Poland not only in the Middle Ages, but in the 17th and 18th centuries as well. This is supported by a study of the history of Marian devotion, numerous confraternities, guilds, associations, and sodalities. The Mother of God was regarded as a particular patron at the hour of death (cf. the ending of the *Ave Maria*...) and an advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory. Because she was free of sin and its punishments, she was called upon as the one who intercedes to free the souls from Purgatory.⁷

We know that from 1663-1667, Fr. Papczyński was the promoter of the confraternity of "The Most Blessed Sweet Virgin Mary" at the Church of the Piarist Fathers in Warsaw. He probably had organized it anew after the epidemics of 1660-1663 were over. Later, after having left the Piarists on December 11, 1670, he was the chaplain in charge of the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. at St. Jacob's Church in Kazimierz near Krakow. In 1673, he brought the Congregation of the Marian Fathers under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. to life to assist the souls of the deceased.⁸ Based on the power of the rights obtained from the Holy See on March 20, 1681, he founded confraternities of the Immaculate Conception, assisting the souls of the deceased in the churches under the Marian's care, and he instructed them to do so in the future.⁹ In the *Norma vitae* (VII.8), he instructed: "The Su-

⁷ J. Wojnowski, *Rozwój czci Matki Bożej w Polsce*, "Homo Dei" 26 (1957), 846-862.—B. Kumor, *Kościelne stowarzyszenia świeckich na ziemiach polskich w okresie przedrozbiorowym*, in: *Księga tysiąclecia katolicyzmu w Polsce*, T. I, Lublin, 1969, 503-545, bibliography p. 540n.

⁸ T. Rogalewski, MIC, *Stanislaus Papczyński (1631-1701), Founder of the Order of Marians and Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality*, Stockbridge, 2001.

⁹ C. J. Krzyżanowski, MIC, *Stanislaus a Jesu Maria Papczyński (1631-1701). Magister studii perfectionis*, Romae 1963, pp. 465 and 480.

terior [General] will assign to each house a promoter of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception assisting the souls of the faithful departed /.../. He, to whom this duty full of merit shall be entrusted, will in every way apply himself to this, so that he may bring forth as many fervent and devout members, lovers of the Immaculate Virgin, and helpers of the dead as possible.”¹⁰

Looking at Fr. Papczyński’s activity, we wonder at the fact of linking the cult of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception with the assistance to the souls suffering in Purgatory. This second mission was usually associated with the Marian devotions of that time, and particularly with the so-called “Holy Slavery” to Mary, which was well-known in the West and also promoted in Poland by the Jesuits as early as the 1630s. As an essential part of this slavery to Mary, we find the total dedication of oneself through Mary “into God’s inheritance.” This kind of deed demanded above all freeing oneself from the chains of sin and the devil. The Blessed Virgin Mary, in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, was the symbol of deliverance from evil—holy and untouched by sin throughout her entire life, from the moment of her conception until the Assumption. Servants of Mary did not stop at freeing themselves from sins and evil. They took concrete functions upon themselves, such as ransoming Christian slaves from the pagans, giving assistance to prisoners and assisting the souls suffering in Purgatory through prayers, indulgences, and the offering of Masses. Such deeds reflected the practical application of the catechetical teachings on corporal and spiritual deeds of mercy.¹¹

The idea of “Holy Slavery” to Mary was not unknown to Fr. Papczyński who had been educated in the Jesuits’ colleges. His years in college coincided with the promotion of that devotion by the Jesuits, especially by Fr. Casper Družbicki (1590-1662), a zealous partisan of practicing “the slavery.” When Fr. Papczyński was leaving the Piarists, having spent 16 years of his religious life with them, he made a public act of offering himself into service to God and the Immaculate One (*oblatio*), calling himself “a slave/servant/ of the Blessed Virgin Mary” (*Beatae Virginis Mariae servus*).¹²

¹⁰ S. Papczyński, *Rule of Life*, p. 24. See: J. Kosmowski, *Marianie w latach 1787-1864*, Warsaw-Lublin, 2004, 206.

¹¹ W. Makoś MIC, *Maryjne niewolnictwo w nauce polskich teologów z pierwszej połowy XVII wieku* (Praca licencjacka powstała na Wydziale Teologicznym KUL), mps. Lublin, 1964, 120n. Cf.: Same author: *Problem powiązania prawdy Niepokalanego Poczęcia NMP z niesieniem pomocy duszom w czyśćcu cierpiącym u o. Papczyńskiego*, “Immaculate” 1972, no. 87, 12-16.

¹² S. Papczyński, *Scripta historica*, (Fontes Historiae Marianorum, 8), ed. C. Krzyżanowski, Warszawa 1999, p. 29.

The Social and Political Circumstances in Poland

In the 17th century, the Commonwealth of Poland was either troubled by various wars or suffering from invasions. There were also foreign military campaigns as well as internal struggles, invasions, unrest, and disturbances. To name just the most important ones: wars with Russia in 1609 and 1654-67; wars with Sweden in 1600-1611, 1617-1629, and 1655-1660; and the war with Rakoczy in Transylvania (1657). There was also George Lubomirski's rebellion in 1665-66, the Bohdan Khmelnycky uprising of 1648, the Cossacks' rebellion of 1651; as well as victories and defeats in the struggle against the Turks (1620-1621, 1671-1676, and 1683). All this brought devastation, death, and the destruction of towns, cities, and settlements. Plains and arable lands burned, while houses and churches vanished. Father S. M. Sydry wrote: "These tragedies were aggravated by natural disasters: floods, unusual freezing conditions, and rains that destroyed the sowings or the harvests from fields already poorly cultivated because of the incessant unrest. This led to famine, the spreading of plagues and epidemics. Often one could see entire settlements completely abandoned."¹³

This description does not exaggerate. It is enough to take into account the statistics on the frequency of epidemics in those times, which were called pestilence or bubonic plagues. In the 17th century there were many epidemics: 1601-1605, 1607-1613, 1617-1618, 1620, 1622-1625, 1627-1632, 1634, 1637-1639, 1641, 1645, 1648, 1650-1663, 1665, 1667, 1672-1679, 1693, 1699.¹⁴

Life-threatening circumstances caused by wars, natural disasters, and plagues were undoubtedly very disturbing. Thousands of people died a violent death, being often completely unprepared to stand before God in eternity. This thought was probably moving the hearts of the sensitive faithful to help the others to preserve their faith and hope instead of falling into fear and uncertainty.

Thus, Fr. Papczyński had no trouble understanding the situations of those who died a sudden death during plagues or military actions. According to Fr. Casimir Wyszynski's notes († 1755), Fr. Stanislaus accompanied King John III Sobieski on his campaign against the Turks in the Ukraine (1675).¹⁵ The conviction of the Marians of the second half of the 17th century about the existence of an "agreement" to bring assistance to "the multitude of people slain in wars," which Fr. Papczyński concluded with King Sobieski and Stanislaus Jabłonowski, the

¹³ S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny Sługa Boży o. Stanisław od Jezusa i Maryi Papczyński i jego dzieło w świetle dokumentów*, Warsaw 1937, p. 103.

¹⁴ F. Giedrojc, *Mór w Polsce w wiekach ubiegłych. Zarys historyczny*, Warsaw, 1899, p. 53-58.

¹⁵ S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny Sługa Boży...*, pp. 165-177; cf. T. Rogalewski MIC, *Stanislaus Papczyński...*, 227; see: K. J. Krzyżanowski MIC, *O powrót do idei przewodniej Zgromadzenia Marianów*, "Immaculata" (1969) no. 51, p. 28.

Great Crown Hetman, commander in chief of the Vienna campaign, seems to be totally credible.¹⁶ There is also a legend saying that Fr. Stanislaus accompanied the Polish hussars (light calvary) to Vienna.

As we see, the tradition favors the opinion that Fr. Papczyński's special remembrance of the souls suffering in Purgatory, "especially" soldiers and victims of pestilence, was born out of the circumstances of 17th-century Poland. Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski referred to this tradition, while performing the canonical installation of the Marian Order (April 21, 1679).¹⁷

Such were the "natural" although very painful circumstances, in which God granted Blessed Stanislaus special graces and light into the domain of faith regarding eternal life and the eschatological truths.

Religious and Mystical Experiences

A link with the world of the dead was Fr. Papczyński's personal charism.¹⁸ He was given to intensely experience the mystery of Purgatory at least twice. We know about those experiences from his biography written by Fr. Mansueto Leporini, OFM (approx. 1705) and the other—by Fr. Casimir Wyszyński (1754), as well as from testimonies given by witnesses in the informative process in Poznań (1767-1769). The witnesses spoke of Blessed Papczyński's lengthy prayers, numerous fasts and acts of mortification, frequent Holy Masses offered for the souls in Purgatory.

Blessed Stanislaus' sensitivity regarding the eschatological aspect, not including the primary Marian aspect, came to life somewhere between 1673 and 1675. This was a time when Blessed Stanislaus had various experiences. He had mystical visions in Lubocza, where he stayed beginning in September of 1671, and Puszcza Korabiewska, where he arrived on September 30, 1673. He dealt with a directive from the Bishop-visitor in regards to the daily recitation of the Office of the Dead (1673)¹⁹, he participated in a military campaign (1675)

¹⁶ *Objaśnienie z informacją o Zakonie OO. Marianów*, p. 2 (no. 1), in: *Uwiedomienie o sukience albo Szkaplerzu Niepokalanego Poczęcia (...) y różne nabożeństwo (...) za Dusze Umarłych z poprzedzającą wprzód informacją*, wyd. 4, Berdyczów 1773.

¹⁷ S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny sługa...*, p. 159: "The goal of the Congregation above all shall be to bring assistance to the souls in Purgatory. Every means can be used to this extent, but mainly the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, daily recitation of the Office of the Dead and the entire rosary, as well as other forms of mortification. Particular care must be given those who perished in incessant wars, frequent epidemics and other disastrous events, as well as those who are devoid of any help from the other faithful."

¹⁸ T. Rogalewski MIC, *Stanislaus Papczyński...*, p. 226-231.

¹⁹ This footnote may have been inspired by Fr. Papczyński or in agreement with his intentions. Additional light can be shed on this topic by the understanding of some basic data regarding the history

and he suffered from dangerous illnesses which were ravaging the country from 1672-1679. The *Book of the Marian Protocols* from the monastery in Balsamão, Portugal, contains a note stating the conviction that Fr. Papeczyński “adopted in 1675 a great devotion for the Poor Souls in Purgatory,” and that in 1676, he made it “a particular goal of the Congregation.”²⁰ Let us look at this note for the answer to the question about the date on which this sensibility towards the needs of the deceased, especially the victims of wars and pestilence, arose in the heart of the priest and religious order member. Indeed, Blessed Papeczyński showed an extreme sensitivity in this matter. It probably stayed with him until his dying day, because in his *Testament* of December 9, 1692, he wrote: “I most urgently and strongly instruct my dearly beloved brethren in Christ to love God and neighbor, /.../ to give proper honor to the Virgin Mary conceived without stain of sin, and to zealously assist the souls of the deceased.”²¹

Blessed Papeczyński’s mystical visions are closely related to two matters. First, there is his profound life of prayer nurtured by contemplation of the truths of the faith, including man’s ultimate matters. While staying in Lubocza and Puszcza Korabiewska, he used to lead an intensive inner life of contemplation. Starting exactly in 1671, he used to remain “in seclusion, guided by the Holy Spirit,” and

of this Office and its binding power in the 17th century. In fact, the Office of the Dead, derived from the early Christian practice of praying for the deceased on specific days, arose in the 8th-century monastic centers. At the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, it had become a universal and obligatory daily practice in monasteries and chapters. The obligation of celebrating this Office daily was eliminated by St. Pius V (*Breviarium Romanum*, 1568). From that time on, it was required to recite this Office in choir on the Mondays of Advent and Lent, on the first day of each month (or on the next day, if taken by another celebration), as well as during certain vigils and quarterly dates. However, the Pope urgently encouraged the recitation of this prayer in choir, granting a 100-day indulgence for each time it is recited on the above-mentioned days. The obligation of reciting this Office in choir was eliminated only by St. Pius X (rubrics from 1913, based on the Bull of 1911). At first, the Office included only *Lauds* and *Vespers*, to which the *Matins* were added in the 14th century. Three prayers during the day and one *completa* joined them in 1913, when the *Officium defunctorum*, which previously had a votive character, that is, being constantly added to the Office of the day (including on November 2nd), has now become a Daily Office on the annual solemnity of All Souls. Based on this information, we can infer that daily recitation of the Office of the Dead, prescribed to the Marians by Bishop S.J. Świącicki, went beyond the all-Church norms and duties. Thus, it must come from some other rationale, which might have been Blessed Papeczyński’s inspiration. As to the history of this Office, see S. Baumer, *Geschichte des Breviers*. Freiburg i. Br. 1895, p. 441, 327, 453; A.J. Nowowiejski, *Wykład liturgii Kościoła katolickiego*, t. 4, Płock 1916 p. 345-350; C. Callewaert, *Liturgiae institutiones*, ed. 2, t. 2, Brugis 1939, p. 308 n.; M. Righetti, *Nauale di storia liturgica*, ed. 3, vol. 2, Milano 1969, pp. 484-487; *Breviarium Romanum*, Venetis 1794, pp. IV-V, CXX.

²⁰ K.J. Krzyżanowski MIC, *O powrót do idei...*, 27. The note in the *Protocollum Ordinis...* was entered by Fr. Aleksy Fischer († 1782) based on Blessed Papeczyński’s diary which did not survive. It contains one concrete date on which the Founder defined “the Congregation’s special goal”—February 11, 1676.

²¹ S. Papeczyński, *Scripta historica...*, p. 12: *Fratribus meis /.../ solidum sine labe Conceptae Virginis cultum, ferentem Defunctis opitulationem /.../ maxime et instantissime, recomendo*. This time, instead of the well-known word “suffragium” he used the term “opitulatio,” which is synonymous. “Cultus solidus” can mean a constant and strong part, which involves the heart, also. Cf. p. 6 in *Testament II* (1699/1701), *Scripta historica...*, p. 136.

“given to the eremetical life.” Certainly, this was a time of contemplation, but it was also a time to seek the way to found a new religious community. Perhaps he was already working on the topic of man’s ultimate matters, those “*de novissimis*,” to which he dedicated seven reflections in his collection for consecrated souls entitled *Inspectio cordis [Examination of the Heart]* (created from 1674-1695).²²

Another matter associated with the special religious experiences in Blessed Stanislaus’s life is his profound understanding of the mystery of the communion of saints and the love of neighbor. People who have died in the Lord are our neighbors and love for them should reach beyond the earthly existence. Blessed Papczyński called fraternal help for the souls remaining in Purgatory “the highest expression of love” and a noble deed since it involved people “from whom no reward, no gratitude, no praise can be expected.”²³ So, just like in other matters, in spreading the assistance for the deceased, Blessed Stanislaus appears as “the Teacher of love—*Magister caritatis*,” for whom man is the temple of God, his heart—its altar, and his love and deeds—the sacrifice dearest to God.²⁴

The Atmosphere of Polemics with the Reformation

This factor, which might have formed Blessed Stanislaus’s sensitivity to the truths of the faith as to Purgatory, needs to be especially studied. Certain arguments reveal the need to consider it, at least in its basic form.

Blessed Papczyński had been educated in the Jesuit Colleges of Jarosław, Lwów, and Rawa Mazowiecka. It was probably there that he learned this particular sensitivity for the truth of the faith regarding Purgatory, because the Jesuits were in the “vanguard” of fighting the errors of the Reformation in Poland. In their schools, they strove to protect the young from heresy. The teaching about Purgatory was one of the truths which the Protestants questioned and the Catho-

²² The manuscript is in the Library of the Seminary in Lublin, sign. 523. See cat. 176-185. The manuscript description was prepared by H.D. Wojtyska, *Katalog rękopisów Biblioteki Seminarium Duchownego w Lublinie*, Lublin, 1972.—A detailed analysis of the said reflections was made by T. Rogalewski, MIC, in “Theological Foundations of the Christian Life” in *The Teachings of the Founder and the Renovator of the Congregation of Marians*, Lublin-Warsaw, 1997, pp. 138-145.

²³ Stanislaus a Jesu Maria Papczyński, *Templum Dei Mysticum*, Cracoviae 1675, pp. 173 and 193. Other publications of this work appeared in Warsaw in 1741 and 1747. See: S. Papczyński, *Pisma zebrane*..., pp. 1158 and 1166; S. Papczyński, *Mistyczna świątynia Boga*. Introduction: K. Klauza, transl. W. Makoś, Warsaw 2007, pp. 206-207. (cf. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, Stockbridge, 2006).

²⁴ C. J. Krzyżanowski, MIC, *Stanislaus a Jesu Maria Papczyński. Magister studii perfectionis*..., 498-500.

lic vigorously defended.²⁵ Even though Catholic efforts at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries prevented the growth of Protestantism in Poland, somehow it was still present in the 17th century and died out only during the war with Sweden (1650-1660).²⁶ Perhaps the atmosphere of fighting the errors of the Reformation was preserved in the Catholic publications of that century and until the beginning of the next because of some real danger, perhaps, or it was simply a means of prevention and security. The Jesuits played a large part in practicing the polemic theology called the “theology of controversy.”²⁷ It was also widespread in the formation of future priests in the Piarist Order.

The fact that Blessed Papczyński referred to Jesuit authors in his writings has already been proven fully and in detail.²⁸ The timeliness of the Marian’s work against the background of Protestant influences after the Swedish invasion in 1656, as well the Islamic ones before the victory at Vienna in 1683, was confirmed by Bishop Hieronim Wierzbowski in his letter to the Holy See of March 20, 1699. The bishop thus spoke about the need for the Marian Order: “After the enemy of the name of Christ departed by the grace of God, the faithful were left infected by new ideas and ceremonies which are wrong,” and for this reason “this Institute is necessary and very useful.”²⁹

To conclude this part, let us briefly state that in our search for the roots of the eschatological element in Blessed Papczyński’s spirituality and apostolate, which was later passed on to his Order, we have found solid self-supporting factors.

The four above-mentioned factors represent the social and personal environment, in which God granted Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński this particular

²⁵ The 16th-century doctrinal debate regarding Purgatory found its reflection in the writings of such authors as Stanislaus Lubomierski and Marcin Krowicki for the Protestants, and Andrzej Zebrzydowski and Marcin of Kleck for the Catholics. This debate echoed in works of the 17th and 18th centuries (see footnote 29). As an example, we give you a brief work published by the Jesuits in Vilnius in 1700: “Odpowiedź na częste owe pytania; gdzie to napisane jest? Katolicka i gruntowna, dyssydentska zaś i fałszywa albo płocha.” Among other things, its author discusses two controversial teachings: about Purgatory (pp. 179-187) and about assisting the deceased (pp. 187-191). He lists the following forms and kinds of assistance: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, alms, fasting, pilgrimages and other good deeds, and supports their sense by appropriate biblical verses (see p. 187).

²⁶ See: J. Tazbir, *Świt i zmierzch polskiej reformacji*, Warsaw, 1956, pp. 152, 155n, 185, 190n.—Cf. works by A. Kossowski and J. Łukaszewicz on the Protestantism in the 16th and 17th centuries in Lublin and its Province, in Wołyń and Poznań.

²⁷ H. D. Wojtyńska, *Studia nad rękopisami nowożytnymi Biblioteki Seminarium Duchownego w Lublinie*. “Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne” 25 (1972) 210, 218 and 221n.—Cf. M. Bednorz, *Jezuici a religijność polska (1564-1964)*, “Nasza Przeszość” 20 (1964) 169.

²⁸ E. Jarra, *Mysł społeczna o. Stanisława Papczyńskiego Założyciela Marianów*, Stockbridge, Massachusetts (U.S.A.) 1962, p. 16, 27n.—Cf. G. Karolewicz, *Poglądy społeczne Stanisława Papczyńskiego*, (Typeset Doctoral These at the University of Warsaw), Warsaw, 1964, p. 35.

²⁹ S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny sluga....*, p. 228

charism. The specifics of this charism are depicted by the titles, which the tradition assigned to Blessed Stanislaus.

Advocate of the Deceased and Servant of the Dying

We will give succinct definitions here of the service and the spiritual uniqueness of the Marian Founder. Two titles have been used to this extent: Advocate of the Deceased and Servant of the Dying.

Advocate of the Deceased

For three centuries, numerous works of art presented Blessed Stanislaus as the advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory and as a chaplain remaining at the side of the dying. These works are legendary portraits, portraits conveying an ideological program, copperplate engravings, murals, stained glass windows, and prints from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.³⁰

There are many pictures among the works of art dedicated to Blessed Papczyński. The ones belonging to the type of a legendary portrait usually have in their bottom part a cartouche or a scroll containing biographical data. They speak of Fr. Papczyński as the founder of a congregation “assisting the Poor Souls in Purgatory.” There are five pictures containing such texts: three of them are from the 18th, and two—from the 19th centuries. As examples, let’s give the pictures of Fr. Stanislaus located in Skórzec, Puszcza Mariańska, and Marijampole.

Along with the portraits of Blessed Papczyński, we have topical paintings that convey a so-called ideological program (or a message) of the main personage. Eleven paintings have in the background scenes and motifs, which explain not so much the biography as the main ideas that enlivened the Founder: the devotion to the Mother of God and intercession for the Poor Souls in Purgatory, above all.³¹

³⁰ J. Pietrusiński, *Sługa Boży o. Stanisław Papczyński w wizerunkach malarzkich oraz pomniki związane z miejscami jego urodzin i śmierci*. (Collection of Photostats with typeset description in possession of the Archives of the Marian Fathers in Warsaw-Stegny), Warsaw, 1963. The same thing appeared in “Immaculata” no. 12 (505) 2006, pp. 19-31, under a different title and date of March 15, 1964.—B. Konobrodzka, *Obrazy z kościoła parafialnego pod wezwaniem Nawrócenia św. Pawła w Skórcu (k. Siedlec)*, “Immaculata” 1971, no. 81/82, pp. 21-22.—To the number of 34 has been also added the image from St. Paul’s Church in Lublin, painted in 1950 by Adam Demont, an Evangelical.—During the preparations to the beatification new images were created (one—by Andrzej Rzepkowski from Lublin), which we will omit.

³¹ To this group belong the following pictures with the “motif” of Purgatory:
– Advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory: mid-18th century (approx. 1740), copperplate, Library of

Among the works of art dedicated to Blessed Papczyński, we also see three paintings, which combine the elements of a legendary portrait and an “ideological” image.³²

Having reviewed the works of art, we note that: firstly, 19 out of 34 paintings either depict Blessed Papczyński as the advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory

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- the Warsaw University. The Blessed is standing in a cemetery. Below him there is an image of Purgatory and people there; above him in the background—Our Blessed Mother conceived in glory, at his right we see fields, tombs, and tents. In his left hand, Blessed Stanislaus holds a crucifix, while his right arm is extended towards Purgatory.
- Founder of the Order: mid-18th century, oil on canvas, Marian Religious House in Balsamão, Portugal; by a local Portuguese painter. In the background we see details emphasizing the Marian devotion and intercession for the fallen in wars. This motif is emphasized by the presence of military camp tents. The inscription is similar to those of the legendary portraits.
 - Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: middle or 3rd quarter of the 18th century; copperplate printed on paper, Archdiocesan Archives in Poznań; probably, an Italian artist. On Blessed Papczyński’s left we see people in Purgatory; on his right—military tents; above him—the Blessed Mother Immaculately Conceived. In his right hand, Fr. Stanislaus holds a crucifix. At the bottom of the picture, there is an inscription similar to those of the legendary portraits.
 - Father Founder celebrating the Holy Mass: turn of the 18th and 19th centuries; by Fr. Jan Niezabitowski, a Marian († 1804), oil on canvas, Marian Religious House in Skórcz near Siedlce. Our Founder, surrounded by other religious, is celebrating a Holy Mass. In the clouds above him, we see the heavenly denizens and Our Blessed Mother with her arms extended towards the Religious in a gesture of intercession. From under the broken floor (as in a crypt), the arms of personages engulfed by flames are depicted. One of the Religious is giving them a rosary or perhaps, the decade chaplet—symbol the Ten Evangelical Virtues, another—the Blue Scapular as a sign of prayerful assistance for them. See: S. M. Sydry MIC: *Organizacja Zgromadzenia...*, photo following p. 148.
 - Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: turn of the 18th and 19th centuries; oil on canvas; Marian Religious House in Góra Kalwaria near Warsaw /formerly: the Church of Our Lord’s Cenacle, see: S. M. Sydry MIC: *Organizacja Zgromadzenia...*, p. 172/. The painting is similar in composition and content to the copperplate from the Library of the Warsaw University.
 - Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: 1913, oil on canvas; parish church in Podegrodzie near Stary Sącz. This is also similar to the copperplate from the Library of the Warsaw University.
 - Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: 1933, by J. Bołtuć from Nowogródek, oil on canvas; Marian Religious House in Warsaw-Stegny. In the background—the Church of Our Lord’s Cenacle; at the bottom—Purgatory. The painting was made for the Warsaw exhibition on one of the anniversaries of the victory at Vienna.
 - Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: second quarter of the 20th century. Mural at the presbytery in the Żarnów Parish Church near Kielce. At the foot of a religious is a knight engulfed by the flames of Purgatory.
 - Blessed Papczyński by the side of a dying hussar: 1934, Marian Religious House in Warsaw-Praga at Wileńska 69. Other data as above.
 - Venerator of Mary Immaculate and Advocate for the Poor Souls in Purgatory: 1961, ink on paper; idea by Fr. E. Makulski, MIC; painting by W. Gałczyńska from Poznań. The composition includes a picture of purgatory.
- ³² They are:—a portrait with miters and a crosier: 1st quarter of the 20th century, by Marian Szczurkowski, oil on canvas, private collector. Purgatory in the background and a dove with an olive branch above it;—a portrait with a scroll and a crest: interwar period (before 1939), oil on canvas, private collector. In the left upper corner, we see the pseudo-crest of Blessed Papczyński bearing the eye of Divine Providence and a dove with an olive branch flying over the flames of Purgatory. The inscription of the scroll reads: “Fraters, orate pro defunctis, intolerabiles enim poenas patiuntur.”—a portrait in an armchair: 1964, by Adolf Hyla, oil on canvas, private collector. Location: cloisters of the Carmelite monastery on Piasek in Kraków. Two attributes can be seen in the background: a dove and the flames of Purgatory.

or refer to this topic in some other manner. Many of the paintings combine the eschatological and Marian aspects; secondly, their content favors the tradition of Fr. Stanislaus' participation as a chaplain in some military campaign.

Servant of the Dying

Already during the Founder's lifetime, the Marians were encouraged to give assistance not only to the deceased. The document of the approval of the Congregation of Diocesan Right (1679) and the decrees of the First General Chapter (1684) also entrusted us with care for the living who found themselves in mortal danger because of some circumstances or age. A paragraph in the Chapter decrees contains the following instruction: "Should they find out that someone has received a death sentence, they should visit, console, and strengthen him, and then accompany him thus well-prepared into his last battle (to execution)."³³ We do not know if the Marian priests ever accompanied the convicts.

Among the people who are near death are primarily the elderly and infirm, and the terminally ill people. The tradition tells us that Blessed Papczyński embraced with special care the elderly and the sick of Góra Kalwaria, where he resided from 1677 until his death in 1701. This certainly involved the sacraments: the anointing of the sick and viaticum for the dying.

On the other hand, the opinion that Blessed Stanislaus founded a hospice there bears little credibility since the home for the poor of that time, mentioned in the archives of the Góra Kalwaria Parish and called *xenodochium*, was linked to the parish under the care of the Fathers of the Communal Life and the local pilgrim movement under the Bernardine Fathers' care. On the other hand, the presently existing Góra Kalwaria nursing home was founded in 1840 as a welfare center and located on former Piarist grounds after they'd been vacated by the Russian troops.³⁴

The above facts, however scarce and few and far between in the process of organizing the Congregation, nevertheless give witness to the broad understanding of the eschatological and All-Souls'-Day elements that make up the spirituality and apostolate of the Marians. Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński was the inspirer of this type of religious apostolate.

³³ S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny sługa...*, pp. 200-201.—The Chapter was presided over by the Bishop's emissary, Fr. Mateusz Illmstadt, a member of the Fathers of the Communal Life, a Canon of Warsaw, the then Dean and Superior of Góra Kalwaria in 1683-1690. See: M. Pisarzak MIC, *Religijne dzieje Góry Kalwarii*, in: *Wiadomości Archidiecezji Warszawskiej*, no. 76 (1986) p. 235.

³⁴ M. Pisarzak MIC, *Religijne dzieje ...*, p. 230.

Continuation and Development of the Cause

As his legacy to his spiritual sons, the Founder left everything that he lived by to them. The specific feature of his personal spirituality became the hallmark of the “Society of the Immaculately Conceived.”

It seems that in the 17th and 18th centuries, no one earned the title of the advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory, neither Fr. Papczyński nor his own Order. Even in the middle of 19th century, the Marians were defined as the “most zealous devotees of praying for the deceased.”³⁵ One of the official titles of the Marians was: The Order “assisting the deceased and the pastors.”³⁶

An analysis of the content of the *Marian Constitutions* of 1687, 1694, 1723, 1786, 1910 (with additions made by the Roman Congregation), 1930, 1970 and 1988), as well as the *Synopsis Regulae* and the documents of several General Chapters, allows us to conclude that the Marians were obligated to preserve, and indeed preserved, their Founder’s spiritual legacy. It would be worth recalling here once again the statement from our original Constitutions, which states that Marian devotion and assistance for the deceased were “the vocation and profession” of the Marian religious community (VIII.1).³⁷

Each Marian accepted the obligation of assisting the deceased during the rite of the religious profession as defined by the *Ritual* (1750, 1791). The Superior would ask the candidate: “Do you promise to come with all your strength to the rescue of the Poor Souls in Purgatory through fervent love and mercy?” To which the candidate would reply: “I promise. I will constantly endeavor for their salvation” (*Ritual* from 1750). This formula was omitted in the *Rituals* of the renewed Congregation (1922, 1950, 1963). Its revised form was brought back into the *Ritual* in the post-Vatican period of the religious orders’ renewal and will be presented here later.³⁸

³⁵ J. Kosmowski MIC, *Charyzmat eschatyczny w dziejach Zgromadzenia [Marianów]*, “Immaculata” 1992, No. 328, p. 44.

³⁶ See: *Norma vitae...*, p. 34: *parochos in laboribus ecclesiasticis humiliter adiuvere* (I.3). Cf.: S. M. Sydry MIC, *Czcigodny sluga...*, p. 226, where we find a fragment of the letter written by Bishop Hieronim Wierzbowski, Administrator of the Diocese of Poznań (March 20, 1699): “This Institute has been founded on the authority of the Bishop to assist the deceased devoid of all help through daily prayers and offering the Holy Mass, as well as to bring help to pastors in their ministry, especially in teaching the basics of the faith to simple folks.” For more information about the name of the Order, see: M. Pisarszak MIC, *Element eschatologiczny w duchowości i apostołacie Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów*, a mimeograph copy, Lublin, 1987, pp. 24-27.

³⁷ M. Pisarszak MIC, *Z badań nad elementem eschatologicznym w duchowości i apostołacie Marianów*, in: *Studia Płockie* 5: 1977, 57-66.

³⁸ M. Pisarszak, *Z badań...*, p. 63; R. Zalewski, *Liturgia i praktyki pobożne w Zgromadzeniu Księży Marianów w latach 1673-1909*, Lublin, 2004, typeset Master these; M. Pisarszak, *Prezentacja Rytułu Mariańskiego. Studium obrzędowości zakonnej*, w: K. Koniecki (ed.) *Laudate Dominum*, Gniezno, 2005, pp. 553-590, see Annex 1-2.

There are various and numerous forms of assisting the souls suffering in Purgatory. Their number was growing in 1723-1787, especially under the influence of Fr. Casimir Wyszyński and Fr. Raymond Nowicki. Certain forms involved prayer and sacrifice (mortification and toil); others had the character of an apostolic service among the faithful. Summing them all up, we should list here the following ways of assisting the deceased and getting the faithful involved in this work of mercy:

- *Officium defunctorum* recited in particular by the priests and the seminarists;
- recitation of the rosary performed mainly by the brothers;
- acts of mortification, fasting and flagellation;
- assigning to certain confreres such titles as “of the Holy Souls in Purgatory;”
- the obtaining of indulgences, celebrating a Holy Mass at a privileged altar (each monastery strove to obtain this privilege);³⁹
- guiding a confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. to assist the deceased;⁴⁰
- frequently reprinting the booklet *Devotions for the Souls of the Deceased*;⁴¹ practicing and spreading devotions for the deceased on All-Souls’ Day and during its Octave according to a special program of chants, ceremonies, and prayers;⁴²

³⁹ The context of the efforts for indulgences and privileges has been well illustrated in *Dariusz czynności of the Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszyński*; see his notes from 1751-1752 (*Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa...*, p. 190-419).

⁴⁰ J. Kosmowski MIC, *Marianie w latach 1787-1864*, Warszawa-Lublin, 2004, p. 206n.

⁴¹ We know of the prints from 1755, 1767 and 1773; today, the best known is the latter. It is difficult to tell who was the editor of this booklet. In 1752, while issuing instructions in regards to those devotions, Fr. Wyszyński mentioned “the booklet of Fr. Aleksy [Fischer]; see *Diariusz czynności...*, p. 294.

⁴² See: *Nabożeństwo za dusze zmarłych*, p. 8, in “Uwiedomienie...,” Berdyczów, 1773. Those devotions were supposed to be performed in choir in the following manner:

1. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at the main altar during the singing of *O Salutaris Hostia*;
2. Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament;
3. The Marian Little Office of the Hours in Polish, accompanied by organ music;
4. Covering the Blessed Sacrament with *umbraculum*;
5. *Officium defunctorum* (three noctures and laudes);
6. Singing the *Requim* at the side altar, during which teachings will be delivered to the faithful encouraging them to give assistance to the deceased;
7. Procession with a *conductus*;
8. After the procession, removal of the covering (*umbraculum*) and incensing the Blessed Sacrament by the priest wearing a white cape;
9. Singing of the Litany to the Name of Jesus (replacing words *miserere nobis* with *miserere eis*);
10. Appropriate chant for the deceased (i.e. *Jezu w Ogrójcu modlejący*) followed by an appropriate prayer;
11. Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament;

- ringing the great bell nine times at night (this practice was introduced in Poland in memory of the battle against the Turks at Varna in 1444, and the fallen knights);
- prayers with the people as part of the parish missions program run by the Marians;⁴³ and finally
- various prayers for the deceased, beginning with “*De profundis*” from the Order’s prayer books.⁴⁴

Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, the Renovator of our Congregation, encouraged the confreres to make heroic acts of offering all personal merits for the intention of the deceased. He described this practice, and his encouragement of it, in a special instruction “*Piae praxes et devotiones liberae*.”⁴⁵

Today, we also include the running of a hospice as a means to support the deceased, the dying, and the terminally ill. Regular meetings of people performing this service become a time of prayer and Christian formation.

From the perspective of past centuries, one notices a specific trend of changes. Already at the end of the 18th century, after the Congregation had gained its independence, the cause of assisting the deceased seemed to be sliding to a lower level of importance, while the involvement in pastoral, educational, and teaching work performed countrywide in the spirit of the sound ideas of the Enlightenment began to grow.

12. Blessing of the people according to the customs of the Roman confraternities, made in a very slow motion so that during this time the choir (people) accompanied on the organ can sing three times *Requiem aeternam*;

13. Incensing and reposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

This is the manner, in which the devotions for the deceased were supposed to be held each morning during the All Souls’ Octave. At night, the solemn Vespers of the day were followed by the funeral Vespers and the singing of the Litany of Loreto to the Blessed Mother and the song *Przez czyścicowe upalenia*. The afternoon service also included the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Cf. : *Diariusz czynności...*, p. 292-295.

Probably, as a result of the decision of the Congregation for the Rites of March 27, 1779, forbidding the singing of the funeral office before the exposed Blessed Sacrament (see; J.A. Nowowiejski, cit.op., T. 1, p. 347, fn. 2), in 1782, the General of the Order, Fr. Raymond Nowicki ordered the following: “After the last Holy Mass, there shall be a half-hour of adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, for which the celebrant is to wear the most festive cape. During the adoration, the people can chant and recite a litany. The service shall close with a benediction but without the singing of *Tantum ergo*. At that time, the faithful shall say three times ‘Eternal rest...’ in hushed tones.” The priest was to serve the faithful in the confessional. The Holy Masses were to be celebrated one after another so that the people had a chance to attend a couple of them. Cf.: *Nabożeństwo za dusze zmarłych...*, p. 8.

⁴³ J. Kosmowski MIC, *Marianie w latach...*, p. 197n. The author gives us the full text of the mission program.

⁴⁴ See: *Ramelhete manual de diversas orações ou Diario espiritual de quotidianos exercicios* (Lisboa 1757); *Sluga Niepokalanej* (Łomża 1932); *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* (Marijampole 1933); *Preces matutinae et vespertinae* (Romae 1936 and following editions in Latin and national languages); *Sluga Niepokalanej*, (Stockbridge-Warsaw 1990).

⁴⁵ *Instrukciones Congregationis Clericorum Regularium Marianorum*, Romae 1959, no. XVI. 6-10.

During the stage of the renewal of the Order, the paragraph of the old Constitutions commanding the daily recitation in choir of the *Office of the Dead* was omitted in the proposal of the Constitutions from 1910. The Congregation for Religious gave permission for it but also added a note speaking in general terms about assisting the Poor Souls in Purgatory *precibus et suffragiis*, to the paragraph about the Congregation's "own" devotions (*peculiares devotiones Congregationis*), without making it a constant and definite duty (No. 5).⁴⁶ In addition, the Congregation included a paragraph calling for prayer for the deceased during the Octave of All Souls' Day.⁴⁷ And this is how it stands today in the canonical dimension. The Congregation's new Constitutions do not bind the members to give any legally defined forms of assistance for the deceased.

However, the post-Councilar *Constitutions and Directory* (1970 and 1988) contain clear and meaningful definitions of the matter at hand which have been introduced with the idea of a "return" to the spirit of the legacy of the charism of the Order. These are important points, well worth our attention, even though they are introduced outside of the section regarding the nature, goal, and character of the Congregation.

The Constitutions of 1988, paragraph 19, reads: "... our Congregation, from its very beginning, following the abiding faith of the Church in the communion of saints in the mystical Body of Christ, with great devotion honors the memory of the dead and offers suffrages for them. (...) Likewise, they shall not neglect to assist the dying who face the most critical moment of their lives." In turn, paragraph 118 of the Constitutions regarding the Apostolate gives an instruction of the pastoral aspect: "At opportune occasions and using various means of the apostolate, the members should strive to inculcate in the mind of the faithful eschatological truths in such a way that by them they be strongly spurred both to attain to sanctity and to offer prayers for the dying and for the souls detained in purgatory."

We witness here a return to our sources, the universality of means, and the apostolic challenge aimed at a formation in a mature faith and salvation.

Among the pious practices for the deceased, the new Directory of 1988 (no. 36) counts first the prayers in the month of November, especially on All Souls' Day and during the following seven days. The Statutes of the Polish Province further specify that it concerns the traditional Vespers for the dead with a homily and Mass (no. 8). Paragraph 36 of the Directory has the character of an urgent encouragement: "... members should particularly strive to promote the prayers for the dead."

⁴⁶ *Constitutiones Instituti Fratrum Marianorum*, Petropoli 1910, no. 5. For text with the Congregation's notes see: *Leges marianae*, ed. W. Makoś, MIC, Romae 1999, p. 141.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 205, p. 182.

In the spirit of the Post-Vatican decrees (1970, 1988), as early as the first General Convention (1973), we began to work on the questions pertaining to the charism at the perpetual profession, which normally are asked before the act of profession. The Convention of 1973 agreed on the following formula: “Are you resolved, out of love of God and neighbor, to give yourself zealously to the apostolate for the salvation and perfection of others; that all, whether living or dead, may reach their eternal joy?” The response is: “I am.” This text is found in the drafts of the Rituals in some Provinces: Polish, Brazilian, American, and Portuguese. In turn, the last General Chapter of 2005, accepted the proposal of the new ritual, in which the matter in question is formulated as follows: “Do you desire by your example of the evangelical life and through the apostolate of the Congregation, to serve the work of salvation, in order to lead the living on the way of perfection and to help the deceased by prayer and sacrifice?” The response is: “I do.”⁴⁸

In the new formulation of the question, which written on the pattern of the second paragraph of our Constitutions, one notices the emphasis on the essential and imperative matter of “the means of assistance,” which are holiness of life and eternal salvation. Prayers and offerings, the apostolate and the religious life—all are to serve the work of salvation.

To sum up the part on the “Continuation and Development of the Cause,” I would venture to make an important statement. Today’s Marians understand their proper eschatological element, as well as the Marian element, not only as their special duty (i.e. duty to pray), but also as a special and additional evangelical inspiration for conducting their own Christian formation in the aspects of the religious and apostolic life, as well as to form the faithful in their pastoral and educational care.

Christian education with a goal of a “mature faith” cannot lack the paschal, eschatological or Marian⁴⁹ features, if it is meant to be Christological and ecclesial. The life of God conceived in man through faith and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation develops and matures in the womb of the Mother-Church thanks to the grace of God and help from the “educators in the faith,”⁵⁰ until the day of their birth for eternal life, because the day of the death in the Lord is *dies natalis*, which will be a perfect entrance into the community of the saints with its source in the Divine *koinonia*.

⁴⁸ M. Pisarzak MIC, *Prezentacja...*, see Annex 2.

⁴⁹ See: Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, parts VII and VIII.

⁵⁰ Decree on the service and life of priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 6.

The Theological Aspect of the Assistance for the Dead

The work of helping the dead is a part of the great cause of the Church's salvific intercession, regardless of the character assigned to it: more prayerful (All Souls' related) or apostolic and formative (towards the eschatology of hope). Thus, it is a value to live by and to practice within the framework of the salvific service of the entire Church. In addition, it may become a specific charism and task of some communities of the Church.

Let us dedicate a little more attention to the theology of this effort. Let us also notice the theological sense of assisting the dead. For its very name narrows the importance of the cause to merely an instrumental and transitory function needed only up to the moment of release from Purgatory.

The following are the essential signs and features of the work of helping the dead, described briefly.

Firstly, this cause belongs to the basic profession of the Christian faith as an important part of this profession: "I believe in... the fellowship of the saints" or as the new Catechism has it: "I believe in... the communion of saints."⁵¹ It is not only a question of the act of the profession itself or a conscious recognition of this reality, but it is a matter of having a true and living unity and bond with them, which is called *communio sanctorum* or *communio ecclesialis* in theological language. The prayers for the deceased emerged out of praying together with them for the grace of heaven and the glory of God.⁵² In brief, it is a matter of a devotional *mysterium Ecclesiae* and not only of the work of mercy and transitory help. A purely human, natural commiseration for the dead cannot dominate our attitude towards them. Our motivation for staying in touch with them must come out of the level of supernatural ecclesial faith.

Professing a belief in the "fellowship of the saints" and advocating for the deceased belongs to the ancient and general practice of the Church.⁵³ Ascribing to them the character of charisms in the spirituality and mission of a specific religious community is a singular incident in the history of the Church. Aside from the Marians, only the Dominicans of the Observance from the Congregation of St. Louis Bertrand (founded in 1671) were obligated particularly to pray for the dead. They were supposed to be called *ad devotionem pro animabus*

⁵¹ *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, 2nd ed. Poznań, 2002, No. 946, 954-959.

⁵² There are publications about prayers practiced in unity with the saints and the deceased in the name of the ecclesial community; see: G.L. Meuller, *Gemeinschaft und Verherung der Heiligen*, Freiburg 1986; B. Nadolski, *Liturgika*, t. 2, Poznań, 1991, pp. 174-175. Also worthy of attention are the commentaries to the Mass Prefaces (the motif of giving honor to God along with the angels and the saints) and to Part Seven of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (about the union between the Pilgrim Church and the Church in heaven).

⁵³ *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, No. 958; see No. 2635.

defunctorum propagandam, but in reality they spread the rosary.⁵⁴ Two female communities bearing the characteristic name of advocates of the Poor Souls in Purgatory were founded only in the 19th century: one in France (1856), another in Poland. (1889).⁵⁵

Second, the assistance for the dead is a work of mercy. The obligation and commitment to it belongs to the basic moral principle called the commandment to love God and neighbor. Concern for the eternal salvation of one's neighbor is not merely a result of one's altruism or a simple sense of human solidarity. This obligation is substantiated by supernatural love for God and neighbor. Consequently, committing to such a cause and concentrating one's attention on it, even one's life as in a special vocation, becomes the fulfillment of basic and principal values. There cannot be any complexes caused by the rank and importance of such a charism in the life and service of a religious community. It seems as if some Marians have this inferiority complex caused by the lack of a deeper theological reflection.

It has already been said that a deep understanding of the mystery of the fellowship of the saints and the commandment to love God and neighbor produced in the heart of Blessed Stanislaus this particular union with the deceased. Father Papczyński called the fraternal help given to the dead "a particular work of mercy" and "the highest display of love" (*insignior misericordia i summa charitas*). People who have died in the Lord are our neighbors and our love for our neighbors ought to go beyond our earthly existence into the truly ultimate level, the truly noble and uplifting one, because "love never fails." (1 Cor. 13:8).

Modern-day care for cemeteries and the signs of remembrance for the dead can sometimes give us the idea that they are only a cult of the ancestors. However, concern for the eternal salvation of man is essential. Assisting the dead must have a soteriological goal. Can there be anything more beautiful, suggested by faith and love, than the salvation of one's relatives, dear ones or any of God's children?

Salvation is not a gift from man, it does not originate from human mercy. Salvation is a grace of God merited by Jesus Christ in His paschal mystery by the will of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, each Holy Mass—a sacrifice and a feast—is such an essential means of assistance for the dead and unity with

⁵⁴ T. Ostrowski, *Dzieje i prawa Kościoła Polskiego*, t. 3, Warsaw, 1793, 616.

⁵⁵ In 1856, Maria Smet (Blessed Maria of the Divine Providence, 1825-1871) founded an "Association of Sisters-Assistants of the Poor Souls in Purgatory in Paris," see: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, T. 9, Freiburg and Bros. 2000, col. 676. In 1889, Blessed Honorat Koźmiński, a Capuchin, and Wanda Ołędzka, founded the Congregation of Sisters Advocates of the Poor Souls in Purgatory in Zakroczym, see: J. Kłoczowski (ed.) *Duchowość zakonna. Zakony w Polsce*, Catalogue prep. By J. Kozak, Kraków, 1994, 288.

them.⁵⁶ The Eucharist must be at the center of our unity with the deceased (the ecclesial communion), as well as at the center of the various forms (means) of assistance for the deceased (sacrifices, indulgences, and prayers), for as long as they need it at the stage of purification in the flames of God's salvific love.

Conclusion

From the research on the eschatological element of Marian spirituality and the apostolate, it emerges that the Marians' work in this field was very extensive, especially in the 18th century. This work is being continued hand-in-hand with updating its forms and theologically deepening the understanding of this idea and its implementation.

The Marians are encouraged to continue their theological reflection and critical consideration of the "means" (the old ones—maybe slightly neglected; and the new ones—maybe too timidly accepted) by their tradition, which has been unveiled, presented and brought closer as an outline by this conference. The teachings of Vatican II on the eschatological sign of the Christian life (*Lumen gentium*) are yet another stimulus and inspiration. The Instructions of Pope Paul VI given in his letter of May 8, 1973, addressed to our Superior General, are full of meaning. This passage from the letter, along with a portion of the beatification homily delivered by Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone on September 16, 2007, may crown the present reflection and justify the suggested proposals.

"Do not depart from the original spirit of your Order; show the utmost concern and efforts in spreading the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived "whose life is a model for all," and especially for the Religious. (cf. *Decree of the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life*, 25; St. Ambrose: *On Virgins*, II, 2. 15). While giving help to the souls undergoing purification after completing their earthly pilgrimage, teach people that they have no lasting city, but they ought to seek the one that is to come (cf. Heb 13:14). Thus, your spiritual and religious life will give you strength for taking on this apostolate, so abundant in fruits, which has been entrusted to you."⁵⁷

Also very significant are the words of Cardinal Bertone on the day of Fr. Stanislaus's beatification in Licheń:

"Blessed Stanislaus's love for his fellow men extended also to the dead. After his mystical experience of the suffering of those in Purgatory, he prayed fervently for them and exhorted everyone to do the same. Alongside spreading the

⁵⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 950.

⁵⁷ Letter of Pope Paul VI to the Marians. See: *L'Osservatore Romano*, no.119 of May 25, 1973, p. 1 (Polish edition).

cult of the Immaculate Conception and proclaiming the Word of God, praying for the dead thus became one of his Congregation's principal aims.

The thought of death and meditation upon Heaven, Purgatory and Hell help us to wisely "spend" our time on earth; it encourages us to think of death as a necessary stage on our journey towards God; it leads us always to accept and respect life as a gift from God, from its conception to its natural end. What an important sign for the modern world is the miracle of the "unexpected recovery of a pregnancy between the 7th and 8th week of gestation" which occurred through the intercession of Fr. Papczyński. God is the Master of human life!"⁵⁸

The tenor of those statements suggests that the object of the Marians' apostolate does not involved the deceased alone, but also the living so that they may format their lives *sub specie aeternitatis* right from their youth. In our way of assisting the dead we must respect the traditional means, while seeking the new and modern ones. All of them have their value and meaning, are equally needed and timely for the work of salvation of men. Salvation is the essential element of every pastoral service. In truth, there is just one form of pastoral work—the work for life: a dignified earthly life and a glorious life in eternity.

Proposals

We feel prompted to formulate certain proposals by our entire and presently reviewed tradition, but particularly by statements and definitions included in the Post-Vatican Constitutions and Directory (1970, 1988), which are concerned with this topic and were placed there with the idea of "returning" to the legacy of the charisms of our Congregation. It is propitious that these statements and definitions have already found their way into decrees. They are important and worth attention, even though sometimes they have been located outside of the chapter about the nature, particular goal and character of the Congregation. Thus, we must find them a more appropriate location. This brings on my proposals. For the Constituitions:

1. Paragraph 19 ought to appear after paragraph 6, because these two, as well as the others given in Part I, speak about the essential features of our Congregation's character. Taken together, they represent a development and a commentary, even an annex to paragraph 2 about the mission of the Congregation, which in the old religious parlance was called the particular goal.

⁵⁸ The Beatification homily can be found at: www.stanislawpapczyński.org; also see: *Immaculata* 2007, no. 514, p. 39.

2. Consequently, the second part of the paragraph 3 ought to be removed (maybe even the whole paragraph speaking about the main goals and starting with “especially:”
3. Replace paragraph 19 with par. 118. It speaks of our own/particular pious practices.
4. Preserve in the new rite of perpetual profession the proposal of questions accepted by the General Chapter of 2005. The question is formulated thus: “Do you desire by your example of the evangelical life and through the apostolate of the Congregation, to serve the work of salvation, in order to lead the living on the way of perfection and to help the deceased by prayer and sacrifice? The response is: “I do.”
5. Think over the possibility of producing and using—after having received the permission of the proper authorities—a different form of the profession than the one shown in the Constitutions (par. 176). It is written in general terms, applicable to various Orders, and involves the dedication to God through embracing/accepting the Evangelical Counsels. The modern text does not include either the charisms or the particular goal. On the other hand, they were present in Fr. Founder’s original definition. In his time, the vow was a distinctive act of oblation to God and Mary Immaculate “for the greater glory of God and the honor of the Most Elect Virgin, to assist the deceased devoid of any other help, especially soldiers and victims of pestilence.”
6. According to the norms of the Liturgical Calendar, there is a possibility to celebrate Holy Mass for the deceased with our own form and readings. It is worthwhile to take advantage of this possibility at every opportunity.
7. Take advantage of the opportunity to recite the Office of the Dead on various days, for example, on a given day of the week, in accordance with the liturgical regulations.
8. It is necessary to nurture in our religious houses the tradition of reading the Album of the Dead (see: *Słowo Przełożonego Prowincji* and also *Introduction to the Album of the Dead* in Polish (Warsaw-Stockbridge, 1997), where the prayerful and formative sense of this practice is discussed.
9. Petition the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments for permission to celebrate Holy Masses for the dead with appropriate prayers and the liturgy of the word on all days of the Octave of the All Souls’ Day, as well as on the obligatory memorials.
10. To reflect on (perhaps during the Convention) the look of our cemeteries and tombs, as well as the method of holding and experiencing our confreres’ funerals.
11. Similarly, to reflect on the manner of remaining at the side of the dying and people near death. It is a matter of usual and monthly visits of the sick, espe-

cially combined with offering the sacraments; the context of the terminal illness (the sense of hospices), of numerous accidents and random dangers...

12. Combine the work of assisting the dead and the dying with the general work of mercy.
13. Activate the confraternities/societies and their service in the framework of supporting the dead.
14. Combine the apostolate of prayer for the dead with the work of evangelization, where there is room for proclaiming the salvific paschal mystery and the eschatological truths (death, judgment, heaven or hell, the possibility of purgatory).
15. To regard the goal and meaning of assisting the deceased in the following contexts:
 - paschal (“the life of Your faithful, O Lord, is changing but not ending” it’s being immersed in the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ);
 - soteriological (“for us and for our salvation He came down from heaven”);
 - ecclesial (in the spirit of *communio sanctorum*);
 - charitable, as a work of mercy, a sign of generous and noble love (*in-signior misericordia* and *summa caritas*).

The Marians of Tomorrow Possible Ways of Development

My assigned topic sounds as if it involves something of futurology and of prophesying. I must confess from the start that I don't know the future. I believe that God is the Lord of history, the Master of our past, present, and future. He wishes to guide us. He grants us inspirations, the light to discern His will, and the power to fulfill it. He also invites us to cooperate in the work of salvation of the world today, tomorrow, and the day after. In my presentation, I will attempt to outline, based on our situation today, what I believe to be the most important points of our Congregation's renewal and some directions for possible growth and the realization of our Congregation's mission. I realize that my reflection is done mostly on the basis of my life and work experience in the Divine Providence Province, while I transfer my inferences to the entire Congregation. I take this liberty knowing that I'm not giving any ready solutions or programs for the Congregation, but only delineating certain points for further reflection.

Dying out

Either vibrant or slowing down, the vitality of any congregation is hard to evaluate, especially by its own members. However, there are certain factors—although always imperfect—that may be regarded as indicators of the Congregation's vitality. They are, among others: the ratio between the number of new vocations and departures from the community; the average age of its members; the members' relationship with Jesus Christ and their desire to closely follow Him through their religious vows; their knowledge of and their living out the Founder's charism as well as their relationship with the Founder himself. It includes the sense of belonging to the institute and the community of its members; the quality of the fraternal life and of interpersonal relations; the kinds of apostolic works of the Congregation and the ways that they are carried out. Analyzing some of these factors in regards to our Congregation ought to awaken at least some alarm.

The number of new vocations in the Divine Providence Province and the entire Congregation has been on the decline for years, even though some of our Provinces or Vicariates might have witnessed some occasional growth. In the 1980s, approximately 30 to 40 young men applied to our Province annually. For the last couple of years now, this number hasn't reached even 10. Every year we used to ordain more than 10 seminarians; lately we only have a few newly ordained annually (2 to 4).

For the last couple of years, we have seen a confrere leaving the Congregation for the diocese or even the world, although he's been perpetually professed and even ordained. Often times, those who leave the Congregation don't show any other connection with the community except for their demands. The ordained confreres want to serve as parish priests in the Czech Republic or Germany, but they do not demonstrate any sense of belonging or any kind of attachment to the Congregation. Those returning to the world, often feel scorned by the Congregation, because they did not get a chance to fully develop or to employ their talents.

Even within the Congregation, there are such members who have emigrated inwardly a long time ago. They live their individual lives and fulfill their personal plans. They concern themselves with the Congregation's life or religious discipline only as much as it is strictly necessary in order to avoid canonical punishments or to run the risk of being expelled. Even in their speech, they use such expressions as "your Congregation," "your Superior General," "you people," "your business," to clearly demonstrate that their own lives and interests lay somewhere else, outside the Congregation.

Even though the overall membership does not decline too dramatically, our shrinking vocations and the departures are the reason why the average age is getting older and the number of sick and elderly confreres grows larger. Much faster than membership, whose number still reassures us, there is the decline of our Congregation and its members' fitness and vitality.

Departures from the Congregation and the "inward emigration" of certain confreres point to a crisis or even to a total lack of self-identification as Marians on the part of many. In the old days, we used to say that the Marians are "an Order of all trades," and that "everyone can find himself" there. On the other hand, we all know that a machine said to be "good for everything" shortly becomes "good for nothing" after being exploited for some time. If all middle-school students prove to be equally "apt" in all of their classes, it is probably because the level and expectations are low. All children who are unable to adequately perform in more demanding programs are being sent there. However, percentagewise, the number of students in such classes who receive a high-school certificate and go on to higher education schools is much smaller than in talent-oriented programs,

which only take the youth with sufficient abilities and interests. The lack of Marian identity, of bonds with the Founder and his charismatic vision of our Congregation; the absence of a sense of belonging to the Institute and of co-responsibility for its destiny and mission, result in a Marian who is set on fulfilling his own plans and visions or only seeking peace and quiet. The only thing he expects from the Congregation is for it to interfere as little as possible in his personal life and actions or, possibly, to make his life and actions easier for him.

Aside from the individualism that marks the life and actions of certain confreres, our communities' other big problem is their small membership (e.g. two-person communities) and inner discord. Gossip, murmuring, and even libel are still alive in some of our houses. There are even such people who purposefully seek out and highlight the failures and shortcomings of the other confreres', thriving on this. Instead of giving help to a confrere in crisis, the community sometimes reverts to observing and commenting on his struggles behind his back. Some of the Marians even say openly that their house community has become such an impossible place that they seek escape in outside contacts, in pastoral ministry or a hobby.

We could give more proof of our Congregation's crisis, although probably they all could be acquitted by the statement that we are still alive, enjoy the good opinion of bishops and the Vatican Congregations; that we run wonderful apostolic works and recently had our Founder beatified; that we are present in Africa and Kazakhstan and have revived our presence in Eastern Europe, while the number of vocations in the U.S. has experienced lately a noticeable growth. We can bring up the fact that we've lately planted the Marian charism in the Philippines and are about to start the formation of our first candidate, with great prospects of work and vocations there. All this is true. However, it is impossible to negate the truth that the above-mentioned facts speak of dying. Not yet the immediate death of the Congregation, but surely of some confreres or communities dying out already today.

Scientists say that all of the cells of a human body get replaced in a seven-year cycle (some even more often). The new ones replace the dead. Therefore, the process of dying is absolutely natural. Probably, we won't be able to prevent people from leaving the Congregation even after they have professed their perpetual vows. We won't convert all of our frustrated or lazy confreres into people full of enthusiasm and apostolic zeal. However, it is a matter of opposing evil with enough good to be able to form new Marians and to pour in new life wherever death has already made its dwelling, in order to awaken new fervor in ourselves and in the people whom we serve. Only then can we be sure that the old dying branches shall make new sprouts that will bring abundant fruit.

Rejoicing in the beatification of our Founder, in the renewal of our Congregation initiated by Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz one hundred years ago, as well as in the entire history of our Institute, we shall, above all, seek the answer to these questions: what do we have to offer, as the Marians, to the world and to mankind today? What do the beatification and the anniversary of the renewal mean to the average man? How can we bring them closer to him? Before we answer these questions, we ought to first sum up our past, to reflect on our present, and to look forward with hope into the future. Both the gift of the beatification and the important anniversary of our Congregation's renewal are a wonderful invitation first for us, the Marians, for a new revival, for enlivening and reforming ourselves, our communities, structures, and works. First of all, we must rediscover our identity, our charism, and mission so that we can live them out within and outside our community, and to show them to the world through our attitudes and actions. We must give ourselves to the Master of the Vineyard, to God Himself, so that He can remove all of the dead branches, purify the ailing ones, and make the Vineyard—in other words, us—bear new fruit. The Marians of tomorrow shall grow out of this renewal, which we have started and will continue in our Congregation and its houses, as well as out of its apostolic works, renewed and freshly restarted.

Renewal

Above all, the Marian of tomorrow must have a clearly defined identity as a Christian, a Religious, a disciple, and a spiritual son of Blessed Stanislaus Papeczyński. It would be good if anyone who would examine the life and work of an individual Marian or of the whole Congregation in the future, could answer the following questions: What kind of follower of Jesus Christ is a Marian? What is the image of Christ that he has most deeply engraved in his heart? In what manner does he live out his religious consecration? Where is the vital center of his life and the life of his Congregation? What is his point of reference? Where does he find the source of his joy and strength for his life and apostolate? In what way and how does he build a community with his confreres and with lay people?

The center of our life and work, both today and in the future, is Jesus Christ and His Gospel life.¹ Through religious consecration, we want to enter into intimacy with Christ, to become like Him and “to replicate in ourselves, as far as

¹ “(...) the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule,” *PC*, 2a.

possible, «that form of life which He, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world».² The source of Christ's salvific mission was His chaste and poor life in obedience to the Father. "Anything else: words, deeds, signs were the expression and consequence of this triple power of Christ's evangelical identity."³ The more we are united with Christ and His radical way of life by the evangelical counsels, the greater is the sanctifying and redeeming power of our consecrated life. Thus, the principle value and strength of the Congregation does not lie in its structures, regulations or works, but in the people united with Christ and making His evangelical way of life present. People are the Congregation's greatest treasure (just like the Church and the whole world), especially those people whose passion is to love God and to follow Christ in accordance with the charismatic vision revealed to the Founder by the Holy Spirit.⁴

All of the activities of both the individual members and of the entire Congregation must invariably come from unity with Christ, poor, chaste, and obedient to the Father. This unity is achieved thanks to the grace of God, through religious consecration, individual and communal prayer, the sacraments (especially daily Eucharist and regular confession), prayerful reading of the Word of God, adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, ministry, and deeds of mercy. When sent to serve, religious order members who do not possess an intimate, personal unity with Christ may become social activists or cult administrators, but not the disciples and apostles of Christ. The first and foremost aspect of each founder and each community's charism is its Christo-centric dimension.⁵ It must be learned before anything else, assimilated before anything else, and then lived out by the religious community and its individual members.

Scrutinizing and imitating Christ's entire life, each founder of an institute or a society, ponders in a unique manner a selected aspect of the mystery of our Savior thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This aspect becomes his starting point and the key to making his own synthesis of Christ's life and mission, as well as to delineating the charism and mission of his congregation.⁶ In Fr. Papczyński's case, the most important aspect seems to be the mystery of

² *VC*, 16; *LG*, 1.

³ K. Wons, *Rozwój i zamieranie instytutów zakonnych. Kryteria rozeznawania*, Kraków 2008, s. 31.

⁴ "What must be avoided at all costs is the actual breakdown of the consecrated life, a collapse which is not measured by a decrease in numbers but by a failure to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to personal vocation and mission," *VC*, 63.

⁵ In his *Testament Two*, our Blessed Founder entrusts the Congregation to Jesus Christ and His Virgin Mother Mary, as the "true and only Founders, Guides, Protectors and Patrons of this little Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, Assisting the Deceased." However, a few paragraphs further, he adds: "I leave my likeness for the curious to look at, but the image of the life of my Lord, Jesus Christ for [the religious] to follow." T II 9.

⁶ Cf. K. Wons, *Rozwój i zamieranie instytutów zakonnych, dz. cyt.*, s. 24-35.

God's love, expressed in a special manner in the passion and death of Jesus Christ. The suffering and crucified Christ is decidedly the One, whom Fr. Papczyński wanted his followers to imitate, strongly emphasizing the point. This emphasis is found in our Founder's writings (such as *Orator crucifixus, Christus patiens*) and in his whole life (he frequently fell victim to persecution, rejection, sufferings and was even close to dying). Blessed Fr. Stanislaus was united with the suffering and crucified Christ; he imitated Him in his life, and wanted Him to be followed by the community that he established. We, the Marians of the 21st century and future generations, must be united in Christ; we must imitate Him in a special way, but above all—we must proclaim Him to the world.

The Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born out of a charismatic vision, which the Holy Spirit planted in our Founder.⁷ Our Congregation's distinctive feature, its focal mystery, the point of reference for every initiative and effort, without any doubt, is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (as our very title has already expressed). In Chapter I of his *Norma vitae*, Fr. Papczyński stated that the goal of our Congregation, (which is something that it has in common with all religious orders), ought to be "the greater increase of God's glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection."⁸ According to Blessed Stanislaus, our special goals must be: propagation of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and prayerfully supporting the Poor Souls in Purgatory. Today it seems that spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception would only be possible after we come to realize and accept it in our hearts and lives, and after it becomes our strength, hope, and joy.

Discussions began before the beatification about Fr. Papczyński and were continued, at least in the Divine Providence Province, helping many of us to glimpse into the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, to read it afresh, to read it in an existential manner. Also, very helpful in this matter was Fr. Janusz Kumala's conference *The immaculate conception of Mary: A gift and task in Marian spirituality and the apostolate*, delivered at this Convention. Without becoming unduly long-winded, I'd like to try to imagine how the Marian of tomorrow would live out the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M.—the greatest treasure of our Congregation's spiritual legacy.

⁷ „(...) this Divine vision that was engraved in my soul and which regarded the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M., prodded me along to its goal, while making me disregard everything and impeding me from going back to the Institute of the Pious Schools,” Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, *Założenie domu skupienia*, 6, in: *Pisma zebrane*, s. 1458. “(...) I was seeking the means to initiate the Society of the Immaculate Conception, which the Holy Spirit formed in my mind,” *Ibid.*, 9, in: *Pisma zebrane*, s. 1460.

⁸ *NV*, I, 2.

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary manifests the absolute gratuitousness of the grace of God and the primacy of God's love. Out of love for man and Mary, God planned her existence before all ages. He so desired and endowed her with His love long before any human could as much as wish for her being conceived and coming into existence. He called her to become the Mother of the Son of God and He equipped her appropriately for this task. He preserved her free from sin by an anticipating grace for the sake of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. He continued to strengthen her and fill her with love so that, upon fully completing her mission, she could come to reign in heaven with Christ and His saints. Discovering through the signs of the times the Marians' task of spreading The Divine Mercy devotion, we may say that the Immaculate Conception of Mary is the first fruit of Christ's paschal mystery, in which God revealed His mercy most fully. Just like devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the BVM, The Divine Mercy devotion draws from and untiringly refers to the paschal mystery of Christ, to His passion, death, and resurrection.

Every Marian can find himself in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and immerse himself in the Divine love. And here am I, who also came into being before all ages as part of God's plan. I was conceived, was born and am alive because God so desired and endowed me with His love, before any other person could even dream me up. And I also have been washed in the blood of Christ poured out on the cross, and thanks to this, I was born anew. Through the power of Christ's paschal mystery, God can preserve me from sin or, after I have sinned, He can create me anew. God called me to life and to love; He called me to intimacy with His Son Jesus Christ and to follow Him in chastity, poverty, and obedience to the Father. Through my religious consecration and priestly ordination, He called me to participate in Christ's work of the salvation of the world, to carry out the cause that the Holy Spirit began in Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński—the cause whose name is the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. God called me to and appropriately equipped me for carrying out His assignment. He always supports me with His grace and fills me up with His love. Also, He is always ready to forgive me and to immerse me into the immensity of His mercy. This is the Good News for a Marian, his point of reference for his life, his projects, and his assignments.

The next characteristic closely associated with the Immaculate Conception by which we, the Marians, ought to be identified, is prayer for the deceased.⁹ Our Blessed Father Founder, who had experienced at least two mystical experiences regarding the mystery of Purgatory, thus defined our second special goal: “with

⁹ An extensive presentation of the genesis and fulfillment of the Marian charism of prayer for the deceased during Fr. Papczyński's times as well as in the following generations of the Marians was delivered at this Convention by Father Marian Pisarszak, MIC, see p. 75 of this book.

utmost zeal, piety, and fervor, assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains—especially the souls of soldiers and those who died of pestilence.”¹⁰ The Immaculate Conception and the life of Mary already indicate that each one of us is being called to heaven. Our vocation to pray for the faithful departed reminds us of this truth one more time. Here we are, even those who weren’t preserved from sin and who fall, those who still cannot rise from sin—we all hope for heaven. The grace of God revealed in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is greater than our sin and weakness. Although I am not deserving of heaven, grace can take me to the heavenly banquet. Only God in His mercy can make me and each one of us holy already here on earth, just like He made the Blessed Virgin Mary holy; or after our death, He can purify us for life eternal. Although Fr. Papczyński gave us “prayers for the deceased” as a special goal, he also earned the reputation among his contemporaries and for posterity as the one who was near the dying (on the battlefields or the deathbed of the victims of pestilence or other diseases), so that they could reconcile with God at the last moments of their lives and thus merit heaven the quickest way possible. We, the Marians, must be gazing at heaven and we must lead others to heaven.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary and prayer for the dead direct our hearts first to God, His love and grace, and then to the most beautiful fruit of His work—Immaculate Mary. She was given to us as a model of the new man, created by God thanks to the grace that flows down from the Cross of Christ. She is given to us for contemplation and imitation. Through the Church, we have received a special way of relating to Mary and of imitating her, namely: *The Rule of the Ten Pleasures or the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, also known as *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.¹¹ In his *Testament II*, Fr. Papczyński declared that he accepted this *Rule* in a most humble manner, and that he wished to make his solemn profession upon it.¹² In the act of his solemn vows made on June 6, 1701, before Francis Pignatelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland, Fr. Papczyński pledged to preserve the *Rule* in “everything that does not contradict the regulations of our Religious Institute, by living in chastity, obedience and holy poverty, and by adjusting to the said *Rule* upon the power of the same pledge, by which or in which the other professed are bound.”¹³ The *Rule* was binding for the Marians until Nov. 28, 1910—the time of the Renovation carried out by Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. In modern times, the

¹⁰ *NV*, I, 1.

¹¹ On this *Rule*, composed around 1501 by Blessed Gilbert Nicolas (also known as Gabriel Maria), the spiritual director of St. Joan de Valois, the Foundress of the Order of the Annunciation of the Most B.V.M. or Order of the the Blessed Virgin Mary (Annunciades), the Marians were incorporated into the Order of St. Francis on September 21, 1699.

¹² Cf., *T II* 14.

¹³ *Profesja ślubów uroczystych*, Warszawa, 6 czerwca 1701 r.

Rule is still preserved among the Marians now in the form of a devotion as the *Chaplet of the Ten Virtues of the BVM*, recited and promoted by some confreres. Certainly, it would even have been worth bringing it back today in the context of the rule of life, just like it is still practiced by the Annunciades. Then, it would have been a matter of living by *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* and imitating Mary in her ten virtues in a way to please Jesus Christ like His Mother used to please Him.

Mary's Immaculate Conception, her freedom from all sin, as well as the possibility of meriting heaven are an invitation for the Marians to freedom, a freedom from sin, from immature relationships and attachments, from personal programs and desires. It means that each one of us, and our entire Congregation, must be so free as to be ready to leave our present place of residence and occupation (even those to which we feel the most attached) and to go wherever the need is greatest; to undertake the works that the Holy Spirit would point to us in the service of the Church. We must ask God for such a freedom so that every day we may be ready to die (individually, communally or even as a whole Congregation) for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbors; so that we may be ready to give our lives gratuitously in our communities and in our apostolic ministry.¹⁴

The question of being vested anew in the white Marian habit returns today within the context of deepening and renewing our identity, as well as rebuilding our relationship with our Founder. As Fr. Janusz Kumala beautifully put it in his conference, "The symbol of the «white habit» is a sign both for the Marians as for the outside world. It is a sign—reminder (of our vocation) and a sign—directive (of the road of purity, the battle against sin); it is also a prophetic sign (of the fullness of holiness in heaven) and a sign that indicates the source of our strength for persevering on the Marian road: the love of God that embraces us, the Eucharist that nourishes us." Our Blessed Father Founder instructed the Marians to wear a habit "white in color, in honor of the pure Conception of our Lady,"¹⁵ and he forbade changing it on pain of God's judgment.¹⁶ The change was made by the Congregation for the Religious at the Vatican in response to our Blessed Renovator's request because of an historical necessity, which has now ceased to

¹⁴ "A Congregation is never more alive than when its «components» (individually and communally) are ready to vanish from the face of the earth. If such a readiness exists, it means that it [the congregation] managed to get rid of the sense of its importance and indispensability, that it understood that the Lord is the One who creates history, that salvation is His exceptional work, and that we are His co-workers. (...) If a given religious family is not prepared for such a death, it means that its true death nears it, ignoring all «statistics» and calculations." Fragment from: A. Cencini, *Będziesz miłował Pana Boga swego. Psychologia kontaktu z Bogiem*, Kraków 1995, s. 86-87.

¹⁵ *NV*, IV, 4.

¹⁶ "Should Father Joachim be reinstated as the coadjutor upon the fathers' agreement, then I put an obligation on him [on pain] of God's Judgment not to change anything in our habit nor the Order's title; may he never dare to godlessly destroy the honor of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary," *T II* 15.

exist. It's probably impossible to give a straight answer to the question: should our interpretation today of our Founder's concern for the white habit be only "a challenge to faithfully preserve all that is connected to the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception present in the Marian spiritual and apostolic life" (following Fr. Kumala's suggestion), or should we, accepting this argument, just simply go back to wearing the white habit? Surely, more that one debate lies ahead, but we must all certainly accept its ultimate result as the will of God and a call to unity.

Today's world promotes individualism and endeavors for success, without paying any attention to other people. The "rat-race" phenomenon is well known in many businesses. Our unity of life and action as a religious community should be our response and a sign of opposition. The latest instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life tells us: "... it is better to take one step together than to take two or more alone."¹⁷ Time and energy offered to the community and to the confreres will blossom with greater communal unity and a better apostolate.¹⁸ It is necessary for us today to seek ways of building and strengthening this community. Certainly, all forms of being together, such as in the chapel, in prayer, during celebrations, at meals, in small groups sharing the Word of God, personal experiences and reflections, in retreats and renewals, in times of vacation and recreation, serve this purpose. Again, it is a matter of a decision by each of us, of the superiors and the house communities, which would express our conviction that building up the Marian community is one of our priority tasks. It would entail, among other things, enlarging our one- and two-person posts to at least three people or closing them down, should it be impossible. It will take the effort of everyone for the unity to be created between people gathered together by the Lord, so that they may dedicate their lives to one another.

Father Papczyński attributed a significant role to asceticism in the Marian communal life. He ordered the Marian residents of Puszcza Korabiewska to preserve strict silence during meals and to publicly and frankly acknowledge their faults before meals. He instructed his companions to conduct a communal flagellation three times a week; he forbade the consumption of any kind of food and drink outside the communal meals, as well as drinking hard liquor "on pain

¹⁷ The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction "The Service of Authority and Obedience, *Faciam tuam, Domine, requiram*," Vatican, May 11, 2008, 25a. "In today's cultural atmosphere, community holiness is a convincing witness, perhaps even more than that of the individual: this shows the perennial value of unity, a gift left by the Lord Jesus," *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸ "(...) time dedicated to improving the quality of community life is not time wasted because, as the late and fondly remembered Pope John Paul II repeatedly emphasized, «all the fruitfulness of religious life depends on the quality of community life»," *Ibid.*, 22.

of forfeiting God's blessing, and in order to honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's thirst on the cross."¹⁹ Those and other forms of mortification were noted in *The Rule of Life*²⁰ and his other writings. Today, we probably won't return to flagellation, many additional fasts or wooden sandals. It is certain, however, that we must accept both individually and communally some forms of mortification that would help us to clear our minds and calm down senses. Maybe, instead of holding complete silence during meals, it would be worthwhile to accept the practice of not bringing our cell phones to meals, communal recreations or rooms. Maybe, instead of an absolute ban on bringing women into our monasteries, we ought to institute a moderate silence in all of the confreres' rooms starting from a certain hour and involving the disconnection of telephones, e-mail, Internet, etc.

For the building up and the deepening of our Marian identity, (the suffering and crucified Christ; the Immaculate Conception of the BVM; praying for the dead and staying at the side of the dying; vows; community...), the Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers already provide many tools. They are: regular confession, the Eucharist, reading and sharing of the Word of God, devotions and forms of piety, communal retreats and renewals, etc. Clearly, some of them must be brought back into life, others—rejuvenated. I'm thinking here about quarterly interviews with the house superior; house meetings and conventions where, aside from organizational matters, we could discuss an appropriate topic, or share life experiences and our relations with God, with the Congregation, and with the house community. Very disquieting is the fact that we experience our deepening of faith far more frequently through personal quests or participation in retreats and communities outside of our Congregation than within it.

The Marians of tomorrow (should they continue to exist and develop) are those who will more precisely define their identity, who will better uncover their uniqueness planted by the Holy Spirit in the person of our Father Founder. They are the ones who will discern the charism and development of our Congregation, achieved by Divine grace throughout the centuries, by recognizing and responding to the signs of the times. We are not "masters of all trades." Having learned God's plan for our Congregation, its identity and its specificity, we repudiate everything unrelated that adhered to us throughout the centuries; we undertake new challenges that God and the modern world present to us; we give specific nuance to all causes that we carry out today or will in the future. There is no sense to reform our apostolic works, if we don't first reform ourselves.

¹⁹ Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Rozporządzenia dla Pustelni Korabiewskiej 5*, in: *Ibid.*, *Pisma zebrane*, p. 1507. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 3-9.

²⁰ Cf. *NV*, IV.

Mission

Our first apostolate is always to give witness to our religious, Marian life in total dedication to God and to the confreres, according to the plan that God planted in our Founder, which we can learn and execute ever more perfectly with the passing of time. “The spiritual life must therefore have first place in the program of the Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality. Apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth in personal and communal commitment.”²¹

Aside from giving witness that directly flows out of our lives, Fr. Papczyński instructs us to provide assistance to pastors.²² During the lifetime of our Founder, this primarily meant preaching missions, substituting for pastors in their office, assisting them by hearing confessions, and through teaching and leading worship in non-Marian parishes. Today, we ought to understand this directive as an invitation to work in those areas of the Church which are not sufficiently cultivated or which are completely “uncultivated” for some reason. We ought to work in those areas as Marians, aware of our identity, and transmitting our charism and our specificity.

The main tasks of a pastor and of the Church are: proclaiming the Word of God, administering the sacraments, building up a community, and conducting the works of mercy. Carrying out each of these works, we will “imprint” them with the Immaculate Conception, with prayer for the dead, with an intent gaze toward heaven, and with the truth about God’s love, about human dignity, and about the vocation to becoming a new creation. This vocation involves a call to holiness on earth and to rejoice with God in heaven. In his teachings (homilies, catechesis, symposia, publications, radio and TV appearances, Websites, etc.), the Marian of tomorrow will always point to God as the source of love, of grace and of every form of life. He will refer to the paschal mystery of Christ as the

²¹ *VC*, 93. “...fraternal communion, as such, is already an apostolate; in other words, it contributes directly to the work of evangelization,” Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*, «*Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*», Vatican, Feb. 2, 1994, 54.

²² Already in his *Norma vitae*, Fr. Papczyński stated: “Since the contemplative life is not binding you so strictly, although you are founded in the eremitical status, those gifted with such talents will not be prevented from humbly helping pastors in their church work,” *NV*, I, 3. We also know that already towards the end of the 17th century, the Marians were conducting extensive missionary and pastoral works outside of their monasteries and that in his solemn profession of vows made before the Nuncio, Francis Pignatelli, our Blessed Founder called the Congregation “the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, a Polish Congregation Assisting the Departed and Pastors.” Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Profesja ślubów uroczystych*, in: same author, *Pisma zebrane*, p. 1503.

greatest revelation of God and His love. He will strive to bring his listeners around to establishing personal bonds with God and to accepting Christ as their Lord. The Marian of tomorrow will show that the love of God is the reason for our existence; he will awaken the hope that the grace of God is greater than our weaknesses and our sin; he will proclaim the new life in Christ. He will point to heaven as to our true Homeland. He will present Mary as the first, new creation in Jesus Christ, as the one who pleased God and fulfilled her earthly vocation, by accepting and responding to His grace.

Celebrating and administering the sacraments is the source of grace for all, enabling us to live by the Good News and Jesus Christ, to accept and fulfill the Word, proclaimed in the sacraments. Baptism is the very new creation in Christ, it is the pouring out of love and grace; it is the incorporation into the Church, into the community of the saints, where Christ, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and the saints have a seat. The Sacrament of Penance restores the broken link to God. It is like adhering to the loving Father, washing ourselves in the blood of our Savior, and opening ourselves to heaven. It is finally an acceptance and an invitation to love. Thanks to this, we re-assume the white garment that was lost through sin. In this sacrament, God sets us free from sin by the same power, with which He preserved Mary from sin—the power of the passion and the death of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is the foretaste of heaven, where we are all invited. It is the banquet where God nurtures us with His Word and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—nourishment for eternal life. Through the Eucharist, we enter eternal life, already having our share in it. It is the time when we accept love so that we can love. Finally, in the Eucharist, we unite ourselves with the saints and intercede before heaven for the deceased. The Anointing of the Sick is the strengthening of those who, in some way, participate in the suffering of Christ, and who also draw closer to the mystery of death. There is also a time and a place for the sick and for their families and friends to reflectively embrace the meaning of life, and to behold their most important vocation: union with God and—ultimately—heaven.

The building up of the community of the faithful by the Marians of tomorrow has to always have Jesus Christ and the Word of God as its starting point. However, the Marian must bring his specificity to every community (a parish or an affiliated community, a shrine community, a society of the laity gathered through the mediation of the mass media, etc.): thanksgiving for the gift of life and of vocation, an orientation towards eternity, the acceptance in love of every person regardless of age, education, race, etc., a respect for human dignity at each stage of life, a continuous reinforcement of the primacy of God's grace and love. The Marian also must know that he is the advocate and the servant of grace, not its

master or owner, and he must always be sensitive to the new challenges and the needs of the people both within and outside of the Church.

It seems that among the various communities and works begun and carried out by the Marians, priority must be given to matters related to life—the new life in Christ, from its beginning until the end. This ought to open us to all *pro life* actions, such as: retreats for engaged couples and for newly-weds; retreats and counseling for childless marriages; counseling, support groups, and homes for women considering abortion; retreats for women after abortion; providing funds and charitable assistance for large and poor families; stipends and educational actions, mediation and legal actions towards recognizing and safeguarding the dignity of human life at its beginning, etc. In our Marian life, we must become servants of the new life in Christ. Along with the communities directly involved in bringing about and strengthening faith, we surely must make a commitment to helping people with various addictions as well as to fighting the addictions. We must enliven both the clergy and the laity with our charism, organizing them into societies where they could first draw from our charism and legacy, and then transmitting this spirit of God’s love to their neighbor. Our “help for the pastors” can surely include recollections for priests, publications, books, and centers of formation also for priests suffering from a deep crisis of faith or vocation. Along with pointing to heaven as our true Homeland, the Marians of tomorrow must give special attention to and support for the dying, the chronically ill, and their relatives. I’m thinking here about hospices, support groups and retreats for the bereaved; about staying at the side of the dying and their loved ones; about education and actions for the dignity of life at all stages.

Assisting the pastors means above all participation in the tasks which they are unable carry out. It is not a matter of substituting for them wherever they do well, but of giving them the gift of our charism and of its richness. That would mean taking over the parishes wherever there is a shortage of priests, but also where their numbers are sufficient. Parishes which are entrusted to the Marians must be run according to the local ordinary’s expectations, but also with the inclusion of our specificity, our qualities or characteristics, our gifts. It would not be a good thing if, after several years of running a parish, our faithful still didn’t know the characteristics of the Marians and the difference between us and other Religious; worse yet, if they did not realize that we are not diocesan priests.

Aside from parishes and churches with rectors, we run Marian shrines and those dedicated to The Divine Mercy; publishing apostolates, communities and societies... We also establish new foundations (presently in the Philippines). Sometimes, upon entering a church, one can recognize it as belonging to the Franciscans, the Redemptorists, or the Jesuits. What should be the mark of our churches, communities, foundations? The Immaculate Conception (and all that

is related to it) can be made visible in the décor of a house or a church; in the images and the stained glass windows; in praying for unborn children and the deceased; in confraternities, communities, and societies; in our proclaiming the Word of God and administering the sacraments; in long flags or banners and reliquaries (naturally, if such are being used); in the Marians' attitude towards the community of the faithful gathered in or near the church; in the manner in which they carry out their efforts there, etc.²³ However, the Immaculate Conception will be visible in all our works only if it will first become the enlivening center of each one of us and of the entire Congregation.

Conclusion

The proposals that are presented above for the renewal of our Congregation, our confreres, our communities and our works are not meant for next week, or next month, or even next year. Rather, they are meant for years to come. However, it is not a question of carrying out one or another, but of producing a total conversion and obtaining a general decision to root everything in God and the vision, which the Holy Spirit planted in our Founder and developed in our Congregation. It's not a question of doing a job which is only cosmetic, but of living a new life in Jesus Christ which God wishes to begin in us for our future. If we allow God to change our hearts and to fill them with His grace, new ideas will be born all by themselves, and their realization won't be too difficult.

The Marians of tomorrow are already living or are being born today through their religious vows. Creating plans for work outside of the Congregation or even for renewing our works which we are currently running does not make much sense if we don't make the decision to convert, to reform, and to renew ourselves. In the same way that Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, being obedient to the Holy Spirit and to his charismatic vision, brought about the foundation of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM, and then began to form, to unite, and to enliven his disciples. In the 18th and 19th centuries, through the power of the Holy Spirit, even individual Marians (most often—the General Superiors) were able to help the Congregation to grow and to be strengthened. Thanks to God's extraordinary intervention, Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, faithful to God's inspiration and guidance, performed the work of the renewal of the Congregation on the brink of its annihilation. God's continuous

²³ Some very interesting proposals for the Marian ministry, especially for the parishes which are in our care, may be found in: M. Kozak MIC, „Parafia mariańska”—*instrumentum laboris*, in: „Immaculata”, special issue for the Provincial Convention *Service of Authority and Obedience*, Licheń, Nov. 17-20, 2008, p. 103-111.

interventions prove that He wishes our Congregation to continue its existence. However, it needs people with passion who, attracted by the charismatic vision planted by the Holy Spirit in our Founder, as well as by his life and works, will give all of their talents and strength to the continuation of our Congregation. We, the Superiors, are called first to the task of deepening our identity and our charism; to become inflamed by the vision that ignited and transformed the life of our Founder and of his spiritual sons; to bring and ignite this flame in our house communities and our confreres.

A fish starts going bad from its head, but the healing (physical, psychological or spiritual) also starts often from the head. First, our General Superior and the General Government must burn with a new zeal and new faithfulness; next, it would be the turn of the Provincial and Vicariate Superiors along with their governments and councils. They must ignite the house superiors, who will in turn pass it on to their house members. It would be good if a new wind blows among our vocation directors and formators, and through them—to our youngest members and the approaching generations of Marians. If we fail to ignite them with a new fervor, there will soon be no one to carry out even the best of plans. But if strongly inspired, they shall shape, along with us, the Congregation of the future.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

**PATHS OF THE MARIAN APOSTOLATE
INSPIRATIONS AND DIRECTIONS**

The Marian Apostolate

1. Our Congregation's mission and apostolate have their roots in our title: The Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. In the biblical tradition, a name was often associated with a special mission, as it was in the case of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. Let's try to read our mission and apostolate in the context of God's assignment. One of the most frequently quoted paragraphs of our Constitutions that emphasizes this aspect, is paragraph 6, which says: "The mystery of her Immaculate Conception is and has been from the very beginning of the Congregation, a particular sign, strength and joy of the Marian vocation."¹

Why is it a sign? "A sign is given to point the way; to get one's bearings; the sign of the Immaculate Conception is a measure of trust, struggle, and unity;" *Mary is a sign of God.*

Why is it a strength? Because she is *the power against covetousness.*

Why is it a joy? Because she is the way to the Church's unity."²

For these reasons, the mission of every Marian is to constantly ponder the mystery of the Immaculate Mary and consequently to proclaim the glory of the Lord and to spread devotion to our Lady, following her example and under her protection. Mary herself told us in her Canticle: "Behold, from now on, all ages will call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me," (Lk 1:48-49). This mission is particularly demanding because living by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception means living in a continuous state of grace, in a constant struggle against evil and sin, which we are supposed to fight—according to St. Paul—with good, and the good is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Two biblical images (signs) depict this battle for us: the Woman from the Book of Genesis whose offspring will crush the serpent's head (Cf. 3:15), and the Woman from the Book of Revelations who battles the Dragon (12:1-18). I would like to emphasize from the start, that in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception Mary calls us in a special way to courageously battle evil and sin in our lives and throughout the world. The example of our Founder's saintly life fully reflects for us the fulfillment of this vocation. (*He is also a special sign for us.*)

¹ C, 6.

² W. Nieciecki MIC, *W poszukiwaniu mariańskiej drogi*, Licheń 2004, p. 111-121.

2. In her spiritual instruction given at the wedding in Cana, Mary makes a suggestion as to our Marian way: “Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you [the Mar-ians]” (Jn 2:5). Thus, the second step of our Marian apostolate is to seek and to fulfill the will of the Lord in our lives and in our Marian vocation following the example of Mary Immaculate, whose only desire was to carry out the will of God: “behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word,” (Lk 1:38). Without being open in a particular way to the actions of the Holy Spirit, without His constant guidance in our apostolate, discovering the pathways of God will pose many questions for us. “He [the Advocate] will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you,” (Jn 14:26). The Holy Spirit is our inner teacher on the will of God.

3. The Marian apostolate has its roots in the Word of God! Kibeho in Rwanda may serve as an example: there Mary appears as the Mother of the Word and in her evangelical message, she calls us to conversion, to prayer, and to acceptance of the glorious way of salvific suffering. She calls us to contemplate the “Gospel of the cross,” which leads to a new life, to resurrection through the passion of Christ and Mary’s glorious compassion with Him. The correctness of our apostolate must flow from meditation on the Word of God. Let us use the Bible as a wonderful prayer book, let us draw from it our inspirations and let it nourish our Marian devotion.³

4. The fruitfulness of our Marian apostolate requires the fulfillment of two conditions: becoming God’s fools, passionately in love with Jesus and Mary, and giving to our apostolate our whole hearts, strength, and souls; (*Shema Israel!*: cf. Dt 6:4-6). Didn’t our Founder place himself on the list of such “madmen of Mary Immaculate?” We often think about St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, about St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, about John Paul II and many others, but doesn’t Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński belong just as much to the cluster of those great pioneers of dedication to God and to Mary? By making a vow of blood to defend the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and founding our Congregation in Mary’s honor, he showed us the depth of the devotion with which he venerated Mary. Entering upon this path and faithfully following it is a particular gift and charism. Having received this charismatic gift, we must carefully develop and deepen it so that it may bear new fruit. The act of dedication to Mary (as a form of prayer) shall strengthen us on our path and bring about new initiatives for a truly Marian apostolate. The daily recitation of the act of dedication in the words of the Marian prayers, in the words of our Founder’s invocation: „Immaculata Virginis Concep-

³ Cf. *MC*, 30.

tion sit nobis salus et protection,” or in our own words will make us more aware of the special mission of our apostolate and will give us the strength for its fulfillment (e.g., St. Joan of France, the Foundress of the Order of the Virgin Mary (the Annunciades), prayed in these words: “O Blessed Virgin Mary, help me to think, speak, and do only what is pleasing to God and yourself”).

5. Reading the signs of the times for the Marian apostolate (this is only a reminder or an encouragement to continue our work which we have already begun):

- In our Marian parishes: we can utilize the liturgy on Marian feasts; light a candle in front of the statue of Mary during the months of May and October; create and develop Marian movements in the parish (the *Office of Mary* and [or the] *Little Hours*); constantly encourage the praying of the Rosary; foster the use of external Marian symbols: proper images, statues, devotional items; live sacramentally, demonstrating our own profound witness of a religious vocation;
- In our Marian and Divine Mercy Shrines: we can offer a model of proper Marian devotion since those are special sites of healings (the Sacrament of Penance) and sanctification (the Eucharist); the outer garments and the vestments that we wear are important signs.
- In our retreat houses: we can prepare programs of Marian charismatic retreats (for weekends, six-day periods, for people from various walks in life); those running the retreats ought to constantly deepen their Mariological knowledge).
- In religious formation: often our young candidates come to us greatly enthused about a Marian devotion, thus we must nurture and properly guide this fervor from the beginning, and encourage them to deepen their Mariological knowledge (*a good Marian library may serve the purpose*). Mary, the Handmaid of the Lord, is a special model of the consecrated life and of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience: Mary purifies and reveals a good religious spirit.
- In our publishing apostolate: the mass media is shaping the modern mentality in a very powerful way. There is a great field of work in publishing, Internet, radio and TV, although this is a very difficult and demanding apostolate which requires special training (perhaps we should be thinking of preparing permanent correspondents for the Marian apostolate?)

Our ministry on the five continents is very diversified, but it has the same basic scope: “For Christ and the Church” with Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God and the Church.

6. The renewal of our apostolate starts with the deepening of our spiritual life since the power of our ministry takes roots there:

- a. *The Eucharist must be our life* (let us not forget the votive Masses for the Blessed Virgin Mary with good sermons); the liturgy is the source and the summit of the Christian life; the essence of Mary's life is her communion with God, which is fulfilled for us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.
- b. *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*: we should go to confession and encourage others to do as well, in the spirit of St. Paul: strength is made perfect in weakness! We need to form our hearts in the pattern of the Immaculate. As I previously stated: the best way to honor the Immaculately Conceived One is by always striving to be in a state of grace.
- c. *Marian Prayers*: The rosary and its variations (The Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows, the Angelus, the Chaplet of the Ten Virtues, etc.); a continuous search for the means to renew this prayer; to be its faithful apostle.
- d. *Prayer for the Deceased*: We must pray for them and ask for their intercession; they are our advocates. We should also remember our holy patrons and continue to carry out their legacy which has been entrusted to us today.
- e. We should renew the custom of reciting the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM.

7. Contemplating the life of Mary as a Mother. On the one hand, this entails constantly being with Christ; on the other—it continuously recalls Mary's presence in our lives (especially in the life of a Marian). The heart of the Mother is not just a great feeling of love, but also a path of constant suffering. The cross is the sign of our hope and the strength of our Marian apostolate (cf. Jn 19:25-27).

8. The external forms of the apostolate and devotion. Let us be mindful of the small, everyday matters, which, if renewed, bring new life: e.g. a redecorated room, freshly baked bread, coffee or tea which is nicely served, etc. A small act which is done out of love becomes a big one, as St. Theresa used to say. Jesus performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves with little human participation;

- My personal Marian library (above all, it is important to seek an understanding of the faith!); We should read extensively about the Mother of the Lord; write books about her; prepare topical and catechetical articles; learn the details and become experts on certain aspects of her life, especially the Immaculate Conception.
- Develop an appreciation for sacred art: paintings, statues, simple decorations in one's own room etc., carry rosary beads.

- Organize pilgrimages to shrines; become a guide, an expert on Mary (we should know our shrines well and live according to the life of our shrine); run “retreats on the road.”
- Promote quality arts, music, and movies.
- Organize congresses, symposia, prayer movements (the Marians must make time for this, thus we must ask the Lord to expand the hours of the day!).

If our hearts will grasp this apostolate, we’ll sing along with Mary: “The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name!” (Lk 1:49). Let us live out our charism!

9. The Marian Apostolate, and particularly the honor of the Immaculate Conception, calls us to radically protect human life from the moment of its conception. *Pro life* prayer and actions are one of the greatest concerns of the Church. Our Founder, whose beatification came to pass after the official recognition of the miracle of a fetus being brought back to life in the mother’s womb, also calls us to care for the life conceived though yet unborn.

This is related to the value of protecting the dignity and vocation of women, which ministry emerges out of the Marian image of the Church. To look at every woman with the eyes of Jesus; to see the image of Mary in every woman (e.g., out of respect for Mary, Cardinal Wyszyński always got up from behind his desk if a woman entered his office).

10. As the prototype of the Church in the economy of faith, Mary teaches us a pure evangelical faith (and this is the essence of a true Marian devotion and apostolate), which is not based on signs but on the word of God revealing Himself. The Mother of the Lord showed her obedience of faith to God who has revealed Himself. The turning point was the moment of the Annunciation. Mary put her complete trust in the word of God which was brought to her by the angel. She reaffirmed this faith at the foot of the Cross and she lived this faith out on Easter morning. This was a pure faith in the Word of God, not in some extraordinary signs. Such was also the faith of Abraham. We must imitate this kind of faith and absorb our Marian apostolate with it. The poet Jan Twardowski was praying for this very pure and austere faith:

“I’m not coming for consolation as for a bowl of soup
I wanted at last to lay my head down
on the rock of faith.”

Eschatological Apostolate

Probably by now, no Marian needs to be convinced that a particular gift and a task were given to us through the grace of the Holy Spirit which we call the Marian eschatological apostolate. The beatification of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński and our post-beatification reflections have contributed greatly to our deeper comprehension of this aspect of our vocation. Everyone who personally met Fr. Founder was struck by his intense love for the faithful departed who were suffering in Purgatory. For this reason, it seems legitimate to ask: how does this charism influence us, the Marians; and then through us, how does it influence the community of the pilgrim Church on earth which is now being purified? What can we do in order that this charism would bear more abundant fruit?

It seems necessary to apply to the eschatological dimension of the Marian apostolate, the message which John Paul II widely promoted on the “new evangelization.” He stated that it must be conducted with “new zeal, new methods and new means of expression.” New zeal always flows out of love, new methods are fruits of the human mind and its ingenuity, and reaching for new means always requires courage and prudence. Thus, it is not first and foremost a question of a “modern” apostolate, (although this cannot be denied), but of a “new” apostolate in the evangelical sense. In other words—we are speaking of an apostolate which is taken up by new people who are turned toward God, striving for holiness, and fired up by the Holy Spirit.

What Is It?

The Constitutions—the Renovator’s Transformed Vision

From the moment of its renewal, the Congregation of Marian Fathers found itself facing a new eschatological perspective as it were, which was predominant for Fr. Renovator. He put a stronger accent on a commitment to the pilgrim Church on earth than to the one suffering in Purgatory. The proof can be found in the first *Constitutions* of the renovated community which he edited, which lacked an “eschatological thread”. The Holy See added certain paragraphs on

their own, not making them, however—as had been done previously—a description of the Congregation’s specific character, but only as one of its pious practices. The Decree of Cardinal Vives y Tuto which ratified the reform and the new Constitutions spoke of “the special devotion of the entire Congregation to help the Poor Souls in Purgatory.” In the Constitutions of 1930, everything referring to the eschatological aspect of the Marians’ service is treated in paragraphs numbered 400 and above.

This aspect was brought back in our present Constitutions of 1986 (I take the liberty to assume that it was largely due to the many lamentations of Fr. Witold Niececki) and it is addressed in Chapter One entitled “Mission and Character of the Congregation” in the section regarding the nature of the Congregation. However, it is still not as clear as are, for example, the Marian, ecclesial, and “educational” characters of our religious community. We read: “The special mission of the Congregation is: out of love for God and neighbor, under the guidance and patronage of Mary, Immaculately Conceived, to strive earnestly with the Church, in the Church and through the Church so that all who are still pilgrims here on earth, as well as those who are being purified after this life, may attain the fullness of maturity and eternal happiness in Christ with all the saints.”¹

Meanwhile, paragraph 19 in regard to helping the dead and the dying, is placed among the pious practices (!). In this aspect, the Constitutions follow the spirit of Father Renovator, who, in his Instruction XVII, also lists helping the deceased among the optional pious practices. As we know, Blessed George Matulewicz used to count on the confreres’ personal responsibility; therefore, he left the matter of praying for the deceased to their good will. This has opened a wide, yet not always clearly defined, field for the Marian eschatological commitment.

Praxis—the Incarnated Vision of the Renovator

A. The prayers which are prescribed by our Constitutions and which are discussed in detail in our Directory, remain an important minimal obligation for us:

a) according to paragraph 81 of our Constitutions, the general communal practice ought to include prayers for the deceased confreres (as part of the Marian prayers and after reading the *Album of the Dead*), as well as for the other faithful departed at the communal meal, for instance;

b) paragraph 36 of our Directory calls for striving, especially in November, to promoting prayers for the deceased; meanwhile D 42-51 places an obligation on us to pray particularly intensely upon the demise of the Church’s superiors, our confreres, associates, parents, and benefactors;

¹ C, 2.

c) additionally, our Constitutions encourage our gaining indulgences and offering them for the deceased,² as well as promoting an eschatological awareness among the People of God.³ This paragraph offers us a clear incentive to reflect on the Marian eschatological apostolate: “At opportune occasions and using various means of the apostolate, the members should strive to inculcate in the minds of the faithful eschatological truths in such a way that by them they be strongly spurred both to attain to sanctity and to offer prayer for the dying and for the souls detained in purgatory.” This opens a wide array of possibilities for action in all possible forms of the apostolate. I shall speak of details further in my presentation.

B. In recent years, some of our Provinces came up with successful initiatives in regards to the eschatological charism. It seems suitable to mention here at least some of them:

a) Regular celebrations of Vespers for the Dead are still a generally accepted practice in the Marian parishes (regrettably, with poor attendance by the Marians themselves usually);

b) A new and specifically Marian initiative is the Votive Candles Shrines (Stockbridge, Kaunas) in remembrance of the departed who have been entrusted to our prayers;

c) Some places have introduced the indulgences for the dead or Prayers for the dead at a cemetery a week before the parish fair, which aptly shows the sense of the indulgence as a time of grace for the living and the dead;

d) The Resurrection processions to the cemetery to proclaim our paschal joy to the departed have similar connotations to (c).

What Seems to Be Deserving Our Great Attention?

Vivere, or to Live Eschatologically

The primary form of the apostolate is always our individual and communal witness to the Kingdom of God, which is among us and to come, given in accord with the famous principle: *Verba docent, exempla trahunt*. Living from an eschatological perspective simply means to live our religious consecration according to the evangelical counsels, thus showing the beauty of what is to come and what is already here.

² Ibid., 81.

³ Ibid., 118.

A. Apostles of eschatological poverty:

a) there is a need to raise up in each confrere and entire communities an *attitude of trust in Divine Providence*, expressed in unselfish (non-remunerative) apostolic and charitable actions;

b) there is a need to call for and foster an *attitude of solidarity among the Marians*, an attitude of moving from the mentality of “my estate” to the one of “all that we have belongs to us all, and, this is the community’s and Church’s property;”

c) there is a need to develop in the Marians a supernatural approach to material goods as a *means of the apostolate*, but not the goal, to which we dedicate ourselves (as Father Founder used to put it: to regard these goods as transitory ones!);

d) there is a need for a communal witness of poverty in our lifestyle, our ownership of goods, clothing, etc. The criteria are provided by our Constitutions.

B. Apostles of obedience:

a) there is a need to accept *the mission in the community of the Congregation and the Church as the fulfillment of God’s will*, which is the foremost value in the life and mission in the Church—God’s Kingdom on earth;

b) there is a need to form in ourselves an *attitude of «leaving behind» and «passing on»* causes, on which we’ve been working, to our confreres appointed by the Congregation, and even more so to the lay people who become associated with us through our work;

c) there is a need to demonstrate our filial understanding of *the Church as a place where the Kingdom of God is manifested* and our attachment to the Church and her shepherds.

C. Apostles of celibacy for the Kingdom:

a) since Christ Himself recognized chastity as a special sign for the world to come, there is thus a need *for a clear individual and communal witness of persevering in the vow and virtue of chastity* given through the manner of thinking, speaking and behaving;

b) there is a need to practice and to show to the faithful a profound life of prayer, both individual and communal, as a manifestation of *our spousal union with God, the most beloved above all*, for example, through the recitation of one of the hours of the breviary in the church or a public chapel;

c) there is a need to shape our attitude of availability and of readiness to be of service towards our neighbor as the fruit of living *for the Kingdom*, in order to please the Lord.

Agere, or Acting Eschatologically

I would suggest three aspects of developing the eschatological apostolate: praying, proclaiming the word, and performing deeds of mercy.

A. The Apostolate of prayer and pious practices:

a) in continuity with a well-established practice, it would be worthwhile to introduce the custom of singing the Vespers for the Dead throughout the Congregation (at least in our pastoral centers), as a specifically Marian element of the apostolate of prayer for the departed;

b) our Marian Helpers Centers have so-called “Prayer Lines.” They are a perfect opportunity for evangelization, especially on behalf of people who have died in accidents, unexpectedly and totally unprepared to meet their Creator; it is possible to shape in this spirit the awareness of the faithful, whom we reach through our bulletins, so that they would commend such people to our prayers;

c) the most perfect help for the departed is always the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. In his *Testament II*, our Founder decreed that two Masses be celebrated weekly at the Congregation’s expense: one for the deceased, the other—for the conversion of sinners. The first Chapter celebrated after Blessed Stanislaus’s death recognized this instruction as contradictory to the vow of poverty. However, was it not a salvific intuition of our Founder not to benefit from praying for the deceased, but to offer something of our own instead, so that our contribution would be apparent and tangible?

B. The Apostolate of the Word:

a) in our work of teaching, we’ll be always inspired by our Father Founder’s zeal, since he frequently encouraged the assistance for the souls in Purgatory (for example, see his famous sermon in Studzienna, his meditations on the last things, or his appeal to support the deceased expressed in his *Mystical Temple of God*). The vast domain of teaching and catechesis opens before us wide possibilities for eschatological instruction. Thus, it would be good to think about preparing appropriate homiletic and catechetical materials.

b) The fact of death and burial is a special domain for our pastoral work. Frequently, the manner in which family and friends would live out these events may greatly depend on the quality of the sermon delivered at the funeral solemnity. The experience proves the importance of finding a right balance between expressing compassion and delivering an evangelical message. Undoubtedly, funerals are the domain of the “new evangelization.”

c) Our retreat centers came up with a proposal for special retreats pertaining to eschatological matters—bereavement, for example. This initiative is worthy developing and cultivating in other Provinces of our Congregation;

d) the 18th-century Marians published a prayer book to prayerfully assist the deceased. This beautiful initiative is continued in many ways by our Publishing House and our Association of Marian Helpers. Maybe, we ought to create an “eschatological series” for our publishing apostolate that would provide the canonical view on this topic: for example, the works of Joseph Ratzinger or Ladislaus Boros. Thanks to these initiatives, people may begin to associate us anew with helping the souls suffering in Purgatory.

C. The Apostolate—*Caritas*:

a) The second hospice, to which the Marians have made a commitment (the first, in Warsaw, and now in Licheń) fits perfectly into our eschatological charism of caring for the dying. At this point, only the Marian experts are involved in this cause. Let’s hope that our hospice work will stimulate all of the Marians to provide spiritual and prayerful care for the elderly and the dying. The aging of the European population should be a sign of the times that indicates the need to re-evaluate our Marian program of caring;

b) I learned from our confreres in Germany about an important pastoral cause related to death—care for the bereaved. The natural place for this kind of care is the confessional and the sacrament of reconciliation. However, wouldn’t it be worthwhile to create some counseling service at our parishes to benefit those who cannot cope with the death of their loved ones. Undoubtedly, this type of apostolate needs responsible and well-trained staff: psychologists or spiritual directors.

Closing question

To close, I’d like to put a question to you. Wouldn’t it be worthwhile to return to the Congregation-wide recitation of the *Office of the Dead* as a manifestation of our charism? I’m thinking about receiving from the Holy See the privilege for the Marians to recite this *Office* weekly, for example, on Mondays, aside from obligatory memorials prescribed by the liturgical calendar. Someone may say that, in fact, no one is forbidding us from reciting this *Office*. My idea goes further: I’m thinking of a communal, continuous prayerful commitment that would help the Marians themselves to live in the eschatological perspective, according to the principle: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Such a renewed practice would demand the incorporation of a new paragraph into our Directory, but the right to make alterations in our laws belongs to the General Chapter alone. The goal of my proposal is to present the problem and to raise a question for further reflection.

Helping the Pastors: The Marians' Apostolic Commitment

“Since the contemplative life is not binding you so strictly, although you are founded in the eremitical status, those gifted with such talents will not be prevented from humbly helping pastors in their church work, if they would be called upon by pastors, and have previously obtained faculties from the Ordinaries and the Superiors.”¹

A wide array of pastoral actions carried out by the Marians in the Church and the world can be fitted within the domain initially defined as helping the pastors. From the Congregation's beginning, the *Norma vitae* instructed appropriately gifted confreres to help the pastors, thus opening a wide field of pastoral work for us. In reality, along with helping the pastors, running confraternities and teaching the truths of faith to the poor (particularly the villagers), the Marians gave parish missions and retreats, took care of their churches, administered the sacraments, delivered sermons, and ran charitable works.²

Today we find the Marians ministering in many countries and being directly involved in parish ministry and many other apostolic works. It has become so wide-spread that our modern laws, referring to this manner of commitment, open before us a large field of action, which can practically embrace the entire evangelical work of the Church in our day.³

For this reason, we need a deep reflection on our beginnings to discover in Father Founder's original intention the profound sense of our own commitment to the apostolate, as well as the model through which our own charism and Marian specificity would show up clearly in this vast field of work.

To evaluate of our own commitment to pastoral ministry, it is important is to ask ourselves about our charism and our specificity. To understand clearly its mission in the Church, each religious institute must always stay on the path of

¹ *NV*, I, 3.

² Cf. W. Makoś, MIC, *Frei Estanislau de Jesus Maria Papczyński—Pesquisas e reflexões* (Tradução para uso interno), Curitiba 2001, p. 255.

³ Cf. *C*, 3; *D*, 1.

tirelessly discovering the inspirations flowing from the founding charism. If we wish to follow this path, we must remember our Founder's achievements, his initiatives and actions, as well as bear in mind the whole of the historic context in which he lived and worked. Only then we can compare it to our modern times and to ask ourselves: What would he do today, how would he react to the challenges of our days?⁴

Since every charism is always raised up by the Holy Spirit in order to respond to the concrete needs of the Church and of the People of God, our apostolic work must be rooted in the experience of our charism, which grounds it and gives it its true sense. It is impossible to understand apostolic activity apart from the mystical experience from which it took its roots. Amadeo Cencini speaks about it in this way: "The pastoral work of a given congregation is so closely united to a particular way of being, thinking, praying and living, that it becomes nearly always the criterion for evaluating its members' faithfulness to the original charismatic inspiration."⁵

The first and foremost foundation of our mission in the Church is to be found in the life of our Father Founder, in his works and endeavors. We see his great commitment to various apostolic works for which he merited the title, the "Apostle of Mazovia."⁶ These facts speak clearly of his dedication to seeking the will of God and saving souls.

Moreover, aside from deepening our knowledge of the facts about our Founder and his teachings in the context of the apostolic commitment of the first Marianists, it becomes necessary to discern the reasons behind Fr. Stanislaus' personal commitment to various apostolic works and his desire that his confreres serve the Church by assisting the pastors. The most important matter is not what Father Founder personally accomplished, but rather, what his intentions were. The most important thing is not the *letter*, but its *spirit*.⁷ Faithfulness to the charism demands creativeness and constant openness to *the breath of the Holy Spirit* who works in the Church untiringly.

We all know that Fr. Papczyński's first concept was a community which, while preserving perfect religious discipline, would be ready to carry out pastoral ministry. We also know that initially it was made impossible by various obstacles which he met in the process of the realization of this goal. The reality forced Fr. Papczyński to accept the eremitic way of life. Nevertheless, in his *Norma vitae*, our Founder left us instructions as to our commitment to pastoral

⁴ Cf. A. Pina Ribeiro, *Teologia da Vida Consagrada*, Ed. Paulista, SP.

⁵ Cf. A. Cencini, *Amaras o Senhor Teu Deus*, Ed. Paulinas, S.P, 1989. p. 62.

⁶ W. Makoś, MIC, *Frei Estanislau de Jesus Maria Papczyński...*, quoted work.

⁷ Cf. *PC*, 2.

ministry. Because of the problems with our Congregation's approval,⁸ these are not fully-developed instructions. Nonetheless, they are very important because they reveal our Founder's apostolic heart. In addition, they show his constant efforts to free his community from the imposed restrictions of the eremitic life and thus to bring it closer to his original vision which God had inspired.

To conclude: to arrive at a profound understanding of our vocation and mission in the modern world, it is necessary to consider the background against which this mission is to be realized. We must constantly open ourselves to the signs of the times and this the goal to which recent Church documents are calling us. Just as in the days of our Founder, the modern world is also trapped in its various problems typical of today. These problems become our challenges just as the problems of Fr. Founder's day occupied him.

Father Papczyński was very sensitive to needs of Christ needs in his day. We, the Marianos, must also be extremely sensitive to the appeals of Christ and the Church in our times. What are the primary needs of the world and the Church? What are the biggest problems that we face in places of evangelization? How can we, inspired by Father Founder's teachings and works, respond to these problems? The answer to these and similar questions will ensure that our apostolic endeavors will bring the very fruits that God expected from Fr. Papczyński's vocation, when giving him this special and unique charism.

To illustrate, let us give a few examples of the challenges that we face⁹ and which demand our response. This response must emerge from our religious and Marian consecration. They include:

- Secularization, which results in people's negating God and His existence and which leads to people's indifference towards God;
- Moral relativism and permissiveness which is typical of modern-day societies;
- Violence, which leads to wars;
- Attacks, armed robberies, abductions;
- Injustice in relations between rich and poor countries, between rich and poor social strata, which leads to various forms of discrimination;
- Attacks on unborn human life (abortion, genetic manipulations);
- A lack of openness and kindness to people who suffer or are near death;
- A decrease in vocations in the Church and our Congregation; etc.

⁸ K. Krzyżanowski, MIC, *A Fundação e o Desenvolvimento da Ordem Durante a Vida do Fundador*; in: *Marianos, Bukowicz & Górski (org.)*, (Tradução para uso interno), Curitiba 2002, p. 21.

⁹ L. Mendes de Almeida, SJ, *Jesus Cristo Luz da Vida Consagrada*, 2 ed. Loyola, São Paulo, 1996, pp.79-80.

These factors, as well as many others, can breed uncertainty, fear, even pessimism. In response to them, God gives us the gift of our Founder's beatification. This gift is his personality, the trials that he faced, his struggle and his hope. He also had obstacles to deal with in order to accomplish his work. Our Founder had to face the challenges of his times (wars, epidemics, persecution, imprisonment, etc.). He had to overcome his doubts and uncertainties, even a temptation to abandon his ideal. To persevere through the trials, he drew strength from his intimate union with Christ and His Immaculate Mother, as well as from his pastoral dedication. These intimate bonds guided and fortified him in moments of doubt, of persecution, of failure, and of crisis. They inspired him to persevere and to be more pastorally involved; they also caused his involvement to bear fruit.

Living in the times marked by activism and efficiency, we must be particularly mindful not to interpret our pastoral involvement exclusively as the realization of external works. In the apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* we read: "Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness."¹⁰

The same exhortation tells us that it is not enough to understand the profound meaning of the problems and the challenges from a purely human point of view. Instead, we need a spiritual discernment which will allow us to see reality through "the eyes of Christ." Thus, it is necessary to open our hearts to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who invites us to ponder in depth the ways of Divine Providence. He prompts the consecrated persons to work out new answers for the modern world. Those are Divine inspirations, which devout souls can easily grasp and courageously transform into actions in conformity with the founding charisma and the demands of the modern world.¹¹

¹⁰ *VC*, 72.

¹¹ Cf. *VC*, 73.

Evangelization

In my conference I won't refer, except in one instance, to the documents of the Teaching Magisterium pertaining to the need for evangelization. I shall only quote them in order to refresh in memory the definition of evangelization as presented in exhortation of Pope Paul VI. Neither will I analyze from that point of view our Constitutions, which regard the need for evangelization as duty of pastoral work, as noted in art. 133. I admit that I've never been officially questioned as to how and in what manner I carry it out. Personally, I believe that evangelizing is done by someone whose life was saved by the Gospel. For this reason, this person feels prompted to proclaim it to all people. It is best if he does it in unity with the Church and if he is sent by his own superior (which must be distinguished from consent).

What Is Evangelization?

In the apostolic exhortation on evangelization in the modern world, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, we find the following definition: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new' (Rev 21:5). (...) the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs. Strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation."¹

¹ *EN*, 18-19.

This exhortation, dating back to 1975, was to trigger the quest for new ways of evangelization: “The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.”² The last document on evangelization, namely the *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization*,³ in which an attempt has been made to discover the difference between proselytism and the right to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ the Savior, indicates that the quest is not over yet.

What Is the Subject of Evangelization?

Evangelization or Christian initiation is not a type of scholarly (doctrinal, theoretical) education, but a process of vital growth within the Christian community. Here, the dominant role belongs to the *kerygma*, which is the starting point of evangelization. The missionary experience of the Church shows that the teaching of doctrine alone does not guarantee the inception of the Christian life. Someone who has heard the *kerygma* needs a community and the ongoing formation of faith in order to come to understand what it is that he has received and from which he can rejoice. To illustrate, I’ll use a catechetical parable as an example. If there is someone who has inherited 22 million pounds sterling from his uncle in Great Britain, there must also have been someone who brought him the good news. If there is such a person able to let him know that 22 million pounds are waiting for him in the bank, then this heir must believe it. If he believes it, he’ll go to the bank to collect, but it may so happen that he would still be unsatisfied with his life, because he is not able to—he cannot—give himself entirely to others. For the *kerygma* proclaims that a person feels happy only when he or she can lose his/her life on behalf of someone else. Thus, evangelization cannot produce fruit if it does not go toward creating at least the nucleus of a community, where the process of the growth of faith can take place. To all of the above, I’d like to add Fr. Wojciech Giertych, OP’s reflection, in which he compares St. Paul’s evangelization with the methods which are used today: “In his experience, the matter is based on a principle that moral perfection is not of the utmost essence in the Christian life, but rather, the quality of the communion with God. It is not a question of men being absolutely sinless, but of living out

² Ibid., 3.

³ Proclaimed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on Dec. 14, 2007, in Vatican.

every aspect of their lives and trials in unity with God. Saint Paul had to learn this in humility in order to persevere in a continuous state of gratitude, of which he wrote in his Letter to the Romans: "... all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus" (3:23-24), and to be able to proclaim with conviction: "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10).

Incidentally, this shows us the reason why the Church is being rejected in modern times. Many people perceive the Church today as an institution that proclaims above all moral principles. This has been seen as a manifestation of arrogance on the part of the clergy, thus provoking reactions like: "See!" As soon as a sin of a cleric is known, it becomes publicized. Here you are proclaiming principles which you do not uphold! Saint Paul proclaimed Christ who defended and transformed sinners into just men ... leaving them, however, with troubles that humiliate and remind of the need to depend on God.⁷⁴

How to Evangelize in Our Congregation?

My giving here some sort of a brilliant solution would be absurd. I believe that our Congregation ought to make a wide-scale reflection on this problem by first creating a chance for those among our confreres who personally have experienced being evangelized to share it with the community and then to pass this experience on to others, to whom they would be sent on behalf of the Church along with other confreres. However, until such a communal road is worked out, we must use the existing experiences of the Church, which have withstood the test of time, in the domain of evangelization and catechism in the communities.

⁴ W. Giertych OP, *Rozważania Pawłowe*, Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, Warszawa 2008, p. 63-64.

Catechesis and Teaching

The topic of my conference is very close to that of Fr. Dariusz Mazewski's conference about evangelization. I would like to open with two statements.

First, we most frequently understand catechesis as a formal system of religious education of children and the youth. I won't speak of this kind of catechesis because I am not competent in it: I served as a catechist for only the two first years of my priestly life. In this talk, I understand catechesis in a much broader sense of the word.

Secondly, my intervention will insert a series of presentations on the theme of the Marian apostolate. By the term "Marian Apostolate," I first and foremost understand the participation of the entire Congregation of Marian Fathers in the apostolic mission of the Church. However, I do not want to use this term exclusively, as an apostolate that must in all places have some specifically Marian features and to always strive for features that are different from other apostolates conducted by other communities.

For this reason, I don't want to talk about any specifically "Marian" catechesis. Instead I would like to indicate a certain trend, which the Church follows in the understanding of catechesis. I believe it to be in conformity with the motto of our renewed Congregation: "For Christ and the Church."

Two documents are particularly helpful in understanding the Church's actual concept of catechesis:

- The *General Catechetical Directory* published in 1997 by the Congregation for Clergy (the first such Directory was published shortly after Vatican II and is being presently updated and revised in accord with post-Vatican papal documents, particularly *Evangelia nuntiandi* of Paul VI, and also *Catechesi tradendae* and *Redemptoris missio* of John Paul II.
- A 1990 document of the International Council on Catechesis, which is an organ of the above-mentioned Congregation *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community. Some principles and Guidelines.*

In this conference I'd like to briefly consider four points:

- What is catechesis;
- The central role of adult catechesis;
- The catechumenate as the model for every catechesis;
- Communal dimension.

What Is Catechesis?

In His commissioning of the disciples which is described at the end of the Gospel by St. Matthew (28:18-20), Jesus tells His Apostles to go and to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He has commanded. Catechesis is the name for all the efforts made by the Church to form disciples, to help them believe, so that through faith they may have eternal life in the name of Jesus, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ (cf. *Catechesi tradendae*, 1-2). Thus, catechesis is an education in faith and as such, it is closely allied with the mission of evangelization. It may be said that catechesis is a part of evangelization. Because the Church exists to evangelize, it may be said that catechesis is the right and obligation of the Church.

Catechesis, just like evangelization, is not a privilege for some. Clearly, the responsibility of educating others in the faith pertains to different persons in varying degrees; nevertheless, everyone in the Church is catechized because all are called to participate in ongoing catechesis. All have been catechized—inasmuch as Jesus Christ is the only true teacher (see Mt 23:8.10), so we may have a part in His mission to the degree that we personally encounter Jesus Christ, allowing Him to form our lives and we are of a mind to be constantly educated in our faith. Likewise, we are all called to share in catechizing others, because this comes from the very missionary essence of the Church: being a light to all nations, the salt of the earth and leaven (cf. Mt 5:13-16; *CC* 1).

The fundamental danger in this context is that from one point of view, a false conviction is held that, we, as Religious, are already sufficiently evangelized prior to our entering the Congregation and that we are catechized in the framework of initial formation. In like manner, it could be thought that conducting catechesis belongs only to certain people who are involved in a formal program of educating children and the youth. If catechesis consists in forming disciples of Christ and helping others to believe, then it means that the process of our own formation as those who do catechizing never ends and depends on an attitude of constant conversion. Belonging to Christ is something very dynamic. In the same way, catechesis is linked to the total life of the Church and practically

speaking, all of the efforts that we undertake have some type of bonding, either directly or indirectly, with the Church.

Catechesis of Adults

There is a saying that Jesus blessed the children and catechized the adults, while the Church is practicing the opposite: she blesses the adults and catechizes the children. It is a very significant point that the present documents of the Church not only speak of adult catechesis but go as far as to emphasize its central role in Christian formation. John Paul II thus wrote in *Catechesi tradendae*: “I cannot fail to emphasize now one of the most constant concerns (...) a concern imposed with vigor and urgency by present experiences throughout the world: (...) the catechesis of adults. This is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form” (no. 43), while the above-mentioned document of the Council on Catechesis strongly emphasizes that: “a fully Christian community can exist only when a systematic catechesis of all its members takes place and when an effective and well-developed catechesis of adults is regarded as the *central task* in the catechetical enterprise” (no. 25).

The Catechumenate as a Model of Catechesis

As the document of the Council on Catechesis states: “The Synod of 1977 affirmed that “the model of all catechesis” is the catechumenate, which culminates in baptism (*Synod Message* 8; cf. *EN* 44. *Chr. L.* 61). According to ancient tradition, every form of catechesis should be inspired by the catechumenal model. Precisely because the catechesis of adults aims at living the Christian life in all its fullness and integrity, the process outlined in the *catechumenate* seems the most appropriate model and should be encouraged everywhere, though it cannot be considered the exclusive model” (no. 66).

Obviously, in the event of catechesis for people who have already been baptized, we do not deal with the catechumenate in the true sense of the word. However, certain essential elements of the catechumenate can become a source of inspiration for post-baptismal catechesis (cf. *Directory*, art. 90-91).

Primarily, catechumenal catechesis is not only an intellectual form of passing down the truths of the faith. It is an integral catechesis, in which the word, the liturgical celebration, and the way of life are completely harmonized. Catechumenal catechesis aims at the formation of one’s entire life.

Secondly, just as the catechumenate prepares for Christian initiation (baptism—confirmation—Eucharist), the post-baptismal catechesis prepares to release the grace of the previously received sacraments of initiation. In this way the catechesis does not float in mid-air, but pertains to the existing sacramental reality. Many young people and adults do not receive an adequate introduction into Christianity and the graces received from the sacraments, in many cases, they remain rudimentary.

Thirdly, catechumenal catechesis points out the central character of the paschal mystery of Christ.

Fourthly, being divided into stages, catechumenal formation foresees a gradual development.

It is worthwhile mentioning in this context, that the structure of religious formation also arose from a catechumenal inspiration. For this reason, it is in fact spiritually related to us in some way.

Communal Character

One of the most characteristic traits of our times is, on the one hand, fragmentation and the experience of solitude and loneliness; and on the other hand striving for intimate relationships. In this context, it is more and more apparent that expanded and anonymous pastoral work is inadequate. This impacts catechesis, as well. Catechesis is effective in the measure that a Christian community becomes a reference point on the path of faith for its individual members. It happens only when the Christian community becomes the source, site, and goal of catechesis (cf. *Directory*, art. 158-159).

It is the source—because the community is the place for the Christian witness which attracts someone to the faith. It is the site and goal—because community is the natural environment to grow in faith.

It appears that Religious, due to the particular nature of their vocation, are especially called to participate in the building up of Christian communities, which is the environment for growing in faith.

I have sketched certain characteristic features of the Church's present thought on catechesis. As Marianists, we are asked to be involved in the faith formation of our brothers and sisters. It is not a question of creating some sort of special Marian catechesis or of using it for some marketing or promotional end. It is a matter of offering our charism for the work of catechesis which is being done by the Church.

The Divine Mercy Apostolate

Divine Mercy Apostolate: a Historical Overview

The *Divine Mercy Apostolate* began in the United States in 1941 as an act of gratitude to God for His extraordinary mercy and protection bestowed upon Fr. Joseph Jarzębowski, MIC. Faced with the growing threat of Soviet arrest, imprisonment, probable deportation to the Siberian gulag, or death for his role as an educator and a prominent clergyman, Fr. Joseph had no means of escape. Inspired and encouraged by his younger confreres to place complete confidence in God's Mercy, Fr. Joseph entrusted his life, safety, mission and journey to the United States to the Mercy of God, and promised, that if graced with protection and safe arrival, he would promote the Divine Mercy Message for the rest of his life.

Before he set out on this perilous journey without proper documents or sufficient financial means, he visited Fr. Michael Sopoćko (Sr. Faustina's spiritual director) and celebrated Mass before the Divine Mercy image. Fr. Michael gave him a copy of his treatise in Latin on the Mercy of God and on the institution of its Feast. The treatise was titled *De Misericordia Dei Desque Eiusdem Festo Institueno*. This treatise, known as the *Memorandum on the Institution of the Feast of Divine Mercy* contained biblical, theological and liturgical teaching on Divine Mercy, as well as, texts from Sister Faustina's *Diary* concerning the Divine Mercy Feast, the Chaplet, the Novena, the Litany and the Image. Fr. Michael, confident in God's protection over Fr. Joseph asked him to spread the *Memorandum* and the Message of Divine Mercy especially among the American hierarchy and clergy.

Throughout his long journey that took him through Moscow, Vladivostok and Japan, and finally by way of Seattle to Washington, D.C., Fr. Joseph was exposed to many dangers. Yet amidst them all, he experienced extraordinary protection and guidance. Immediately upon arrival at the Community House in Washington, D.C., Fr. Joseph, out of gratitude to God for His wondrous gifts of mercy and protection that he experienced, and, in order to fulfill his promise that he made, began to spread the message of God's Mercy and the need to trust

Him. He was joined in this effort by several Marians from the Washington House especially Fr. Joseph Łuniewski, MIC and Br. Walter Pełczyński, MIC. Slowly, this apostolic work which was initiated by Fr. Joseph Jarzębowski, MIC grew and developed in the American Province of St. Stanislaus Kostka and it became its major apostolic endeavor.

Fr. Julian Chróściechowski, MIC, who joined the Marians and its work of promotion several years later, had similar experiences of the extraordinary protection and guidance of The Divine Mercy. Arrested for being a judge and detained in the infamous Pawiak prison in Warsaw, he was able to escape against all odds with a Divine Mercy Image which he held in his hand, having placed himself under the protection of The Divine Mercy. Stories of such wondrous deeds began to spread as more people witnessed the power of God's Mercy when they placed their trust in Him.

The need for the extraordinary message of hope and trust in God's Mercy increased among families waiting for their members' safe return from the Second World War. In 1944, the Marians in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, under the direction of Fr. Walter Pełczyński, MIC, established a center with the appropriate name The Mercy of God Apostolate for the promotion of this consoling message primarily through the printed media. With the formation of the Association of Marian Helpers in 1944 and the establishment of the new Province of St. Stanislaus Kostka in 1948, the Marians began a very fruitful apostolate. It continued unabated until November 1958, when the Holy Office issued a "Notification" forbidding the spreading of The Divine Mercy message in the forms proposed by Sister Faustina Kowalska. [*Acta Apostolicae Sedes* published the document in March 1959.]

(For a more comprehensive summary of the growth of the devotion to Divine Mercy in America and throughout the world in the years 1941-1958, and on the Holy See's March 1959 Notification banning the promotion of The Divine Mercy in the forms proposed by Sister Faustina, confer Fr. Julian [Chróściechowski]'s Book: *Devotion to Divine Mercy in Our Day: A Historical and Critical Study*, Chapters 9, 10 and 11).

The Marians, faithful to the Holy See, stopped promoting the Divine Mercy devotion in the forms proposed by Sister Faustina. They changed the name of the apostolate to the "Marian Apostolate," and began to promote literature dedicated to Mary and to the Mercy of God according to Sacred Scripture and Catholic Tradition. Some more important publications during this period were:

Fr. Michael Sopoćko's books:

1. *The Mercy of God in His Works* (four volumes in Polish and English);
2. *God is Mercy: Meditations on God's Most Consoling Attribute.*

Fr. Julian Chróściechowski's, books:

1. *God's Infinite Mercy*;
2. *Devotion to Divine Mercy in Our Day: A Historical and Critical Study* (English and Polish).

Other authors:

1. Maria Winowska, *Prawo do Miłosierdzia*;
2. Fr. Jacek Woroniecki, OP, *The Mystery of Divine Mercy*;
3. L. Garriguet, *The Good God*.

The ban lasted from 1958 to 1978. Father Michael Sopoćko, St. Faustina's spiritual director and our invaluable co-worker in The Divine Mercy Apostolate, died in 1975—three years before the ban was lifted. Two Marian promoters of this message Fr. Joseph Jarzębowski, MIC and Fr. Julian Chróściechowski, MIC also died in 1964 and 1976 respectively. Fr. Julian and Fr. Joseph left a legacy of promoting this message by all possible means including multilingual publications, extensive personal correspondence, parish missions, conferences and retreats. They were also instrumental in establishing important relationships and contacts with key Church and lay leaders and organizations, who offered invaluable support in the worldwide promotion. In addition to Fr. Michael Sopoćko, already mentioned, among those special promoters associated with the Marians were: Fr. Joseph Andrasz, SJ (St. Faustina's first and last confessor and spiritual director and the author of a very influential booklet *Divine Mercy we trust in You* translated into key European languages); Cardinals Sapieha of Krakow and Hlond of Warsaw, Poland; Michael Curley of Baltimore and Mooney of Detroit, U.S.A.; Monsignor and later Cardinal Ciappi, Papal Theologian during the pontificates of Pope Pius XII, John XXIII, and Pope Paul VI; Monsignor Carlo Vivaldelli, Italy; the Pallottine Fathers; the Franciscans, Felician Sisters; Propaganda Mariana from Rome; and later, Cardinals Wyszyński and Karol Wojtyła (the future John Paul II) of Poland.

In 1965, hopeful developments on behalf of the message of The Divine Mercy began to dawn. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Cracow opened the Informative Process for the cause of beatification of Sr. Faustina and assigned Fr. Ignatius Rozycki, an expert theologian, to review the theological content of the *Diary* of Sister Faustina. In 1966, the first Divine Mercy Symposium was organized in Dolina Miłosierdzia (Częstochowa) by Fr. Stanisław Wierzbica and the Pallottine Fathers who were assisted by professors from the Catholic University of Lublin. The symposia continued in 1968, 1972 and 1975 in Ołtarzew, Poland. In 1975, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński participated in the symposium.

**'Notification' of April 15, 1978:
Its Significance for the Promotion
of The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion**

The Marians of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Province realized the importance of the new "Notification" of April 15, 1978, issued by the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. It not only lifted the ban on the spreading of the message of The Divine Mercy but also offered a new chapter in the distribution of the salutary message.

The Marians, wanting to be true and obedient to the spirit of the new "Notification," asked the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith for an authoritative interpretation of the "Notification." On July 12, 1979, the Superior General of the Marians received the following response from the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

"In reference to that matter (raised in the letter of Father General) I have the honor of informing you that with the new "Notification" (A.A.S., 30 June 1978, p. 350), arrived at in the light of original documentation examined also by the careful informative intervention of the then Archbishop of Cracow, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, it was the intention of the Holy See to revoke the prohibition contained in the preceding "Notification" of 1959 (A.A.S, 1959, p. 271), in virtue of which it is understood that there no longer exists, on the part of this S. Congregation, any impediment to the spreading of the devotion to The Divine Mercy in the authentic forms proposed by the Religious Sister mentioned above [The Servant of God Sister Faustina Kowalska]".

Assured that there "no longer exists, on the part of this Sacred Congregation, any impediment to the spreading of the devotion to The Divine Mercy in the authentic forms proposed by the Religious Sister mentioned above" the Marians, with a new vigor and dedication, began to spread the Message and Devotion of The Divine Mercy in the authentic forms proposed by Sister Faustina Kowalska.

**New Divine Mercy Apostolate and Other Marian Instruments
of Promoting The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion**

**The Apostolic Endeavors of Pope John Paul II
and the Marians' Divine Mercy Apostolate**

Six months after Pope Paul VI lifted the ban, the Archbishop who inaugurated Sr. Faustina's beatification process was elected Pope. This fact was not

insignificant to the spreading The Divine Mercy message and devotion. The Lord providentially had removed the obstacle of the ban under the Pontificate of Pope Paul VI. This freed Pope John Paul II to promote the salutary message of God's mercy without any fear of showing favoritism to a candidate for the altars from his former Archdiocese.

Two years after His election to the Papacy, Pope John Paul II gave witness to the importance of Divine Mercy by writing his second Encyclical with the very appropriate title *Dives in Misericordia* [*Rich in Mercy*]. It was published on November 30, 1980, the first Sunday of Advent. Because the encyclical is biblically-rooted, many non-Catholic theologians immediately hailed it as among the greatest of papal encyclicals. Catholic theologians, on the other hand, under the influence of political theology and its heavy emphasis on social justice, were puzzled by the appropriateness of the Encyclical for the times and only came to appreciate its relevance and value slowly and with time.

Pope John Paul II, during his post-assassination hospitalization and recovery, had St. Faustina's *Diary, Divine Mercy in my Soul* read to him. After his hospitalization, while visiting the Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaleza, Pope John Paul II identified his special mission as the Vicar of Christ with that of Divine Mercy, stating: "Right from the beginning of my ministry in St. Peter's See in Rome, I considered this message (of Divine Mercy) my special task."

Ten years later in his homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, on April 10, 1991 the Holy Father linked the Encyclical's message to that of Sr. Faustina, stating: "The words of the encyclical on Divine Mercy (*Dives in Misericordia*) are particularly close to us. They recall the figure of the Servant of God, Sister Faustina Kowalska. This simple woman Religious particularly brought *the Easter message of the merciful Christ* closer to Poland and the whole world."

During his 1997 visit to Łagiewniki (four years after Sr. Faustina's beatification) Pope John Paul II even more closely linked the Gospel message of mercy, his Petrine ministry, and the message of mercy that Christ chose to give to the world through St. Faustina. The link reached its culmination on April 30, 2000, the *Second Sunday of Easter*, when Pope John Paul II not only canonized St. Faustina and passed The Divine Mercy message and devotion so eloquently expressed and lived by her to the people of the Third Millennium, but also proclaimed that Sunday as the *Divine Mercy Sunday*. In this act, Pope John Paul II fulfilled Jesus' request through St. Faustina that the Sunday after Easter be known as the Feast of Divine Mercy. The link was reaffirmed during the Holy Father's entrustment of the world to The Divine Mercy from the Divine Mercy Shrine in Łagiewniki on August 17, 2002, and also when the Lord called him home just after he had received the Eucharist on April 2, 2005, the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday.

During these extraordinary years of the papacy of Pope John Paul II, the Marian Community used every means available to make the Great Mercy Pope's message of mercy resound far and wide. They printed his words in pamphlets, books, and magazine articles; they proclaimed his message of mercy by means of radio and television programs, audio and video tapes and cassettes, full feature movies, conferences, missions, homilies, and pilgrimages. Pope John Paul II became the great apostle of mercy whom the Marians greatly honored and cherished and with whom they retained a deep spiritual, *kerygmatic* and pastoral union and apostolic partnership.

For the Marians, distributing Pope John Paul's proclamation of the Divine Mercy message contained in Scripture, Tradition and direct references to St. Faustina's message from the Lord was only one way of their continuing to spread the message of The Divine Mercy. Equally important was the proclamation of the message approved by the Church which is contained in the writings of St. Faustina, especially in her *Diary*.

In 1993, during a special audience held for the Marians, Pope John Paul II encouraged the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception "to be Apostles of Divine Mercy under the maternal guidance of Our Lady."

The Congregation responded to the words of Pope John Paul II addressed in a special Recommendation to the 1999 General Chapter and to the whole Congregation to deepen their knowledge and experience of the mystery of Divine Mercy in the light of Revelation and the teachings of the Church, and to draw practical applications for all its activities.

Saint Faustina's Diary, The Divine Mercy In My Soul—an Important Source and Instrument of Spiritual Renewal and Authentic Promotion of The Divine Mercy Message And Devotion

In 1980, the Marians, freed from the restrictions imposed by the 1959 ban and formally assured by the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation that there "no longer exists, on the part of this Sacred Congregation, any impediment to the spreading of the devotion to The Divine Mercy in the authentic forms proposed by the Religious Sister mentioned above," began to prepare basic materials on the Message and Devotion to The Divine Mercy. In order to respond quickly to the new requests for Divine Mercy materials, the Marians first reprinted holy cards with the Image of the Merciful Jesus and pamphlets which had been prepared before the ban.

In order to safeguard and promote the authentic message of The Divine Mercy proposed by Sister Faustina, it became essential to prepare and publish the

critical edition of the original Polish *Diary, Divine Mercy in my Soul*. The Sisters of the Our Lady of Mercy in Cracow, Poland asked the Marians in Stockbridge to prepare the original Polish text of the *Diary*, which they printed in 1981. The critical edition text was made available to readers not only in Poland, the United States, and Italy, but in other countries as well. After two printings, the rights to publish the Polish *Diary* were handed over to the Polish Province of the Marians which continues to do so unabatedly.

With the critical edition of the original *Diary* in hand, the Marians began to work on the English, Portuguese, and Spanish translations. The endeavor required many linguistic consultations and revisions due to various usages of the English and Spanish languages spanning across many countries. The official text of the *Diary* in English was published in 1987 and the official *Diary* in Spanish was published in 1996. The *Diary* in Portuguese was published in two versions, one for Brazilian readers in 1982 and the other for Portugal in 1995. The Marians subsequently facilitated in the publishing of the *Diary* in Russian in 1993, and in Arabic in 1999. The Czech, Slovak and Vietnamese versions of the *Diary* have been published with Marian collaboration or assistance. A Chinese version is being also prepared with Marian assistance. The French, Italian, German, Hungarian and Korean versions were published by others.

Current statistics on the *Diary* printing and promotion

English large and pocket editions	printed/sold - 900,000
Deluxe Leather Edition	1 st edition printed/sold -10,000; 2 nd -15,000
Diary in Polish	printed/sold in the USA - 50,000
Diary in Polish	printed/sold in the Poland – not available
Diary in Spanish	printed/sold -100,000
Diary in Portuguese	printed/sold in Portugal – not available
Diary in Portuguese	printed/sold in Brazil – not available

Promotion through the Association of Marian Helpers and Its Apostolic Outreach

It is through the works of the Association of Marian Helpers, especially through its publishing arm, the Marian Press (formerly Mercy of God Apostolate and Marian Apostolate), and through the electronic media (video/DVD, audio/CD and the Internet), that the Marians have been able to communicate The Divine Mercy message and devotion to tens, perhaps hundreds of millions of people throughout the world in the last 25 years. The booklet entitled *The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion* (listed under six below) is the reason that

all radio and television stations, many businesses and institutions in the Philippines are praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at 3 O'clock in the afternoon. The production and distribution of holy cards and pamphlets are the reason that people around the world have come to know not only the Image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy, but are praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet in countless nations and languages, but especially in English and Spanish.

Printed Spiritual and Devotional Materials on Divine Mercy Continue to Be the Primary Work of the Apostolate.

1. *The Marian Helper* magazine, begun in 1944 (originally *Marian Helpers Bulletin*), is a quarterly publication with an average circulation over the years of 500,000 per issue and with a readership of about 2.5 persons per issue, according to professional surveys. Every issue has communicated The Divine Mercy message ranging from special articles on the new forms of The Divine Mercy devotion (the Image, the Chaplet, the Novena, the Hour of Mercy, the Feast of Divine Mercy), and the importance of trust and works of mercy to the news about Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations and Our Lord's promises attached to it. The *Marian Helper* magazine has been crucial in promoting every aspect of the message: spiritual, sacramental and pastoral.

2. *Róże Maryi*, a quarterly publication for the last ten years, began as a monthly in 1943. It has an average circulation of 8,000 per issue. This magazine has communicated the Message and Devotion of The Divine Mercy to the Polish-speaking members of the Association of Marian Helpers.

3. *Fuente de Misericordia*, a quarterly publication with an average circulation of 20,000 per issue, has been in existence for 13 years. This magazine likewise communicates The Divine Mercy Message to the Spanish-speaking faithful in a similar manner as the *Marian Helper* magazine, while respecting the specific spirituality and culture. In addition, a newsletter called, *Boletino de Misericordia* is mailed in between the above quarterly publication.

4. *Friends of Mercy*, a monthly newsletter, has communicated the mercy message to specific members of the Association whose interest is to support the promotion of the Message and Devotion of The Divine Mercy. Each newsletter contains special articles on the message and its promotion. The circulation is about 4,500 per issue.

5. *Appeals, Enrollments, and Novenas* also promote the Message of Mercy by way of spiritual reflections, prayers, and Divine Mercy Images. On average, the Marians mail over 1,000,000 of these annually.

6. *The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion* booklet, popularly known by its code name M17 (*Mercy 17*), has been revised several times over the last 22 years. More than 5 million copies have been printed and distributed. The Spanish version has also been very popular. Data on the number of Spanish copies printed and distributed has not yet been compiled, nor have the figures been documented for a similar publication (in several versions) printed and sold by the Marians in Poland.

7. *Leaflets* that describe various aspects of the devotion, especially the one that contains both the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Novena Prayers, have been sold or given out free in the tens of millions.

8. *Holy Cards* depicting various Images of the Merciful Jesus with the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy on the reverse side have been published in English, Spanish, Polish, French, and Portuguese and have been sold or have been given out free in the tens of millions.

9. *Holy Cards* depicting the Divine Mercy Image on one side and on the reverse side the Lord's words in which He states His desire for the institution of the Feast of Mercy and the promise of the extraordinary grace of forgiveness to those who worthily receive Holy Communion on that day (cf. *Diary 699*) have been distributed free, upon request. Over 2 million have been printed in English and Spanish.

10. *The Divine Mercy Images*, large formats, framed and unframed, paper prints and on canvas with an oil finish, have been printed and made in the tens of thousands.

11. *Divine Mercy Times*, a special edition of a newspaper dedicated completely to the Message of Divine Mercy and prepared by the staff members of the Marian Ministries, the John Paul II Institute of The Divine Mercy and the Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy, was been printed and distributed free in the Spring of 2005 in the amount of 400,000 copies.

12. Regarding equivalent or similar publications and printings by the Marians in other countries, e.g., Brazil, Poland, England, Portugal, the former Republics of the Soviet Union, the data has not been made available as yet. For example, the Marians in Brazil have published a series of booklets, such as *Guia da Devocao a Misericordia Divina*, or *Catecismo Inicial Deus e Amor*, which contains a substantial amount of information on The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion, yet no data is available on the scope of these publications.

Many of the more popular books on The Divine Mercy message and devotion have been published by the Marians in the U.S.A. through the John Paul II Institute of The Divine Mercy or through its lay Outreach Apostolate, especially the Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy, headed by Bryan Thatcher. Con-

crete statistics are also unavailable at this time, but these large and small format books, many of which have been authored or co-authored by Fr. George Kosicki, CSB, have sold over 100,000 copies.

The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy

The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy (officially so designated by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1994) has been another effective means of communicating The Divine Mercy message and devotion to approximately 60,000 pilgrims annually. Around 20,000 pilgrims are drawn to the Shrine for the Divine Mercy Sunday weekend celebration, which began in 1982, with approximately 300 in attendance. Within eight years, the number attending had grown to 2000, and in the last 6 years it has averaged 18,000. During the year, and especially during the pilgrimage season from May through October, pilgrims are exposed to an afternoon (1:00 - 4:30 pm) of prayer and devotions, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation. During Lent, Divine Mercy Stations of the Cross are celebrated daily. Through these means, many come not only to know but also to receive God's mercy. The Shrine Gift shop is a wonderful instrument in providing materials related to the Message and Devotion of The Divine Mercy.

The Novena to The Divine Mercy has been prayed continuously at the Shrine since 1941. During the years of the ban, a Novena based on Sacred Scripture was used instead of the one Jesus gave St. Faustina.

5) Conferences, Missions and Seminars: Promotion through Marian Priests, Brothers and Seminarians and through Staff Members Especially through Its John Paul II Institute of The Divine Mercy

The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion has also been spreading through conferences, retreats, pilgrimages, parish missions, special formation and leadership training seminars, and university courses. These conferences, missions, retreats and seminars (in particular *Ocean of Mercy Seminars*) have been conducted by the Marians and the Marian staff, both Religious and lay, employed or contracted through the efforts of our Institutes, especially the former DMI (Divine Mercy International) and subsumed under the present John Paul II Institute of The Divine Mercy.

The John Paul II Institute has been responsible for numerous scholarly publications which promote the theology and spirituality of The Divine Mercy message and devotion.

Conferences and seminars are conducted or coordinated by Marian staff members. Among those whose efforts have been noteworthy are a number of

important co-workers, such as, Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, Fr. George Kosicki, CSB, Dr. Robert Stackpole, STD, present Director of the JP II Institute, Fr. Kazimierz Chwalek, MIC, Dr. Bryan Thatcher, Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC, Fr. Anthony Gramlich, MIC, Mr. Vinny Flynn, et al. Of these, Fr. George Kosicki, CSB deserves special recognition. He has tirelessly conducted or participated in hundreds of these conferences, missions and seminars in his over 30 years of close collaboration with the Marians. He has also helped us greatly in the mission of promotion of this message by authoring many of the books published by the Marians. Likewise, he has made many series of audio and video tapes that have helped thousands to hear the message of Mercy. Marians, or Marian staff members, who have either sponsored or spoke at the many conferences, missions and seminars, have formed by this means more than a hundred thousand of devotees and promoters of the Message.

Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy EADM and Its Cenacles

Another means by which the Marians have been able to promote the Message of Mercy is through the Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy (EADM) cenacles. Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy, a lay outreach ministry of the Marians established by Dr. Bryan Thatcher, has been promoting The Divine Mercy Message among the laity and forming them into groups of dedicated lay people who daily live the Message and spirituality of mercy. Cenacle members undergo a three-year weekly program of formation based on *Holy Scriptures*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and St. Faustina's *Diary*. In addition, each member of the cenacle embraces a life of Eucharistic adoration and of praying the Chaplet for the Dying. Further each cenacle group undertakes a particular work of mercy on behalf of the needy in their local community or parish. Dr Thatcher's cenacle groups have been instrumental in sending 6 or 8 huge containers per year with medical supplies, hospital and household equipment, clothing and Divine Mercy materials to the needy in countries such Cuba, the Ukraine, Nigeria, Rwanda, El Salvador, and others. The number of EADM Cenacles has greatly increased throughout the world and currently Cenacles are located in more than countries. EADM also produces a quarterly newsletter called *Rays of Love* with a circulation of 4,000 copies.

Mother of Mercy Messengers (MOMM)

The Mother of Mercy Messengers, a lay outreach ministry of the Marians directed by a lay couple, Dave and Joan Maroney, is important in the area of the

promotion of the Message. They travel throughout the United States and promote the Message through a dramatic presentation in parish Churches and Catholic Schools. This ministry started eight years ago through the efforts of Life Foundation, founded and directed by Jim Humpel, and five years ago, evolved into the present form under Dave and Joan Maroney. Mother of Mercy Messengers have given on the average 40 presentations per year with about 200 viewers per performance. Presentations lead into Eucharistic adoration, the Divine Mercy Chaplet and an opportunity for individual confession. In addition, MOMM has produced numerous products that complement their presentations and offer a variety of special programs for children and youth.

Healthcare Professionals for Divine Mercy (HPDM)

Healthcare Professionals for Divine Mercy (HPDM) is a lay apostolate of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception founded by Marie Romagnano, R.N. It offers nurses, physicians, and allied health professionals a unique program of spiritual and professional formation that integrates medical science, bioethics and medical ethics with Catholic spirituality and The Divine Mercy Message. Its program consists of:

- *Annual Bioethics, Spirituality and Medicine Conference* that carries continuing education credit (for medical professionals (MD, RN, Social Work and Pastoral Care).
- *Nursing with the Hands of Jesus: A Guide to Nurses for Divine Mercy*
- Annual retreat for medical professionals.
- *Bioethics, Spirituality and Medicine Conference* on DVDs with Continuing Education Credits
- Cenacles of Spiritual Formation with Bryan Thatcher, MD, Founder of Eucharistic Apostles of Divine Mercy Cenacles.

Evangelization and Development Office:

Promotion of The Divine Mercy through Television and Radio, Especially *Eternal Word Television Network and Relevant Radio*

Television and radio programs have been a very effective means for promoting the Divine Mercy Message. Our collaboration with *Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)* or popularly known as Mother Angelica's Television Channel, has been very important. *EWTN* is available through cable networks as well as through satellite. The Marians have been in close collaboration with *EWTN* since 1989. In that year, the Marians taped a series of thirteen half-hour

programs called *Come to My Mercy*, as well as, The Hour of Great Mercy program with a version of the Divine Mercy Chaplet sung before the Divine Mercy Image in the National Shrine Divine Mercy in Stockbridge. These original half-hour programs were very popular and ran for years at different times. The first series was substituted by another series of 13 half-hour programs called *Ocean of Mercy*. This series was also produced jointly by the *EWTN* crew and the Marians, and has been broadcast for several years. There have been three versions of The Hour of Great Mercy sung Chaplet. Various versions have been broadcast daily through *EWTN* TV and Radio networks enabling the viewers and listeners to pray with the Marians, hear the message of Mercy and adore the Merciful Jesus in His Sacred Image.

EWTN live broadcasts of the Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations from the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge have been a powerful and an efficacious way of promoting the Message and Devotion of The Divine Mercy. In the last six years, *EWTN* had the potential of reaching 53 million viewers. We do not know how many of these potential viewers have annually watched the live celebrations of Divine Mercy Sundays from Stockbridge. However, the popularity of the live transmission of the Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations has continued unabatedly since its beginning 16 years ago. At times, other national networks have transmitted news from our celebrations. In 2004, because of the SARS epidemic and first large gathering of people in the Eastern U.S. at the Divine Mercy Sunday celebration in Stockbridge, and in 2005 because of the passing away of Pope John Paul II on Divine Mercy Sunday (Vigil), several national TV networks reaching tens of millions of viewers transmitted reports from the Divine Mercy Sunday celebration at the National Shrine in Stockbridge.

Ongoing weekly broadcasts of Divine Mercy Cenacles, Series I and II with Fr. Joseph Roesch, MIC as anchor and with Marians, Lay Staff and members of the Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy as guest participants, have been especially fruitful.

In close collaboration with Relevant Radio, especially, the Drew Mariani Show, with an audience of several million listeners, the Marians or Marian staff members through its Office of Evangelization have co-produced more than 40 programs annually since 2005. The programs were designed to address a wide audience of listeners (commuters who listen on car radios from 3 to 6 p.m. CST) to introduce them to the Message of The Divine Mercy, to live the spirituality of mercy, and to encourage them to participate more fruitfully in the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday. In the last four years, the Marians have participated in various other radio programs. In addition to the close collaboration with Relevant Radio, our collaboration with Michigan Catholic Radio, Stations of the Cross from Buffalo, and KBVM Radio from Oregon are also worth mentioning.

Two years ago, the Marians have also transmitted live 15-minute weekly programs from the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy sharing various reflections on the Mercy Message with listeners in the greater Detroit area.

The Role of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., is the largest and most frequented Shrine in the United States. The Marians of the Washington House have established it, with the permission of its Rector and the knowledge of the local Archbishop, as the place for the annual special celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, which have been celebrated solemnly there since 1990. Because of its importance for the American Catholic Church, the Divine Mercy Sundays celebrated there has had an influence on other Churches, such as those in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Diocese of Arlington and many other parishes in other dioceses. The Washington, DC celebration has provided a good model for celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday with great solemnity, spiritual preparation and benefit. The celebration there began a decade prior to the official establishment of the Divine Sunday by the Holy See and has continued to the present time. In 1995, the Basilica's Divine Mercy Sunday celebration was broadcast live via EWTN and affected many persons.

Marian Distributors and Promoters of Divine Mercy Around the World

Close collaboration exists among the Marians living in various Provinces and their sharing of Divine Mercy resources and materials especially through the formation of Marian Helpers Centers. For example, the Marian Helpers Center in England distributes Divine Mercy materials produced in the U.S. and in Poland while the Marian Helpers Center in the U.S. distributes Divine Mercy materials produced in Poland, Brazil and the Ukraine. The Marians have also formed or have entered into formal contractual agreements with individuals or centers that collaborate in the work of promoting and distributing Divine Mercy materials in various countries on every continent. The first major relationship began in 1984, with Don De Castro who is responsible for introducing the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion through television and radio throughout the Philippines. He created the *Three O'Clock Habit* program that the government of the Philippines has endorsed and has encouraged all Filipinos to stop and pray the "three o'clock prayer of mercy." As a result all media and businesses in the country stop at three o'clock in the afternoon for prayer.

The Marians have also entered into contractual agreements with individuals or groups in Australia (John Canavan -1994), Nigeria (Bishop Martin—1995), South Africa (1996), Mexico (Centro Internacional de Difusion de la Divina Misericordia—1997), India (Daughters of St. Paul - 2003), the Philippines (Diocese of Cebu—2003), Singapore (Kuala Lumpur—2003), Spain, and France (Lourdes Bookstore—2005). The primary purpose and motivation for entering and formalizing these contractual relationships is to maintain the accuracy of the Divine Mercy Message and to ensure proper dissemination of the materials. Also, the official approval of the Local Ordinary is critical to the distribution of materials. Two relationships with distributors have ended: One was in Canada and the other in Ireland where Val Conlon opened a Divine Mercy Publication's Center.

The Centro Internacional de Difusion de la Divina Misericordia (CIDDM) in Puebla, Mexico is a key provider for formation programs for leaders. This Center was established jointly by the Marians and Archbishop Huesca Pacheco of Puebla, Mexico in 1997. Since then the Center has trained over 12,000 promoters of Divine Mercy (2/3 from Mexico and 1/3 from other Central and South American countries). The center has also collaborated closely with our Spanish language publications, *Fuente de Misericordia* and *Boletino*, and has become an important distributor of Divine Mercy materials in Mexico.

Divine Mercy Pilgrimages

Throughout the last 28 years the Marians, through the Marian Helpers Center, have organized an annual pilgrimage to Poland with a major focus on key aspects of The Divine Mercy. Many of the early pilgrimages were led by Fr. Walter Pełczyński, MIC, who founded the Marian Helpers Center. There were also several pilgrimages that focused entirely on Divine Mercy: the Beatification Pilgrimage in 1993, the Canonization Pilgrimage in 2000 and first official Divine Mercy Sunday celebration in Rome in 2001. Every pilgrim group over a period of 10 days received a broad and deep exposure to The Divine Mercy Message. Out of these pilgrimages a number of participants have become Divine Mercy promoters or have been strengthened in their zeal to spread The Divine Mercy message and devotion.

In addition, in 2000, the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy sponsored an on-site seminar, which took its participants to Rome for the canonization of St. Faustina. The group then went to Poland, where they visited many the places associated with St. Faustina and the revelations of The Divine Mercy message and devotion. They ended up in Vilnius, Lithuania, where they prayed before the original image of The Divine Mercy which was painted under the

direction of Sr. Faustina. At every site and along the way, Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, Fr. Kazimierz Chwalek, MIC, Robert Stackpole and Sr. Isabel Bettwy presented lectures on The Divine Mercy topics related to each particular site.

Divine Mercy Films

Divine Mercy No Escape, produced in 1987 by Hermann Tauscher, was the first professionally made film about St. Faustina and The Divine Mercy message. It received eight film awards for its excellence from various film festivals. This film was premiered in Los Angeles before an audience of Cardinals and Bishops, many benefactors and friends on the night before Pope John Paul II's meeting with the American Bishops and Cardinals during his visit to the United States. All participants at that time received a companion book called *The Promise*. This film was seen by thousands in public and private viewings

The Life of Sister Faustina, produced in 1991, by Patty Nolan with Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC as the narrator and expert guide, leads the viewers through the life of St. Faustina and introduces them to the important elements of The Divine Mercy Message. This film was made on-site in Poland.

Time for Mercy, produced in 1994 by Drew Mariani with Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC as theological and technical director, presents The Divine Mercy message and its relevance for contemporary times. This film likewise won four film awards.

The Internet and Electronic Media

In 1998, the Marians created marian.org, their own Website. While the site encompassed all of the Marian entities and activities it also provided a formal location for on-line information on The Divine Mercy message and devotion. For many years persons who sought information on the message and on support materials and resources, as well as on the activities of Shrine, were able to obtain the basic information from the web site for their personal and parochial use. The need for a more comprehensive on-line information on the message of Mercy became evident because of the growing number who accessed *marian.org*. In response to this growing need the Marians created and launched in 2004, *thedivinemercy.org* Website. The new site, which is under constant expansion, makes available a wealth of Divine Mercy information and provides a high level of interactivity and current information. Viewers are able to access the

Gift shop and the Marian Helpers Center to purchase materials related to The Divine Mercy.

Divine Mercy Activities in Kibeho, Rwanda; Cameroon; and the Phillipines

At the request of the local Bishop in Rwanda, the Marians were invited to build a Marian and Divine Mercy Formation Center, in Kibeho, Rwanda. Through the vision of Fr. Leszek Czeluśniak, MIC and the cooperation and support of the Marians and the members of the Association of Marian Helpers in the U.S., this project, is almost completed. A formation house and a pilgrim house are being completed through the generosity of an American benefactor, Joseph Risi. The Center is bringing the healing message of The Divine Mercy to people who suffered greatly ten years ago in a violent inter-tribal war. The donation by Oscar Delgado, an American benefactor, of an 18-foot (5.5m) bronze statue of the Merciful Jesus which has been placed on a hilltop overlooking the site of the first approved Marian apparition in Kibeho, Rwanda, has created a powerful means of Divine Mercy evangelization.

In Cameroon, under the guidance of Fr. Francis Filipiec, MIC, the message of The Divine Mercy is being promulgated through dramatic presentations, missions and conferences reaching tens of thousands. The Marian Helpers Center in the U.S. is assisting in this apostolate.

In the Phillipines, two centers of promotion were established in 2008; one in Mindanao through its shrine and the other in Manila. The Manila center, in the planning stages of development, will have an outreach to all of Asia.

The Marians, through their own shrines such as those located in Poland (Lichen), Brazil (Curitiba) and England (Fawley Court), have special devotions to The Divine Mercy. Other major shrines of the world such as the ones in Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe in Mexico, Rome, the Basilica in Washington, D.C., Medjugorje and the Holy Land carry in their bookstores and gift shops materials on the Divine Mercy. These materials in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Polish are most frequently produced by the Marians.

The Marian Prayer Line

The Marian Prayer Line, a ministry of the Marian Helpers Centers in the U.S., has served more than 120,000 callers (annual average of the last several years) and is yet another means by which the message of Mercy reaches out to the thousands who are in need of spiritual assistance, consolation and healing.

National Shrine of The Divine Mercy Gift Shop and National Distributorships

Persons who visit shrines and other holy places are blessed by the opportunity to purchase materials, books, holy cards, medals, and other things related to the charism of the Shrine. The Gift Shop at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy is no exception. It has provided thousands of pilgrims with such materials. In addition to the on-site store, the Shrine, in collaboration with the Association of Marian Helpers, produces a biannual catalog which is distributed through the mail. Purchases can be made directly over the Internet or through the mail.

The Marian Helpers Center has entered into distributorships with gift shops and bookstores around the world. Standard discounts are offered for these distributors.

Marian Vice-Postulation in St. Faustina's Beatification and Canonization Processes

The Marians, in the person of Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC actively participated in St. Faustina's processes of beatification and canonization. Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC accompanied Robert and Maureen Digan and their little son Bobby to the tomb of Sr. Faustina in Lagiewniki, Poland. He witnessed the miracle of Maureen's healing and that of her son. Since Maureen Digan's medical records were in Boston, MA in the U.S., Fr. Seraphim helped Fr. Antoni Mruk, SJ, the Postulator for Sr. Faustina's cause, carry out the necessary administrative tasks which led to a successful conclusion.

As the Vice-Postulator for the Canonization Cause, Fr. Seraphim was directly involved with the many complex matters regarding the healing of Fr. Ronald Pytel, a diocesan priest from Holy Rosary Parish in Baltimore, MD, U.S.A. Father Kazimierz Chwalek, MIC was a participant in the day of prayer and adoration in honor of Blessed Faustina when parishioners in attendance prayed for Fr. Pytel and he received the miracle of the healing of his heart. Fr. Seraphim, along with a doctor friend, obtained the necessary documentation regarding the miraculous healing of a congenital condition of Fr. Pytel's heart that led to the canonization of St. Faustina.

Special Assistance to Pope John Paul II in His Promotion of Divine Mercy

The Marians and our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, were close collaborators in the area of Divine Mercy. He relied on us and appreciated our assistance

in spreading the Message of The Divine Mercy all over the world. He also appreciated our involvement in the work of postulation in bringing to a successful conclusion both the beatification and canonization processes of St. Faustina.

In December 1999, Msgr. Stanislaw Dziwisz, Pope John Paul II's personal secretary, asked the Marians to gauge the grass-root interest and desire for the establishment of The Divine Mercy Sunday. We initiated the collection of signatures by turning not only to the 550,000 active members of the Association of Marian Helpers, but we also contacted the various Divine Mercy Centers, Promoters and Shrines around the world with which we were connected. In addition, we brought this request to the entire world through EWTN (Mother Angelica's television network). The response was phenomenal. Day and night our fax machine continued to print names from all over the world. Boxes and boxes with signatures were sent to the Holy See. We believe that this effort and the overwhelming response by countless millions from all over the world convinced the Holy Father that it was the proper time to extend the Divine Sunday celebration to the Universal Church. The Sunday after Easter, the Second Sunday of Easter, had already been formally approved for Churches in Poland, Russia and the Philippines.

On Divine Mercy Sunday, April 30, 2000, the day of St. Faustina's Canonization, Pope John Paul II officially proclaimed that the "*Second Sunday of Easter* from this time on will also be called Divine Mercy Sunday." Pope John Paul II expressed his appreciation for our efforts in a special blessing addressed to the Marians issued on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the revelation of the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion and the 60th anniversary of the promotion of the message by the Marians. In that blessing He thanked the Marians for all that they have done on behalf of the message of Mercy. The full text of this blessing reads as follows:

On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Revelation of The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion granted to the Church by Our Lord, Jesus Christ, through St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, as well as of the 60th Anniversary of the Promotion of this Message and Devotion Throughout the World by you, Marians of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M., of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Province, headquartered on Eden Hill in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in the United States of America, I hereby thank you for your participation with others in the successful conclusion of St. Maria Faustina's Canonization Cause; And I encourage you to "be Apostles of The Divine Mercy under the maternal and loving guidance of Mary..." That by "Deed, Word and Prayer" you would proclaim this urgent and salutary message of and devotion to Jesus—The Divine Mercy, especially as you minister to the needs of the faithful who come on pilgrimage to The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy, placed in your country, by God's Providence, under Your solicitous care.

As a token of an abundance of Divine Blessings, upon You, Your Marian Associates, Helpers and Benefactors, I impart My Most Heartfelt Apostolic Blessing!

Joannes Paulus II

From the Vatican: October 5, 2001
Memorial of St. M. Faustina Kowalska

Authentic Guidance in the Service of the Church

The Marians' longstanding and unswerving witness to the authenticity of the Lord's revelation of The Divine Mercy message to St. Faustina and their dedication to the faithful transmission of the Message in its totality and purity have given the Marians the stature of faithful interpreters of the authentic message especially in the eyes of many local ordinaries in various parts of the world. Thus, many individuals, centers and groups, by way of a recommendation from their local bishop, seek our advice and opinion in matters that pertain to the Divine Mercy theology, spirituality and pastoral practice. The Marians have responded for years in both formal and informal ways.

Parish Resource Book for Celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday

Celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday in Your Parish is a special parish resource, prepared for the Archdiocese of Newark by the Office of Evangelization. It provides theological, pastoral and liturgical materials for the proper and enriching celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday.

Other Forms of Promotion of the Salutory Message of Mercy: World Apostolic Congress on Mercy and Pope Benedict XVI—the Mercy Pope

The first World Apostolic Congress on Mercy (WACOM), held in Rome on April 2-6, 2008, definitely bears the stamp of Pope Benedict XVI. He blessed and encouraged this new initiative in the life of the Church which was inspired by Pope John Paul II's Divine Mercy legacy. In key remarks only days before the Congress, Pope Benedict XVI set the table for the celebration of God's mercy. Most importantly, at the opening and closing of the World Mercy Congress, Pope Benedict XVI was front and center, opening the Congress with Holy Mass which

he offered for the Great Mercy Pope, John Paul II. He also delivered his mandate at the conclusion of the Congress.

The idea for a World Mercy Congress came in July 2005, at the end of an international retreat for priests and their pastoral co-workers, which took place at the International Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki, Poland. The retreat was led by Cardinals Christoph Schonborn of Vienna, Austria, and Philippe Barbarin of Lyons, France. More than 500 clergy, Religious, and laity from around the world gathered for the retreat. Among them were several Marianists from the United States and their close lay collaborators.

There in Łagiewniki, the memory of Pope John Paul II's entrustment of the world to Divine Mercy and his 2002 consecration of the International Shrine inspired the participants to develop the idea for a World Mercy Congress. The goal was to fulfill Pope John Paul II's mission of mercy when he spoke about before the solemn act of entrustment: "From here there must go forth 'the spark which will prepare the world for [Jesus'] final coming' (*Diary of St. Faustina*, 1732). This spark needs to be lighted by the grace of God. This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world." So, from its inception, the World Congress was seen as an important means of spreading "the fire of mercy" on the earth to reach all souls.

Cardinal Christoph Schonborn working with *Missionaries of Mercy*, Fr. Patrice Chocholski, (Secretary General), Cardinals Stanisław Dziwisz, Jozuas Bačkis of Vilnius, Philippe Barbarin of Lyon, Arinze, Bergoglio, Erdő, Pengo, Poupard, Rodé, Rosales, Ruini, Rylko, Scherer, Tauran, Bishop William Lori, Msgr. Ranjith, Msgr. Bocard and the Marian Fathers represented by Frs. Seraphim Michalenko and Kazimierz Chwalek prepared the World Mercy Congress.

Pope Benedict XVI, who has embraced Pope John Paul II's legacy of Divine Mercy and has made it his own, approved opening the Congress on April 2, 2008 (the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II) and its being held in Rome at the heart of the Church.

Seven months before the World Mercy Congress, Pope Benedict XVI made the following statement about Pope John Paul II, whom he knew was the inspiration behind the Congress: "In our time, humanity needs a strong proclamation and witness of God's mercy. Beloved Pope John Paul II, a great apostle of Divine Mercy, prophetically intuited this urgent pastoral need" (*Angelus* message, September 16, 2007).

On March 30, 2008, Divine Mercy Sunday, with the Congress only days away, Pope Benedict XVI stated:

"In the coming days, on the occasion of the first World Apostolic Congress on Divine Mercy, there will be a special reflection on Divine Mercy. It will be held in Rome and will begin with Holy Mass at which, please God, I shall pre-

side on Wednesday morning, April 2, the third anniversary of the pious death of the Servant of God John Paul II. Let us place the Congress under the heavenly protection of Mary Most Holy, *Mater Misericordiae* (*Regina Caeli* message, the Second Sunday of Easter” [Divine Mercy Sunday], March 30, 2008).

The Holy Father emphasized that he would inaugurate the Congress by presiding at Holy Mass for the Servant of God John Paul II, on the third anniversary of his death. He also stated that at the Congress, “there will be a special reflection on Divine Mercy,” pointing to the manner in which the Congress would delve into the mystery of God’s mercy. Further, he invoked Mary’s “heavenly protection” over the Congress under her title as the “Mother of Mercy” (*Mater Misericordiae*), a title which refers to her special role in the mystery of Divine Mercy.

Although more than 40,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square on April 2, 2008, for Holy Mass on the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily, singled out the nearly 4,000 delegates who were present for the opening of the World Mercy Congress:

“I address a special thought to the participants of the first World Congress on Divine Mercy, which is opening this very day and which intends to deepen [Pope John Paul II’s] rich Magisterium on the subject. God’s mercy, as he himself said, is a privileged key to the interpretation of his Pontificate. He wanted the message of God’s merciful love to be made known to all and urged the faithful to witness to it” (cf. Homily at Krakow-Lagiewniki, August 17, 2002).

There are three aspects to the Holy Father’s remarks. First, he said that one of the principal aims of the World Mercy Congress would be “to deepen” Pope John Paul II’s rich papal or magisterial teachings on the subject of God’s mercy. Here, one thinks of Pope John Paul II’s second encyclical, *Rich in Mercy* (*Dives in Misericordia*), especially his insightful exposition of how the parable of the Prodigal Son reveals that God the Father is “rich in mercy.”

Second, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the way Pope John Paul II himself described God’s mercy as “a privileged key to the interpretation of his Pontificate.” In these remarks, Pope Benedict XVI may well have been referring to Pope John Paul II’s visit to the tomb of then Blessed Faustina at the Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki, Poland, on June 7, 1997.

During that visit, Pope John Paul II made these poignant remarks:

“I come here to commend the concerns of the Church and of humanity to the merciful Christ. On the threshold of the third millennium, I come to entrust to Him once more my Petrine ministry — «Jesus, I trust in You!»”

The message of Divine Mercy has always been near and dear to me. It is as if history had inscribed it in the tragic experience of World War II. In those difficult

years, it was *a particular support and an inexhaustible source of hope*, not only for the people of Krakow but for the entire nation. This was also my personal experience, which I took with me to the See of Peter and which in a sense forms the image of this Pontificate” (emphasis in the original).

Thirdly Pope Benedict XVI underscored the mission of deepening Pope John Paul II’s “rich Magisterium” on God’s mercy, and reminded all how Pope John Paul II wanted everyone to know God’s merciful love and witness to it. Building on Pope John Paul II’s legacy, Pope Benedict XVI thus laid the groundwork for his own Divine Mercy mandate at the conclusion of the Congress.

The North American Congress on Mercy (NACOM), under the Episcopal guidance of Bishop William Lori, and with the support of many other Cardinals and Bishops, will take place on November 14-15, 2009 in Washington, DC at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The Congress coordinated by Fr. Matthew Mauriello and the Marians will be preceded by many pre-NACOM regional events. Many of these pre-NACOM events will be hosted in collaboration with the Marians. On November 13, the Marians will host a major pre-NACOM event at the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. The emphasis will be on networking and formation of leadership. The major portion of the event will consist of workshops which will assist individuals and groups to become better promoters of The Divine Mercy message and devotion.

Conclusion

The Divine Mercy message and devotion is a special gift of Divine Providence given for the renewal of the Church and the world. It offers a unique message of divine love, hope, healing, consolation and forgiveness to our world in need of redemption.

In this presentation I have offered an historical overview of the various dimensions of the apostolic work undertaken on behalf of The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion by the Marians of the Immaculate and their co-workers of the former Province of St. Stanislaus Kostka and, after the unification with St. Casimir’s, Mary, Mother of Mercy Province. This overview, limited as it may be and requiring further study and research, gives witness to our love of Our Merciful Redeemer, the Immaculate Mother, and God’s people. It testifies to our conviction expressed so well by Our Holy Father John Paul II: that “there is nothing that man needs more than Divine Mercy—that love which is benevolent, which is compassionate, which raises man above his weakness to the infinite heights of the holiness of God.” We believed from the beginning

that it was our task to spread the message of Divine Mercy to all humanity. We understood the importance of trust in God's merciful love and that "mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to God's mercy. We proclaimed the message of God's mercy in every possible way and God brought forth abundant fruit of His salvation.

The Social and Public Involvement of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński

1. Blessed Stanislaus's calling was not to be a politician or a social reformer. He did not write any treaties on the reform of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, nor did he think out any plans for its making amends or organizing any social movements for improving the life of the poorest. He was a pious Religious and zealous priest. He became the first Polish religious order founder who gave his total attention to sanctification in his writings. The basis of this, for every Christian and particularly every Religious, ought to be a reflection on the Passion of our Savior; honor for Mary Immaculate; understanding that the soul of every person is, in the Divine Plan, a Mystical Temple of God, etc, along with the rhetoric that eventually brought him considerable fame. Father Papczyński lived in the 2nd half of the 17th century in Poland which had then entered a stage of profound crisis out of which it did not come until the time of the partitions [the 2nd half of the 18th century]. Numerous wars destroyed the country politically and economically. It was then that Poland gave the territory of the Duchy of Livonia to Sweden, and Smolensk and Dzikie Pola (the wild plains on the lower Dnieper)—to Russia. It also lost to the Turks the control over its south-eastern territories and relinquished its domination over Ducal Prussia. The horrors of war followed by pestilence caused the devastation of the country and brought poverty and chaos previously unknown in Poland.¹ However, this crisis did not unduly move either the King or the magnates and the nobles. It did not provoke any significant movement for improving the matters of the Commonwealth.

¹ In his "Zarys dziejów Polski do roku 1864" (Kraków, 1985, pp. 310-311), W. Czapliński writes: "The ravages of war in Poland, especially those of the war with Sweden, took on dimensions that were never heard of before. [...] In Prusy Królewskie—a wealthy Polish Province, 33% of the villages had been completely destroyed, while another 33% were ruined by almost 50%. Almost 55% of the farms in fertile Podole and Czerwona Ruś were totally annihilated. [...] In the Wielkopolski region, the Swedish-Brandenburg Wars brought about the destruction of cities or their desolation up to 60%. [...] Along with material losses, the human losses, which were far more important, bore a heavy toll. [...] Almost 40% of the farmlands in the Arch-Bishopal Province of Gniezno were unattended due to a lack of workers. [...] The average annual export of grain conducted through Gdańsk fell to 32,000 tons in the second half of the 17th century as opposed to 58,000 in the first.

What is even worse: those times gave birth to the infamous *liberum veto*, which was first used in voting at the Diet [parliament] in 1652. From that moment on, the use of this so-called privilege of the noble's liberty effectively blocked all initiatives of social and political reforms.

Blessed Father Stanislaus wasn't able to watch all this quietly. He deeply empathized with the people who were most affected by wars and illnesses. He was deeply angered by the thoughtlessness of those who were in charge of the country's destiny and who were only concerned with their private interests, ignoring the signs of an approaching catastrophe that was about to engulf them, as well. Thus, he did not forgo his chance to censure the unfortunate *libero vetum*, although his *Prodromus Reginae Artium* was a textbook on rhetoric, not politics.² He also frequently censured the privileges of the upper classes and their widespread corruption.³ The admonition that Blessed Stanislaus addressed to his spiritual sons in *Inspectio cordis* is very enlightening: "If you don't feel the urge to help your neighbor and to place the common good ahead of any other matters, no matter how painful and contrary they are to such an attitude, please be aware that you still do not understand what perfect love consists of." No one is free from responsibility for others among whom the Lord God placed him, and for whom He made him co-responsible.

Thus, Blessed Stanislaus's first lesson teaches us that social and national problems cannot be left to "qualified experts" only: politicians, social activists, all those who fulfill important offices in public life. Naturally, each organized human society needs such people, and may they be many and good: competent and dedicated. It is necessary to respect them and to support their beneficial actions. But social activity is not strictly reserved to such professional activists. As Blessed Papczyński emphasizes in the above-quoted fragment of *Inspectio cordis*, social activity is ultimately about a basic awareness towards the destiny of our neighbors and thus is something like a first word of love; it is about the sensitivity that makes us go outside the circle of our own interests and concerns, even though they may be "very painful and contrary to this attitude." Getting

² Among other things, we find there this passage: "And so, with the Senate's agreement and without opposition from the nobility, one truly free person comes forth with his *veto* repeated twice or three times and thus puts a stop to the proceedings, so that a previously accepted decree, which might have been conceived for some good purpose, would be instantaneously rejected because of the opposition of this one scoundrel who often was the enemy of the homeland. Why, Poland, how can I call you free if a single man, even mumbling, may force something on the assembly whenever he wishes? [...] You may very well claim a right to be called free, but the world [...] will rather call you a slave, an impudent creature, which is even more hideous."

³ In "Prodromus Reginae Artium" Fr. Stanislaus recalls: "The violation of the compatriots' rights has become completely unpunished out of fear of implementing the punishment. The Senate is marked by corruption, the knighthood is weak. All authority is humbled by the mighty in possession of their own armed forces. The interests of the State are undefended and the voice of the entire country hasn't been heard."

involved in politics or taking sides is not our business, even though some of the causes may be dearer to us than others. Our duty is to be concerned with the common good: the good of the Church, the country where we live, and above all—the good of those who are most badly affected by the consequences of rash or downright harmful political and economic decisions. We have the right and the obligation to make demands on their behalf and to seek the judicious governing of the country in the framework of the functions and tasks entrusted to us, using our sermons, conversations with representatives of central or regional political authorities, as well as our publications. We ought to do it also by inspiring and supporting beneficial social actions, which must be led by other people for whom our help may prove to be priceless.

2. In response to the deep crisis in Poland in the 17th century, Blessed Fr. Stanislaus decided to remain among the poor of this world. He received lucrative proposals, which he rejected, despite the fact that they came from Church dignitaries and his refusal could be regarded by them as an outrage. As he would later confess: “I rejected them for the sake of the love of God, even though I badly offended my Bishop-protector who dearly wished to have me, decorated with the title of Monsignor, at his side.” The old proverb says: “The rich cannot understand the poor.” Blessed Stanislaus wishing to understand the poor, decided to stay among them and he also bequeathed those challenges to his spiritual sons. He accepted simple folks to his Order, descendants of the peasantry, which met with contempt and ridicule. He used to be addressed as: “Stanislaus, clad in a white sack, founder of the worthy farm-hands [order]” and ridiculed in every possible way along with the other Marians. Not only didn’t he give up in the face of such abuse, but in his *Norma vitae* he instructed his spiritual sons: “You will surround with devoted love not only those you find benevolent to you, but adversaries as well, and enemies.” Although the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception was canonically installed as a religious community of an eremitical character (*in statu eremico*), its Blessed Founder instructed the Marians to dedicate themselves to pastoral work, particularly among the poor.⁴ In his *Inspectio cordis* he urges the Marians to make a meaningful examination of conscience: “Decide yourself how great is the wickedness you committed, when at an opportune moment you preferred the influential persons to the common folk and the rich to the poor, while fulfilling a duty regarding salvation. How far away from the teachings of the Heavenly Master did you wander if you visited only the

⁴ See the valuable notes of Fr. J. Kałowski, MIC in: *Początki mariańskiego ustawodawstwa*, in: *Bl. Stanislaus Papczyński, Pisma fundacyjne*, Warsaw, 2007, pp. 14-19.

nobility's gatherings for the sake of their splendor, and avoided with contempt the poorer; whether you served with a degree of zeal, the little *and* the mighty."

Today we do not doubt that our Congregation has an apostolic character. Its main causes are "to obtain and promote knowledge and to teach others" and "to fulfill priestly duties and to assist the diocesan clergy" (C § 3). We all vowed poverty in imitation of our poor Founder, and it is grounds to seek understanding with others who did not make such a vow, but who suffer from want, illnesses, and have to bear contempt and disregard from the mighty of this world. So, this is the second lesson on social awareness which we may find in the life and teachings of Father Founder: to choose a poor life among the poor and to be their special brothers and advocates.

3. As we all know, Blessed Stanislaus was particularly concerned with the fate of those who fell victim to the wars and epidemics ravaging Poland during his time. The first help that he was able to give them, especially to "soldiers and victims of pestilence," was a prayer of support for their passage through purgatory. In his *Testament*, Fr. Stanislaus defines his "Little Congregation" as a "Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Advocate of the Deceased," thus uniting its two special features: honor for Mary Immaculate and remembrance of the dead, since—what is essential—is to perceive in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary the radiance and dignity of every human life, of every man, about whom he wrote such a beautiful treatise—*Mystical Temple of God*. The destruction of this temple, which occurs through the unexpected death of a sinner who did not have a chance to prepare for it, is his particularly overwhelming misfortune which cries out for prayerful assistance. Remembering the dead still remains our duty up until the present day, but the context in which Blessed Stanislaus singled them out, tells us to embrace human life with special care: life on earth and eternal life. And this seems to be the third important and, above all, timely inspiration of the Marian apostolate. If a battle has been fought today for the protection (legal and not only legal) of unborn children, if we ever more frequently hear appeals for the acceptance of euthanasia, if we learn about so many frail elderly people left helpless, then we must take those matters as our primary challenge, for the sake of Blessed Stanislaus's legacy. We can undertake it though our academic and pastoral work as well as in our publications. But our words would be deceitful and unconvincing should they not be supported by deeds serving the protection of life: help for single mothers; the organization of hospices; ministry for the sick and the elderly. Words are equally needed because we witness that: "Today there exist a great multitude of weak and defenseless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being

trampled upon”⁵ and we must take an active and public part in the battle for the respect for life.

The mystery of The Divine Mercy, which lately absorbs the Marians so fully, fits beautifully into the context of concern for human life. In a very impressive and convincing manner, this mystery shows how precious each life is in the eyes of the Merciful Father, even the life of a hardened sinner. It also reminds us that judging is not ours, and neither is the condemnation of those who think and live differently. Ours is seeking the ways of reconciliation on a foundation of merciful love, which is the rock and the essence of human life, and a foretaste of eternity in him.

I also see three basic inspirations related to the social and public involvement of Blessed Stanislaus: concern for public matters (the common good), solidarity with the poor and service for life (earthly and eternal). It is understandable that they are connected to other paths of the Marian apostolate and that they need to be put into concrete terms, which take into account the circumstances of our work. But the foundation of all our public actions must be basic social awareness: sensitivity toward the destiny of every person, especially the poor, defenseless, and forgotten, such an awareness that penetrated the entire life of Blessed Fr. Stanislaus and which has been left to us as his legacy.

⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter “*Evangelium vitae*”, No. 5.

Vocational Ministry

I have been asked to say something about Vocational Ministry in our Congregation. We know that in the scriptures, the Lord tells us to beg the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His vineyard (Lk. 10:2). So the first thing we need to do is to ask the Lord to send us vocations. It is the Lord who gives the call to each individual. It is often harder to hear the call these days because of the many distractions in the world - people are not as open to receiving the call. Smaller family sizes has led to an increase in selfishness in individuals and in parents who don't encourage vocations among their children because they want to have grandchildren. Sometimes we are guilty of not doing enough to encourage vocations. Our Washington house has three hours of Eucharistic adoration every Sunday and the men pray for vocations. Many of our men in formation try to make a holy hour of adoration everyday before the Blessed Sacrament. Mother Theresa had mandated this for all of her communities when they were struggling for vocations and now they work in over one hundred countries around the world.

As you know, in our *Ratio Formationis Marianorum*, which is just now being published in book form in three different languages, there is a good section on vocations which is well worth reading over. After laying out some theological and pastoral principles, a number of practical means of caring for vocations are laid out. The *Ratio* speaks about those responsible for vocations. It makes an important point here, while all of us are called to foster vocations through the witness of our religious lives, we also need to entrust this task to specific individuals if we hope to accomplish anything in this regard. The *Ratio* also speaks about those to whom the pastoral care of vocations is directed, and it gives specific helps regarding candidates—vocational discernment and evaluation—the means for discernment and specific criteria for discernment—including positive indications of a vocation, and counter indications.

I have never been a vocation director in our community, so I asked our current vocation director in the United States, Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC for his thoughts. In my province in the U.S., we usually try to give a priest the opportunity to pursue this ministry as a full time ministry or if it is part time—the priest needs to have enough time and opportunity to be able to do it effectively. It needs to be a priority. Father Don receives the assistance of the house secretary

in organizing matters involving correspondence. We have application forms and a process in place for applicants. We ask the candidates for a number of letters of reference, we ask them to take a psychological evaluation, and in the context of the United States, we even ask for a criminal background check. Getting to know the family of the candidate is a priority. I know this is important for our Argentinean confreres as well. There is a vocation board which reviews candidates submitted to it by the vocation director to recommend to the Provincial those candidates it seems worth accepting to postulancy. This allows for the candidates to be interviewed by three Marians so there is a mix of opinions. More and more candidates today come from broken homes and difficult backgrounds. Discernment is needed.

In the U.S., we currently have one postulant, six novices, 10 seminarians, (one of them is studying in Poland), and one brother in temporary vows. In Argentina, Bro. Roberto Bigolin will be ordained to the priesthood next week, one seminarian is about to make final vows, one will renew his vows, a novice is about to make his first vows, and we will have one new novice in a couple of days. We currently have around 87 people in the Province between the U.S. and Argentina and around 22 of them are in formation—this works out to about one out of every four people in the Province.

Father Don told me that every single man that has been applying to our Marian Congregation in the United States wants to be involved with Divine Mercy. Why is this? Most of the men who apply to the community in the U.S. now are a little older. The men applying in Argentina are younger. Our youngest man in formation right now in the U.S. is about 23 and in Argentina, the new novice is 20. Our oldest in formation is a brother who is still in temporary vows who is 65. Almost all of these men who have joined the community in the U.S. had been away from the practice of the Catholic faith for a while, and they then had, not a *conversion* but a *reversion* to the faith. They know that they have been recipients of God's great mercy, and now, they want to share this mercy that they have received with others. They also want to be sure that their future ministry will involve the freedom to be able to spread this message and devotion.

Another common factor found in the men who are applying to our community is a devotion to Mary. The men love the fact that we speak openly about Mary, and in our houses of formation, we pray the rosary in common everyday. This really means a lot to them.

Despite the fact that many of the men who are applying to the community now in the U.S. have had some life experiences after college or university, relatively speaking, we are still a fairly young community. Many of the men applying to the community have expressed this to Fr. Don. When they come to our houses, they are amazed that we are so energetic, youthful, and jovial with one

another. In other words, the communities get along with one another and there is no evident tension in the air. Some of the men who have joined us after having been in other congregations have said that there is a big difference between the Marians in the U.S. and what they experienced in other groups. They admire our desire for holiness, but our ability to joke around and to be very human as well.

Father Donald is the Superior of our Religious House in Steubenville, OH. We opened a house there in 1997, for our men to take their philosophy classes at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. This is a dynamic university run by the Third Order Regular Franciscans. It is unapologetically Catholic in the midst of a secular environment. Other Catholic Universities in the United States have become Catholic in name only, but Steubenville was attracting people who truly want to live and deepen their Catholic faith. They began a pre-theology program there. Young men who are thinking about entering the seminary, live in community, pray together and study philosophy as they discern their vocations. Every year there are between 50 and 100 young men in this program. One of our aims for opening a house near the university was to be in proximity to this promising group of vocation candidates. Every month, Fr. Don leads a “Come and See” weekend retreat at our Marian House in Steubenville. Between three to nine men come every month. This gives the men a great impression of us. Many of the men discerning vocations today love the fact that we have a house in Steubenville and this makes a very favorable impression on them. In the 11 years since we have had a house near the University, we have received a number of vocations in this way and over the last several years, we have gotten at least 1 man a year from Franciscan University. We are very well known there and loved because of the pastoral ministry our priests do on Campus through preaching, confessions, etc. For next year, already, it looks like another man from there will be applying to the community after graduating in May! Father Don finds it to be a vocation goldmine. Besides the students at the University, there are a number of Catholic families who have chosen to live near the University who are searching for ways to authentically live their Catholic faith. There is much social pressure in the U.S. now to limit the size of families and it is common to see families with only one or two children. Many of the families who live near the University have many children—often five to 10 and they seek an environment where they can find the support of other like minded adults. Many of these young people who live in our neighborhood are future vocation prospects.

Father Donald also travels a good deal, giving testimony of the dramatic story of his conversion to the Catholic faith at parish missions and Catholic Conferences. Father Don’s traveling expenses to these conferences are paid for by those who invite him. While at these conferences, he is able to talk about the community and invite men to join. This has allowed him to reduce the vocation

budget while still reaching potential candidates in many places, allowing us to advertize the community for free in effect.

His conversion story has also been widely spread through Catholic media in the U.S. A number of vocational candidates have gotten to know the community through our use of the media in the U.S.—the Internet, Catholic Cable T.V., cd's and dvd's and books published. The Catholic Cable TV Channel— the *Eternal Word Television Network* features some TV programs and interviews involving myself, Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, Fr. Donald Calloway and other Marians. Vocational candidates in the USA are really starting to know who we are because of our frequent media coverage. These programs also reach the Philippines and have helped us get started over there as well. By the way, our first postulant in the Philippines will come to live with our men in El Salvador on December 7th.

Many candidates have responded to our vocation website. It has proven to be a great portal for letting men see who we are. The *Marian Helper* magazine also helps with this, and many men send Fr. Don the advertisement coupon requesting more information. Another thing that helps in our vocation efforts in the U.S. is networking. Fr. Don personally knows most of the vocation directors in the United States for other religious communities which have a strong reputation and are also attracting vocations Therefore, other vocation directors send men to us, and vice-versa, if they see that a man has our Marian charisma and also wants to be a part of the Divine Mercy movement. This has happened a lot.

Father Don is 36 years old so he is a relatively young vocation director. He really thinks that helps as well, especially regarding modern technology. While he is not a computer guru, his main way of contacting the candidates is through email. He does not own a cell phone, yet he always gets back to a candidate who contacts him via phone or email either the same day or the next day. Many of the men have told him that they contacted many other vocation directors, but Fr. Don was the first to respond and that sometimes, they did not hear from the others for weeks. There is a saying in English, when the fish bite, make sure the hook is planted.

To sum up, we need to pray, we need to authentically live our Marian vocations and to give good example in our striving for holiness. Finally we need to make vocational ministry a priority and to take the practical steps necessary to give the Lord a chance to work with us, so that we can do great things for Christ and the Church!

In the Service of the Poor

Without deeds, faith is dead. Without enkindling ourselves in the service of others, especially people in greatest need, our religious life is just a parody, an egotistical cultivation of our personalities, a search for an easy life at the very cost of these poor people who provide for our sustenance and whom we are called to serve. Our Founder warned: “Unworthy of the love of God is the man who does not burn with love of neighbor.”¹ “A man without love, a Religious without love is like a shadow without the sun, a body without a soul. He is simply nothing.”²

First, let’s see briefly how the Marians served the poor in the past; what example our predecessors left for us, especially the attitude of our Founder who possessed a great social awareness and was a friend of the poor (we’ve been talking about the Founder for two years; now, as the 100th anniversary of the renewal draws near, it would be fitting to recall the person of Blessed George). Then I’ll say a few words about our work for the poor today and will conclude with a proposal of a new initiative in the field of charitable pastoral work.

“The first Marians gave support not only to the souls of the departed, but also embraced with care the sick, the dying, the elderly, the poor, and the lonely. The Founder personally provided care for people at the Góra Kalwaria hospital.³ Although poor, from its inception, our Congregation founded and ran hospitals and shelters for the homeless, the poor, the sick, the handicapped, and beggars. As Fr. J. Kosmowski writes, in the 18th and 19th centuries such shelters existed at the Marian monasteries in Goźlin, Skórzec, Puszcza Mariańska, Raśna, Mirosław, and Marijampole. The Marians covered the costs of hospitals out of donations made towards this goal as well as paying “out of pocket” and thus sharing with the poor all that they had. This kind of attitude was rarely seen in those days. In addition, they gave material assistance to the victims of fires, wars, epidemics,

¹ *Inspectio cordis*, “Błogosławiony O. Stanisław Papczyński,” Marian Shrine in Licheń, 2007, no. 28, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ E. Matulewicz, *Miłosierdzie Boże w charyzmacie Księży Marianów*, p. 362; same work: *Opieka nad chorymi, ubogimi i samotnymi*, pp. 362-368.

natural disasters, and they interceded on behalf of the poor (the majority were illiterate) before the officials in the matter of subsidies or abating taxes.⁴

Father Stanislaus Papczyński led a life of poverty and was acutely aware of the material and spiritual needs of the people whom he served. By word of mouth and example of life, he was teaching his confreres and the faithful to practice the love of neighbor. In his book *Mystical Temple of God* he wrote: “The Mystical Temple of God is (...) repaired by pious deeds. (...) There are 14 works of mercy, with which you will achieve everything with God. Those related to the body are (...): *I visit, give drink, give food, ransom, cover, welcome, bury*.”⁵ He stated quite clearly: “The heart that does not know the love of neighbor, does not know the love of God either.”⁶ And he admonished rigorously: “Woe to you, who perhaps feed many dogs and yet allow men to die of hunger! (...) will Christ not cast you out from the gate of heaven?”⁷

Years before the renovation of our Congregation, Fr. Matulewicz wrote to Blessed Honorat Koźmiński, OFM Cap on April 28, 1905: “We, the Religious, need to reform, to take up social work, and particularly to strive for perfection if we don’t want the same thing happen to us like it happened in France.”⁸ [Referring to the French Revolution]. At the first meeting of the Association of the Diocesan Priests (04.27.1905), of which he was the inspirer, he spoke about poverty. “Father Matulewicz suggested that those assembled regarded all of the goods that they possessed as the property of God and the poor and to consequently give a part of their income for the needs of the community and the poor of the neighborhood where they were serving.”⁹ Mister Eugeniusz Jarra recalls that “during his social studies course in 1907, Fr. Matulewicz stated that the Church ought to be involved immediately in the work of salvation, but added that the Church knew well that a certain supply of goods is needed even for practicing the virtues and religion.” For this reason, he believed that involvement in social issues was one of direct duties of a priest.¹⁰

Father Matulewicz was a practical man who knew well that people living in extreme poverty and abject living conditions were the most susceptible to temptations, downfalls and addictions. For this reason, he was concerned with

⁴ J. Kosmowski MIC *Marianie w latach 1787-1864*, Part: *Działalność charytatywna (przytulki)*, pp. 218-223.

⁵ Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, Part XXI, *The Restoration of the Mystical Temple*, Stockbridge, MA, 2006.

⁶ *Inspectio cordis*, “Błogosławiony O. Stanisław Papczyński,” Marian Shrine in Lichen, 2007, No. 48, p. 69.

⁷ Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, p. 104, Stockbridge, MA, 2006.

⁸ T. Górski MIC, *Błogosławiony Jerzy Matulewicz*, Marian Publishing House, W-w, 2005, p. 57.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁰ T. Górski MIC and ks. Z. Proczek MIC, *Rozmówiony w Kościele*, W-wa, 1987, p. 29.

and made efforts for the good of the “whole” man. Father M. Wiśniewski recalls: “Impossible to forget were the pictures that he painted before our eyes: the penury of the workers, the injustice and exploitation by the capitalists, the degradation of women, the damage to the children. (...) The workers lived among dirt and rubble. Father Matulewicz was an honest democrat and a devout friend of the poor, oppressed people.”¹¹ However, being fully aware of the difficulties that the social and charitable work involved, he used to tell the priests: “A priest who wants to dedicate himself to an intensive social work in the Vineyard of the Lord... and wants to see its good fruits must be a holy priest.”¹²

“During the war, in 1916, Fr. Matulewicz organized an orphanage in Bielany. It involved a lot of problems because the children needed to be fed, clothed and to have a warm facility, and yet there was no heating oil. So, Fr. Matulewicz went to the officials asking for the fuel ration. A German clerk berated him: «You are a priest and it would be better if you trusted Divine Providence more and stopped bothering me.» To which Fr. Matulewicz responded, standing humbly at the entrance to the office: «This is true. But Providence uses good people.» That day he got firewood for his orphanage.”¹³ Here is another incident known to many people. On another occasion, a clerk began to scold Fr. Matulewicz for his “obtrusiveness,” using abusive language. Without losing his calm, Fr. Matulewicz responded to him in the words of St. Philip Neri: “Well, that was for me, now what have you got for my orphans?” Startled by this response, the official gave Fr. George additional food rations.¹⁴

“I remember the Bishop’s efforts to get additional rations of food and clothing for us, poor children, and the great trouble that he went to to get them, like riding on a coal wagon from Warsaw to Bielany one cold winter.”¹⁵ “He procured potatoes for the hungry, distributed meals and provided monetary help. (...) He rode a wagon to town, even in winter or rainy weather, in search of food, clothing, firewood, and oil. (...) Jadwiga Reut recalls: “Father Matulewicz must have been very hungry and tired for he stood in line for several hours to get things for his orphanage in Bielany. However, he did not sit at table until after he told us with great joy how much flour, lard, grain and bread he was able to get for those poor children.”¹⁶

“On July 7, 1917, the Marian Government decided to take over the Institute of Educating Boys at the Mańskowski Foundation located at 63 Wileńska Street

¹¹ *Wspomnienia o Bł. Matulewiczu*, *Fontes Historiae Marianorum*, p. 52.

¹² Testimony given by Fr. Zenon Kalinowski, *Rozmówiony w Kościele*, p. 42.

¹³ Kamila Tyczyńska, “Wspomnienia o Bł. Matulewiczu,” p. 156.

¹⁴ A. Kucas, “Archbishop George Matulaitis,” Chicago, 1981, p. 131.

¹⁵ Ks. J. Sobczyk MIC, “Wspomnienia o Bł. Matulewiczu,” p. 117.

¹⁶ T. Górski MIC, “Błogosławiony Jerzy Matulewicz,” pp. 119. 121.

in the Praga borough. Father Matulewicz supervised this institution. True, he did not take up residence there, but he visited very often and not only on holidays. One of the teachers recalls seeing Fr. Matulewicz rolled up his sleeves and fixed the clogged toilet.”¹⁷

With his love for the poor, Fr. Matulewicz “infected” all those whom he attracted to his renewed Congregation. Let’s recall here at least some of the first novices from Bielany of 1915: Władysław Łysik (“Father of the Poor”), Zygmunt Truszyński (“St. Francis of Marymont”). They were great social and charitable activists. Also, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary displays the same social attitude as its Founder.

Our Constitutions, although briefly but forcibly, especially § 50, call us to the service for the poor: §30—living by the three theological virtues, we must have *caritas* for God and people; §44—we “should be poor in fact and in spirit”; §48—we may “totally renounce any patrimony, which [we] have acquired or may acquire, especially in favor of the poor”; §50— “the Congregation (...) should strive to witness a manner of corporate poverty. (...) Avoiding every appearance of luxury, of excessive profit and the accumulation of goods, the Congregation should contribute something of its own goods to other needs of the Church and to the support of the poor, whom the members should love, both by Gospel mandate and apostolic admonition, not in word or in speech, but in deed and in truth.”

In the Marian Community Prayers recited daily, we ask the Patron of the poor:

L.: Saint Vincent de Paul,

All: Teach us to zealously serve the poor and the suffering.

There also are many sick, homeless, hungry, lonely and poor people today. Each of our religious houses has in its financial budget a certain sum of money for the poor. But let’s be frank: this “little money” is often more symbolic than anything (to placate our conscience, perhaps?). We have the *Caritas* charitable centers at our parishes: some are more active than others are. There also are centers for children of poor and dysfunctional families (i.e., “Okruszek” on Wileńska Street in Grudziądz). A true center for the sick and the elderly worth its salt is the „House of Mercy” founded in Gorodok Podilskiy in Ukraine by the late Fr. Władysław Vanags. We should also name other confreres zealously serving the poor: the late Fr. George Margis from Argentina and Fr. Stanislaus Chryc from Poland. The hospital in Turvo, Brazil which is sponsored by the Marians, also serves the poor. Naturally, there are other efforts, actions, and campaigns on

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 123-124.

behalf of the poor (i.e. soup kitchens, distribution of clothing, etc.), particularly in our missions or in Eastern European regions. I did not do any close research in this matter nor a list, but it seems that we have precious little *stricto sensu* causes for the poor.

Taking to heart, John Paul II's appeal for the Marians to go out to "the new poor,"¹⁸ the General Chapter of 1993 undertook an obligation to "respond to the needs of the poorest,"¹⁹ so that we may "be apostles of Divine Mercy under the maternal and loving guidance of Mary."²⁰ The new poor of today are, among others, the addicts, the abandoned, the old and the sick. Our concrete response to JP II's appeal was the Licheń Center for the Family and the Addicts. Then we created a hospice at Tykocińska Street in Warsaw (Fr. Dziędziul is assigned to carry out this work only), and now we are opening a new hospice at the Marian Shrine in Licheń. This is a step forward, but it's only a beginning.

We are in charge of several shrines, where various actions promoting human dignity and support for the needy ought to be organized. On October 19, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary in Pompeii. There are dozens of charitable centers and institutions associated with this famous Italian Shrine of the Blessed Mother. In his homily, the Pope praised those initiatives and said that the shrines ought to be "citadels of love." The Licheń Shrine is going in this very direction; The Divine Mercy Shrine in Brazil has been spending too much time preparing for it; and I don't know what is being done at the Shrine in Stockbridge (U.S.A.).

A new impulse for an ever more intense and better organized service for the poor is provided by the Divine Mercy devotion accepted by our Congregation as a new aspect that enriches our charism. "Be for everyone apostles and witnesses of The Divine Mercy,"²¹ a seriously ill John Paul II wrote to us from the Gemelli Clinic. Do we truly fulfill this commandment? Do we do the proclaiming only or do we accomplish concrete works of mercy in the service for the poor and people in need?

Examining our rich legacy of service for the poor, one cannot help but notice that this field of our work has shrunk considerably. Do we feel unprepared? Are we afraid? What do we fear? Taking risks? Obviously, it's easier and less risky to move exclusively within the sphere of the devotees. Do we lack volunteers for this work? Do we lack courageous decisions from "the brass"? Is this influenced by the type of basic formation that we run? In the face of the poverty and the enormous social problems of his time, Fr. Matulewicz cried out: "Give me

¹⁸ John Paul II to the Marians on June 30, 1987.

¹⁹ General Chapter 1993, *Obligations taken on by the Chapter*, no. 2.

²⁰ JPII to the Marians, June 22, 1993.

²¹ JP II's Address to the General Chapter of 2005, from the Gemelli Clinic, March 10, 2005.

men, give me men!” Probably, this is where the problem lies: we lack dedicated men burning for this task, we lack the “charismatics” with hearts open to human misery.

In May of 2004, a controversial Belgian nun, Sister Emmanuele (lay name Madeleine Cinquin, recently deceased) approached John Paul II in Lourdes and asked him to write an Encyclical about the Church’s true calling to poverty and service to the others. *Only such a Church would be authentic and better heeded to in the world*, she whispered into the Pope’s ear. He smiled and nodded in response.²²

This was the kind of Church that John Paul II dreamed of, wrote about and gave witness to with his entire life, illness, and dying. However, he did not have time to write the requested Encyclical. He was “saved” by his successor who published the Encyclical “Deus Caritas est.” Benedict XVI dedicated the entire second part of this document to the concrete service of love which the Church must carry out. “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word,”²³ writes the Pope. “The Church’s charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her (...)”²⁴ “The Christian’s program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is «a heart which sees». This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”²⁵

The Pope calls us to organize effective charitable structures. It is high time for the Marians to intensify their service for the poor and give a clearer witness to the world that *Deus caritas est*. In imitation of the Handmaid of the Lord, a Marian is a “permanent deacon,” and, having said “yes” to God, he rushes to say “yes” to people, especially the poorest of the poor.

Our Founder knew well that the deepest penury is the moral one (sin), the slavery to an addiction that causes the financial poverty of families and societies. For this reason, he cried out: “Certainly if a disaster suffered by our neighbor can at times elicit our tears, a spiritual downfall ought to elicit them more.”²⁶ Benedict XVI also reminds us of this: “(...) this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God.”²⁷

²² Joanna Brożek, *Prowokatorka w habicie*, „Tygodnik Powszechny,” Nov. 2, 2008.

²³ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, Stockbridge, MA, 2006, p. 109.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 31.

In imitation of the awareness and sensitivity of Blessed Stanislaus—the Apostle of Sobriety (freedom)—I would like to close my reflections with a concrete proposal. I believe that homes for addicts ought to be created at our Licheń Shrine and other places (Balsamao), where those people can be admitted for treatment. That would be our “outstretched helpful hand” in service to the poorest and to their families.

In the Service of the Church

Ways of the Marian Apostolate—Inspirations and Trends

It is worthwhile to recall, echoing Father General, that when we say „the Church” we speak about the reality understood in three aspects.

1. In its first sense, the Church is the reality derived from the Spirit, the constitutional principles of which are:

- Faith (the revealed doctrine);
- The Sacraments of the faith;
- The Apostolic power derived from Christ the King, Priest and Prophet and regarding the faith;
- Charisms.

Those gifts reach man through other people; however, the Holy Spirit is in them. For this reason, they do not grow old and it is impossible to accuse them of being narrow-minded or incompatible. They do not need and won't ever need reforms. Sometimes, those in a rush to “reform”, especially those from outside of the Church, are not aware of this fact.

The matters of faith, the basic moral commandments will always be “signs of rebellion.”

The Church does not stand on the text, by its external letter, even though it may be the texts of the Holy Scriptures. She came into being through the gift of the Holy Spirit as a living reality: “the Advocate, the holy spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you” (Jn 14:26).

This understanding of the Church with her betrothed union with the Holy Spirit is the object of faith: “*credo in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem*, and right after that: *et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam*.”

2. In another sense, the Church is the Christian people—the assembly of the faithful. And these are not only the gifts of God, which are pure and perfect,

but also the reality of the way in which people utilize these gifts. Through that door sin enters the Church. For this reason, we speak about the “holy Church of sinners”. The Church is not a community of *the pure*. She continuously purifies sinners of their sins and she is the instrument of Redemption. In this dimension, the Church is *semper reformanda*.

3. Speaking in the third sense of “the Church” we mean the hierarchy. (J. Maritain calls them the “personnel of the Church”). We say: “The Church in Poland took such and such a stand,” and we also say: “These are the rules of the Church.” Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “The Church shall not be defined on the basis of her officials and structure, but on her service for God: as a community of the table around the Risen Christ. People united by participation in the Eucharist create a community that crosses over the boundaries of death.” In another place, he wrote: “The history of the Church is not the history of an institution; it is the unfathomable acts of the saints.”

4. One should not confuse these dimensions nor separate them. One must differentiate them properly, when inquiring about the “service for the Church”, contained in this conference’s title.

Narrowing the service for the Church exclusively to the first dimension, while forgetting others, brings about the threat of disembodiment, individualism, subjectivism, endangering of the community, and sectarianism.

The second dimension, taken separately from the others, can transform the service for the Church into a “horizontal” society. Building effective Church institutions does not necessarily mean building the Church. For the same reason, the goal of our Congregation is not its growth, just like its proper functioning is not the Congregation’s goal, but the realization of everything that emerges from the first meaning of the term “Church.”

Bringing the third dimension to the first plan, may effect, that the measure of the quality of “serving the Church” will be a reaction to the response of the hierarchy. It is easy then to fall into (ecclesial) opportunism, let alone the temptation of careerism. If it falls short of the bishop’s approval, it is easy then to become depressed or to lose a sense of that kind of service. And then, what is to be done with the failed instruments (ministers), often so typical of this world?

Thus, it is imperative to differentiate what is constant from what is prone to change, under the influence of historical, cultural, political or other circumstances, and also thanks to the constant deepening self-awareness of the Church, through the actions of the Holy Spirit.

5. The times, in which our Congregation was founded, were the times of the counter-reformation. The reformation caused Catholics in Europe to be only one of the fighting parties, different than in the Middle Ages. Along with the downfall of the traditional society, they felt being pushed to the second plan. And their response was to develop „Catholicism” as a counter-culture. This situation lasted until Vatican II.

People who were striving within their own camp to reach some agreement and understanding with the „enemy camp”—contemporary philosophy or even Protestantism—became subject to suspicion and rejection, even repression. As an example, let’s give the „anti-modernistic campaign” of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, of which our Blessed Renovator was also a victim. As a result of the bureaucratic oppression of the reforming trends among Catholic theologians, no distinction was made between thinkers who honestly and creatively strove to read the „signs of the times” and the truly decadent ones who compromised with the „spirit of the times.”

The “besieged fortress mentality” which must fight back the attacks from every side, as well as an attempt to create a „parallel world” (for example, Pius XI’s appeal; „the Catholic party as opposed to a party, Catholic association as opposed to an association, Catholic press as opposed to press”) can be a mobilizing factor for a time, but in the long run, it leads to suffocation and a slow degeneration.

When John XXIII was asked about the reasons that prompted him to convoke the Second Vatican Council, he allegedly widely opened up the windows and said: I wanted to let in the fresh air (cf. Fr. Tomas Halik *Od katolicyzmu do katolickości*, a conference delivered at the Club of Catholic Intellectuals in 2003, in “Wzywany, czy niewzywany Bóg się tutaj zjawia”).

In this way, in the historical context of his times, the Marian characteristic of Blessed Fr. Papczyński was service to the Church: it was the defense of everything that was particularly exposed—along with Thomism and the Papacy—to external attacks. In the long run, the defense of these bastions led the “Marianism” to develop an excessive sentimentalism, Thomism – to an excessive rationalism, the Papacy—to acquiring the features of an absolute power.

6. Our Renovator’s great love for the Church is well known to us. Those were not only love-filled excerpts from his *Journal*, but his entire life and consequent actions.

In his service to the Church and in his vision of the renewed Congregation, he stepped outside of the mentality of a “besieged fortress.” Certainly, he organized a Catholic association as opposed to a lay association, but let’s not forget his statutes, which astound with their pluralism displayed against the background of the

times. He did not want to create a “parallel society”. The Association of Christian Workers, for which he wrote the Statutes, was not a society for confessions. It tolerated a variety of political and world-view opinions. When Fr. Matulewicz left this Association, they abandoned his principles, which negatively presaged its future.

7. Father Matulewicz based his concept of serving the Church on the experiences of the Church, in which he was destined to live and to serve. “Is it now our duty to go wherever we can gain more for God, where we can save more souls, that is, where godlessness, immorality, a lack of faith, and indifference toward the Church abound? Should we not try to get in, even to force ourselves into any place where it is possible to gain something for Christ and for His Church? If we find one road blocked, let us look for another. If one door is closed to us, let us make another; if one window is nailed down tight, let us break open another to let the light in.”

Being friends with Fr. Honorat Koźmiński, the Renovator became fascinated with the idea of using the Congregation to penetrate (infiltrate) the various environments in which people live and work daily. Such was, for example, his idea of the role of the religious brothers. Also, the rejection of the habit and other external “religious attributes” was dictated by the then political situation, but also was something more that just a form of temporary intrigue: it was the breaking of barriers between the Church and the “outside” world. The Renovator did not want to build a parallel Christian society, a clerical world. He dreamed of the presence of witnesses to the Gospel in the mainstream of human life, wherever it was really dynamic.

Following the fall of Communism, questions were asked of the Congress of Theologians of Eastern and Central Europe in Lublin (1991), the Synod of European Bishops in the same year, as well as many men of the Church about the experiences which the Church had brought out from the times of persecution and the way they could enrich the Church of the free world. What conclusions were drawn out of the Church’s underground work when she was pushed to the margins of society and dispossessed, not only of her privileges, but even of basic rights? I believe the answer has not been found. Meanwhile the countries, where the Church was persecuted now see a dominant trend of not only drawing conclusions, but trying to establish the status quo ante, to rebuild the old structures, regain former influences, possessions and privileges—securing material and legal stability.

8. From the times of our Congregation’s founding, and even from the times of its renovation, the world has changed tremendously. The manner of the

Church's presence in the world community also undergoes a process of inevitable evolution. For this reason, it's not worthwhile to involve all our energy in the rebuilding of forms, which now belong to the past because of the changes of civilization. Our times are not worse than the "golden days of the Middle ages," and yet—who's to know —our times may prove to be better for the Gospel.

Our Constitutions open up a great field for new initiatives in the service for the Church: proclaiming the Gospels, sanctifying through the sacraments, building the community and developing our charisms, primarily the charism of love, the life-giving love so that others may have life.

New forms of our services will decide the growth of our Congregation: such forms that respond to the challenges of our times, such forms that don't destroy old instruments (such as a parish, for example) but give them new meaning. This will confirm that we are not yet totally disabled by sclerosis and still needed in the Church.

THE GIFT OF FATHER
STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI'S
BEATIFICATION

REFLECTIONS ♦ SHARING ♦ CONCLUSIONS

MARK BARON, MIC

U.S.A., Washington D.C., House Superior and Novice Master

The fruit of the beatification for the members of the Washington, DC house has been a unifying clarity of our identity as Marians. I would like to spend the next few minutes explaining this statement.

Currently, the majority of men, including myself, joined our community based either on a strong devotion to Our Lady or Divine Mercy or both. Most people, then, are not motivated to join our community out of a specific devotion to either Blessed Stanislaus or Blessed George. When people go through the novitiate and learn about our history and charism it seems that they may experience them in a discreet manner. There is no sense of true clarity regarding who we are and what we do now and where we have come from. The problem is that we do not know how to integrate our history, charism, apostolate into a solid identity. We do not know how to interiorize it so as to make it our own and thereby live by it.

The beatification of our Founder—with all of the preparation and thanksgiving that it involved—has made the person of Fr. Stanislaus and his spirituality come alive for each of us. Through this new encounter, we have had the fruit of experiencing 2 points of clarity: the first one involving Blessed George and the second involving the Divine Mercy.

Concerning Blessed George, we have seen that Blessed Stanislaus was filled with a great apostolic spirit and it was emphasized to us that his initial intention was to establish an apostolic community. This helped us to see how the renovations of Blessed George complete and fulfill that original vision of our founder. In this way, we can see how George and Stanislaus share a similar heart and are not, therefore, meant to be “pitted one against the other.”

Regarding the Divine Mercy, it seems that we are seeing this great gift given to us as the interpretive key to our overall identity. What is meant by this? If we look at some of the essential characteristics of Blessed Stanislaus’s spirituality and charism—dependence on Divine Providence, devotion to the Immaculate Conception, praying for the souls in purgatory, assisting pastors—we can

see a strong grounding in Divine Mercy. It seems that what God has given us through Blessed Stanislaus is an expression of what is essential to the nature of Divine Mercy. Thus, we see that Divine Mercy was not only given to us as a gift to promote among the faithful, but it has also been given to us, for a moment of self-reflection.

The beatification of our Founder has thus given the house in Washington, DC a sense of a deeper clarity concerning our identity as Marians.

I conclude by making a note for the future. I agree with what some of you have mentioned that we can't stop here. That there needs to be a deeper reflection on our Founder and on our identity so that we can become better grounded. It seems that it is providential that our renewal is following the beatification because we cannot really renew ourselves unless we first know ourselves. Again, there is a connection with Stanislaus and George. The beatification can help us to spring into the year of celebrating our Renewal. Knowledge leads to action and so may the fruits of our reflections on the Founder help us reap greater fruit in celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Renovation. May this fruit come in the form of a deeper zeal in imitation of Blessed George.

JAN BAĆAL, MIC

Brazil, Curitiba, Provincial Secretary and Treasurer

I'd like to begin with the words of Cervantes from his novel "Don Quixote." In one of the many dialogues between the knight and his servant, the following words were said: "Sleep, my dear Sancho, sleep! That's what you've been born for. I was born to keep watch."

Once, at the beginning of my path of vocation, looking at Fr. Papczyński I saw him as this demented knight who tried to battle windmills with no great success coming out of it; he did not change the world. Today, after the beatification, having rediscovered Father Papczyński's role in the life of our Congregation and my own, I understand that loving something or someone as Don Quixote loved his Dulcinea requires fighting for one's ideals and keeping watch.

Father Papczyński invites me to keep watch. He tells me not to miss my vocation. He also tells me that, guided by him, I must fight for everything that is good, but above all, that I must always watch out for the plan that God has for my life. Father Papczyński has become the father of my Marian and religious vocation.

ADAM BONIECKI, MIC
Poland, Kraków, former Superior General
Editor-in-Chief of *Tygodnik Powszechny*

Acquainting the public with the person of Blessed Fr. Stanislaus was a discernible fruit of his beatification. It was done on a considerable scale in Poland and met with public interest. Getting to know the person of our Founder more closely by the Marians themselves also was a fruit of the beatification, or much rather of the preparations for it, which found its confirmation today in Fr. Cambra's homily.

The beatification helped us to better understand our charism, showing us the continuity and bringing the old Marian tradition closer. It also made us ask ourselves anew about the identity of our Congregation renewed by the Church. The preparations for the beatification were a time of the intensive work of re-discovering our legacy which remained unavailable for dozens of years, hidden in archives and libraries behind the wall of unfathomable Latin. The credit goes to our confreres: Fathers Casimir Krzyżanowski, Waclaw Makoś, Ryszard Piętka, Jan Bukowicz, and others who performed the task of bringing those materials closer to us.

This also helped us to realize, even discover, such elements of our Founder's charism as his total dedication to the matters of God, his total self-sacrifice and penance. All of this has been clearly demonstrated by his recently published works.

The ceremony of the beatification itself proved to everyone high and large the organizational abilities of our Congregation. I heard one of the bishops who participated in the celebrations saying: "I pity those who would need to organize the next beatification for no one can do it better." The organizational part of the festivities and the liturgy was worthy of the Vatican itself.

It is worthwhile though to understand a certain perplexity and the problems brought about by the beatification. It seems to me as if some confusion has arisen in the minds of the community members as to the relations between the Congregation reformed and renewed by the Church and the one of Fr. Papczyński, in which we take roots, and of which we are the continuers. Even here, at this conference, we hear voices advocating the need to bring back *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*, for example, or the white habit. Although no one has said that, but the return of the white Marians' penitential practices: fasting, prayers such as the Office of the Dead, is presumed. In short, it would mean the return to what used to be the essence and lifestyle of the white Marians. Interestingly, these kinds of motions are nothing new. The motif of bringing back the white habit and some of the pious practices has been weaving its way into our various meetings. The

beatification seems to create favorable conditions for these nostalgic tendencies. Indeed, should such decisions be made, should our religious community reach the conclusion to bring back the *status quo ante*, then we should act very prudently and in consultation with the Apostolic See. I'm not sure if the people who joined the Congregation renewed by the Church, after all, should not be dispensed from their vows and asked to make new vows in the Congregation from before the renewal.

It is quite obvious that the Congregation's style, its manner of being and acting, which were assigned to the community by Blessed Fr. Matulewicz during his short lifetime, is subject to evolution. They were slightly different in the times of the Renewal than they are today. When I joined the Congregation, being admitted by the Renovator's direct co-workers, it was quite unimaginable that the main work of the Marians would be running shrines and spreading The Divine Mercy devotion according to Sr. Faustina. But such was the turn that took the Congregation's life and such were its challenges and needs. A religious order is a live organism living as best it can by the Lord's guidance. Once, the typical works of the Marian were to run schools according to well-planned programs and to co-operate with scholars. In like manner, the manner and means of proclaiming Christ wherever He is less known or loved have changed. In this evolution, I see elements of the "white tradition" manifesting themselves in our attending to the poorest and the abandoned in Brazil in the manner of the white Marians.

My last remark. Our Founder's beatification obligates us to a renewal, an updating. This is always necessary, but I advise caution in such reforms. We have lived through some sort of a "movement" which was supposed to renew our Congregation and bring back its original faithfulness. People who truly achieved a community renewal, as well as those who were at the onset of great religious communities, were persons gifted with a charism. Let us recall the people who were at the beginning of our renewal communities in Poland, Latvia, Brazil (e.g., Fr. Zenon Rosłoń). Originators of a true renewal, naturally performed in co-operation with the grace of God, were saintly people. Our communities must create favorable conditions for sanctity, must produce saintly people, but not necessarily such to be elevated to the altars at once.

VYTAUTAS BRILIUS, MIC
Lithuania, Kaunas, Vicariate Superior

First, I would like to give thanks to the General Government and to all those who worked at the preparations of the solemn beatification of Fr. Stanislaus

Papczyński. Both the beatification and related studies revealed the riches of Fr. Founder and his Congregation's spirituality and charism. It is a new experience that brought the Lithuanian Marians closer to other Marian communities worldwide as well as allowing us to get to know better the history and development of the Congregation throughout its entire lifetime. Until now, because of well-known causes, the Marians in Lithuania used to think of themselves as locked within the Lithuanian borders; also, they used to perceive the history of the Congregation starting with its renewal. This new experience touched not only the Lithuanian Marians, but also our lay people. Much help in this aspect came from people associated with the Marian Helpers Center's work in Lithuania, who were involved in the beatification process. Their numerous contacts made us clearly realize that the Marians also live in various places outside of Lithuania and that the history of our Congregation does not start with the Renovator, but with Fr. Papczyński. I am amazed by all this and I rejoice from the chance to deepen my knowledge of the charism and spirituality of our Congregation. I admire the thoroughness, responsibility, and great efforts that have been exerted to studying our history, spirituality, and charisms; and I rejoice at that plans which have been laid out. I hope for a great future of our Congregation and that it will blossom.

However, personally I am also concerned with our future. We are talking about our entire activity, not only after the founding of the Congregation, but also after its renewal. We are not living 300 years ago, but today. When we talked about our Founder and his spirituality, we've done it in the context of his period with its political and religious circumstances and mentality of his contemporaries. Instead, I rarely hear anything presenting his person and spirituality in relation to our times. This worries me because I find there this mentality, which could be thus expressed: what do all those things that happened in the past have to do with the future?

Consequently, what needs to be done? I remember a passage from the New Testament: "Go into the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20). I believe that the study of, and living according to the spirit of our Founder, as well as according to the rich heritage of our Congregation, are that part of our lives in which we are removed from the world. It gives us protection and is a source of our spiritual strength. With it, we must enter today's reality, go to the great sinners who, having taken care of various things, do not see the need to be concerned about the things that we care about: their spirituality and eternal life. Thus, I believe that our task is to study the world and the mentality of people today, to show them a personal motivation for faith, to explain the meaning of the spiritual life and its necessity for growth. However, there are some dangers hidden in these kind of activities. We must make sure

that our studying and actions are always conducted in the spirit of unity with the entire Church. Bearing this reality in mind, we must be well prepared to carry out our mission in the world.

DANIEL CAMBRA, MIC
U.S.A., Plano, Provincial Superior, Pastor

I'd like to mention three things in my reflection: death, life, and sanctity.

When I was growing up, my family was exceedingly poor. All of our houses were heated by either kerosene stoves or wood stoves and at seven years of age, I was responsible for carting wood up two flights of stairs to my parents' apartment. I was responsible for getting wood to both of my grandparents' homes and to my great grandmother's home and to her sister's home. I received a dollar a week as an allowance to see to it that these five houses all had sufficient wood for boiling water and cooking meals. That might not seem important in the life of Blessed Stanislaus. However, when I was seven years old, I also made my first communion. And shortly after my first communion, I became an altar server. And as an altar server, I was asked to serve at a funeral Mass. And the first time I served at a funeral Mass, the good Father that celebrated the Mass, turned to me and gave me two dollars and I found my vocation to the priesthood.

I had four cousins that were diocesan priests. I had three cousins that were Franciscans, one that's a Conventual, one who was a priest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a Passionist, and a Benedictine. So, religious vocations were not unknown; priestly vocations were not unknown in my immediate family. However, when I first discovered the Marians—the thing that clicked for me was the devotion to the poor souls in Purgatory. It started when I received that first two dollars and it was more than the money; it was part of my spiritual life from very early on to pray for the poor deceased souls.

Shortly after I discovered the joy of funeral Masses, I remember learning how to sing the *Dios el rey* and a few other songs that were always sung at funerals and occasionally I could pick up another dollar by singing solo at communion time. How could I be anything other than a priest? Priests do not have to lug wood up two flights of stairs to cook water. And when I discovered the Marians and their devotion for the dead and the dying, I discovered that this was my niche. This past year, as I read different things about Father Founder, as I came to appreciate a little bit more fully his devotion for those who needed pastoral assistance at the end of their lives, I see how that also relates to my life as a Pastor. How many people I visit on a weekly basis, how many people I bury,

and how very often the people that I bury are not well known, are not well appreciated by society.

I remember one particular funeral I did, and it was for a woman who had already buried her husband and she was absolutely alone in the world. She had no relatives to the best of my knowledge. At her funeral, there were only three people present. Two of them were her next door neighbors. And the third one was me. And that woman whom I used to take communion to every week and who I would sit and have tea with about an hour every week ... for whatever reason, I don't know because I didn't really feel as if I was that close to her—left all of her money to St. Peter's Parish in Kenosha. And that woman was Martha Crosky and some of you have said Masses for her because she left us over \$25,000 in Mass stipends. She left us \$125,000 to help renovate St. Peter's in Kenosha. I had no idea that she had any money. I thought she was living on retirement checks and the government. But it reminds me that very often, we don't know whose lives we are touching and how they will in turn become a blessing back to us.

When I look at Blessed Stanislaus and the way in which he brought new life into the life of those parents, into the life of that infant in the womb that had died and then revived. I think of how many people seem to be on the verge of spiritual death or how many people seem to be on the verge of emotional death, on the verge of economic death these days. And sometimes they are considering suicide and I think if I can paraphrase a common saying in the United States, what would Fr. Stanislaus do in this situation? And I try, to the best of my ability, to deal with the people as I believe Fr. Stanislaus would deal with them: with love, with care, with concern. Without looking out for myself, "am I going to get two dollars back out of this?" This is where I also find my own call to sanctity. That it's not the two dollars, it's not even a sense of warm regard or human respect. It is the call to become part of the communion of saints, the living and the dead.

I became Provincial at the death of Mark Garrow and not a day goes by that I don't both pray to Fr. Mark as well as pray for Fr. Mark. Obviously, [he was] well beloved by so many of you. I honestly think those three aspects, life, death, and the call to sanctity are what Fr. Stanislaus has done to give more meaning to my life.

KAZIMIERZ CHWALEK, MIC

U.S.A., Stockbridge, Provincial Vicar, Convention Translator

I am grateful to God that I was able to participate in this historical Convention. With great joy I listened to each one of you sharing your experience of

what Father Founder means to you. It's truly inspiring sitting in the booth there, everything comes to my ears. I am quite attentive and do listen to every word not only to provide good translation: your moving and inspiring witness has nourished my heart.

For me, the beatification is a type of crowning or conclusion of a wonderful journey of discovering who Father Papczyński was. This journey of discovering took place almost 30 years ago. It is kind of interesting for me that first I heard about Fr. Papczyński from Fr. Casimir Krzyżanowski, MIC who gave us a two week program about our Founder which was quite interesting. But then he was only a historical figure for me, not a real person.

In the 1990s, I used to go to Rome for various reasons. I had a chance to personally see and appreciate the work of Fr. Casimir Krzyżanowski, who was then preparing Fr. Papczyński's writings in Latin for publication. He was copying the original manuscripts and providing commentaries. He explained to me what he was doing and also informed me about the work progress. During our meetings, I copied his work from his old computer for fear that it might break down and that the fruits of Fr. Casimir's work would be lost. To this day I keep all the floppy disks in my archives.

Sometimes I would ask Fr. Krzyżanowski: "Father, what is the situation with our Founder's beatification process?" And he shared with me his thoughts and talked about the progress. Once he told me with sadness that the difficulty with Father Founder was his "disobedience." It seemed as if each serious discussion about the Founder's possible beatification sooner or later would meet with this obstacle. However, everything is in God's hands and He can remove it. Once, during our conversation about the beatification, I said to him: "Father, don't rush the Founder's beatification. Remember Fr. Vaišnora, MIC? He was preparing Blessed George's cause. When he finished the informative process, he died before the beatification. And then there was Fr. Bolesław Jakimowicz, MIC. He went to the Lord, having completed his work on the *Positio* about Fr. Wyszyński and before the decree on his heroic virtues were proclaimed. So, please Father, do not rush, for you are needed in our community." Father Casimir heard me with a smile, but rejected my reasoning.

During my visits to Rome, I also met several times with Fr. Waclaw Makoś, MIC who, along with his administrative duties, also carried out historical research in regard to our Father Founder. One day, Fr. Makoś shared with me his discovery in the matter of the Founder's "disobedience" and a possible solution of this problem. He showed me that the problem of "disobedience" arose from the fact that Fr. Papczyński witnessed serious wrongful deeds while he was a member of the Piarists. "Father Papczyński admonished his Superior. The latter, having taken offence at his subordinate's action and trying to defend himself,

accused our future Founder of “disobedience.” Father Papczyński spoke of the sin *contra naturam*. In these days the phrase defined most frequently a homosexual act. With this explanation, we may approach the Holy See and ask to dispense with the problem of disobedience.”

I received the news with great joy not only out of hope for the prompt recognition of Fr. Stanislaus’s heroic virtues, but also because it proved his high morals and courage. He opposed evil uncompromisingly, even if it required admonishing his superior. The price he paid for this was defamation.

I’ll tell you also about Br. Andrew Mączyński, MIC who, some 10 years ago, while the Director of our Association of Marian Helpers, introduced in our quarterly *Marian Helper*, the column, “Graces Received.” Through this column, people were learning about our Founder. They started to believe in his holiness and to seek his intercession before God. I read the reports about the graces received through the intercession of our Founder and I was greatly moved, especially by graces granted to unborn children. This reading greatly inspired me and convinced me about Fr. Stanislaus’s holiness.

For years, we had no certainty as to which of the existing portraits best reflected Fr. Founder and if any of them actually represented Fr. Founder’s true likeness. One day, Br. Andrew showed me a drawing of Fr. Founder’s face made by a forensic expert in Poland and which was based on the study of Fr. Stanislaus’s skull. It was a great moment for me. Shortly after, an even greater experience was to see Fr. Founder’s portrait painted according to Br. Andrew’s commission, based on the above-mentioned drawing. This portrait depicted Fr. Founder with exceptional reality. When I saw his face, I actually felt his presence. In this portrait, I saw a tender and loving person, also loving me. I felt his proximity, his spiritual fatherhood.

And finally, my experience of hearing Fr. Wojtek Skóra, MIC then the Postulator General, to say enthusiastically: “We have a miracle through the intercession of Fr. Stanislaus, but there is a problem with its recognition because of its uniqueness. We have here a case of an unborn baby being brought back to life in the mother’s womb. The Vatican Congregation has trouble with the classification of this miracle. The doctors state that the fetus died in the mother’s womb and then returned to life. The theologian and cardinals have trouble with providing a theological explanation of this fact. We must pray for the light of the Holy Spirit.” Finally, after many months and several meetings with the medical doctors, the Congregation for the Saints recognized that the baby in mother’s womb was brought back to life through the intercession of our Founder. What an unusual event and witness for our times! When I heard it, I was very happy and proud of our Founder who rejoices at such great recognition for our Merciful Lord and His Immaculately Conceived and Most Holy

Mother. This miracle also reminded me of the story of how Fr. Papczyński raised a child to life on the altar of the Marianki Church in Góra Kalwaria.

Limited time does not allow for more examples. The important thing I wanted to tell you is that through all these experiences, I came to find in the historic past a real man—an inspiration and great model of sanctity. The booklet *Toward Beatification (Ku beatyfikacji)* prepared by Fr. Krzyżanowski foretold the weight and the importance of Fr. Stanislaus’s virtues for our world today.

I would also like to mention the significant role played by the retreats run by Fr. Zdzisław Żywica, MIC. He wanted each of us to establish a personal connection with our Founder and to discover in ourselves the Founder’s charism. During the retreats, we lived out his strong faith, his unbreakable trust in God and his dedication to seek His will. We’ve seen Fr. Stanislaus’s heroic charity for his neighbor, his deep love for the Immaculate Conception and for the souls suffering in purgatory. Although his life was very complicated, he made it simple through discerning the will of God in all of the circumstances of his life. Through these personal experiences of retreat, our Founder became someone special and very close to my heart. I can say with a grateful heart that for me, Blessed Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński is an illustrious person whom I greatly admire. In my life, he is joined with such holy men as St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis of Assisi. And in this Congregation, he occupies the first and exclusive place—the place of my Father.

For all this, I am deeply grateful to the Lord God whose merciful love for us knows no limits.

LESZEK CZELUŚNIAK, MIC

Rwanda, Kibeho, Mission Superior, Director of the Marian Formation Center

A few thoughts from the heart of Africa. To begin, I’d like to say this: when we received the movie after the beatification, I was showing it to our seminarians, novices, and the faithful. They were enraptured and a sort of a spiritual sigh was heaved. For them, it was a great joy to see the beatification which attracted them not so much with its beautiful external décor, but its depth and joy, which they came to express in a special way. To us, the Marians in Rwanda, the beatification is a sign of great joy and hope because it confirmed the timeliness of Fr. Founder’s life and work, not only the fact that he once founded the Congregation, but also of his continuous presence, concern and blessing for his Congregation, which he imparts to all our works do that we will persevere for the greater glory of God and the honor of Mary Immaculate. I would like to illustrate with two examples.

Three years prior the beatification, we initiated the project to create the Marian Formation Center in Kibeho. We already had the land but were struggling with financial problems which were preventing us from beginning the construction. Then a proposal was made to pray to our Founder. I was asked to compose a prayer. I said then that there was no need to create new prayers but to recite the prayer for his beatification for a special intention instead. I remember that first time that we faithfully and wholeheartedly prayed during the evening vespers; the next day I opened my e-mail box to find news about a very large money transfer. It is three years and counting that we've been reciting this prayer daily both in the novitiate and in the Kibeho Center, although now we pray for his canonization. This taught us a lot. Then we had another project—the construction of a school. And again we had money troubles. Yet, an idea was born to dedicate the school to Fr. Stanislaus, and almost at once, the funds appeared and the school will be finished soon. We have already prepared the painting and the plaque that reads: Blessed Father Stanislaus Elementary School.

These are the signs that strengthen us on the path indicated by Fr. Stanislaus and the other Marians. This is the path of our charism, the development of the Marian identity, the renewal of our life and the joy which flows from evangelization. All this adds more vigor to us. Life is very important. The miracle used for his beatification calls us to protect life. I recently visited the United States. There is a lot of talk on this topic. A chapel of the Holy Innocents is under construction now. Such signs are very important, also to us, in Africa, especially after this great genocide. Protecting life becomes the most important call.

Another fruit of the beatification is a closer attention to praying for the deceased. In some way, it is also like re-discovering our charism. Praying for the people who perished in Rwanda is a road to reconciliation in this country.

Orienting our apostolic work towards education is another fruit that came about thanks to this elementary school and the comprehension that education is the first step, a very Marian one, towards a [better] future for the Church and the world.

Making it possible for our confrere Bogusław Gil to study in Rome, although our communities are tiny and we had to redistribute the groups, is another fruit. However, we recognized that the study of the Immaculate Conception in the paschal mystery of Christ, which Fr. Bogusław entered, will contribute to the growth and strength of our service in Africa.

Devotion to Blessed Father Stanislaus successfully took roots in Rwanda. We commissioned a few of his statues because a concrete image is very important for the African culture. The locals do not have great power of imagination and they need a direct contact. Devotion to his statue or image is very strong. People pray in earnest; they come and plead for his images, and for the prayers

which he once composed. Here, he is the father of the poor. Rwanda is a country of the poor and the people find in the person of our Founder, Christ Himself who cares for them, gives them signs and miracles to confirm the presence of the Kingdom of God. In the person of our Father Founder, people see the power of Christ. Their faith in this power and in Fr. Founder's spiritual protection is great and full of simplicity.

PIOTR FEDOROWICZ, MIC
Italy, Rome, General Treasurer

My encounters with Fr. Stanislaus started early in my life because, as a little boy, I had the joy of being educated at Wileńska Street in Warsaw, under the wing of the Marians. Concerned priests (Frs. Łada, Minota, Meller)—the acolytes' educators—often took us to Marianki, to Fr. Founder's tomb. We made these pilgrimages at least twice a year (in May and in September). In later years, I also visited Marianki and Fr. Stanislaus's place of eternal rest as a seminarian. I used to go there to lend a hand in preparing for the solemnities. I rejoiced seeing more and more people arriving, for whom the memory of Fr. Papczyński was always alive, although so many years had gone by since the moment of his departure to the "house of the Father." At that time, I did not know his writings, or his theological wisdom; but I knew what he was to us: our Founder; and what he was for his time: an illustrious preacher and theologian and a great confessor of the faithful.

With the passing of time, my encounters with Fr. Stanislaus begun to happen on a different "level." During the beatification ceremony, Father General put a question to us: why has the gift of his beatification become *our* destiny, the present generation of the Marians? This question is still standing; it is our task, an invitation for a deeper reflection, for study and finally for our personal conversion.

I had the great privilege of being directly involved in the preparations for the beatification celebrations. I would like to express my gratitude to Father General for having invited me to be part of this group of people under the direction of Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, MIC. I believe that a great help in the spiritual preparation, for me, as for many others, was the book entitled *Lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord*, prepared by Fr. Pakuła and his team. Another one, *And that Your Fruit Would Remain*, came next. In those two books, which were translated at a high cost, (intellectually and monetarily) into the main languages used in our Congregation, we found, as we all recall, a treasure chest of information about Fr. Stanislaus. His love for God, his search of the Lord's will, his

concern for the beauty and the holiness of a soul, finally his humble carrying his many crosses... it is impossible to name everything that's been shown to me through the meditations. And finally, as a beatification gift, we received the entire collected works of Fr. Papczyński in Polish—*Pisma zebrane*.

The preparations for the beatification gathered many priests and brothers together, including those from outside of the Congregation, many lay people; they have all created a large family of people helping one another.

About a month after the beatification, I met Bishop Edward Nowak at the Vatican. He recognized me at once and called out: "Greetings to the Marians! Your beatification was a masterpiece." Undoubtedly, we have done a great deal of work both organizationally and financially, and it reverberated widely.

I ask myself: what is the beatification to me? But first, I will tell you what hurts me. In spite of the fact that the beatification has taken place, and we are about to enter the year of 100th Jubilee of the Congregation's renewal, several of our confreres have left. People who are dear to me are leaving. These are my confreres, colleagues with whom I studied, received my priestly ordination; one of them is my friend who I grew up with and then worked with in Germany. They are leaving. I ask you: Why? Naturally, the beatification is not a protective armor or a shield meant to keep the Marians safe in some artificial manner. It is, as it always has been—an invitation. I understand it as an invitation to my personal conversion, to be faithful, to open myself to the grace of God, to become involved ever more strongly in [the service of] "Pro Christo et Ecclesia." These departures pain me greatly and I know that they bring about a deep human crisis. I ask myself: how can we help these people? How to embrace them with our solicitude? Without doubt, this is the worry of all governments, all superiors who give serious thoughts to their confreres. What our community is living by has been already discussed by Frs. Marek Szczepaniak and Zbigniew Piłat, and I put my signature under it. Yes, we are sinners. The only consolation is that the Lord keeps us in His unwavering care and great love, that He is not discouraged and still allows us to explore new "sides" of grace. I trust that the beatification of our Founder will help us to discover the values of the communal life, of the priestly and religious life in the Marian community. I believe that it will open our eyes to the needs of our confreres and that Blessed Father Stanislaus's intercession will teach us to respond to the "signs of the times."

Father Stanislaus, help us in conversion! And you, [my confreres,] who are called to care for us by the power of your various offices, be patient with us.

RYSZARD GÓROWSKI, MIC
Italy, Rome, General Promoter of the Missions

The fruits of the beatification are the discovery of Fr. Stanislaus's spiritual legacy and a new fascination with his life as the model to follow in striving for holiness. It seems to me that Father Stanislaus—now a Blessed—says to us today: “I have now been elevated to the altars, and where are you, what are you?” If we do not regard our Founder as a father, then we are orphans... If we don't think of him as our father, then we may sometimes see him as some sort of kind-hearted grandfather indulging and spoiling his grandsons. Father Papczyński is nothing of the sort. He is a father who loves but also chastises, and who can also make someone fall off the ladder, even in the literal sense [of the phrase]... I thought that the time after the beatification would be something like a vocation boom for us; instead came the purge in the form of decreasing vocations, especially in Poland. It was also related to the crisis of certain confreres and the departures from our community of others, which happened in the year of our Founder's beatification, no less. I think that in his role as a father who loves but also chastises, Fr. Papczyński invites us to renew our religious life and our faithfulness to our vows. I believe that some special renewal must happen in our communal, and fraternal life, in every local community of our Congregation and that it must take the form of giving the gift of ourselves—and not only externally. For it is easy to give gifts externally to people that we meet and who may be at times quite taken up with those gifts. Instead, it is a matter of mutual gift-giving between confreres in a community. In this renewal, we ought to be more involved and not only communally, but also individually, especially through prayer, unceasing prayer for vocations, so that people who would come to us may also become heirs to our Blessed Founder's patrimony.

WOJCIECH JASIŃSKI, MIC
England, Fawley Court, House Superior and Delegate of the Provincial

I'd like to say a few words on behalf of my confreres serving in England, particularly those of my own community and myself, since I did not have the opportunity to talk the matter over with the brothers from Ealing, because I learned about my coming to the General Convention in Rome at the last minute. I'm glad to be here and to witness all that happens here on behalf of our community in England. I believe this form of witnessing to be very important (more than the printed materials which will appear in the future) for me personally, and for the community beyond the English Channel. I noticed, and it is very important for

our two communities—in Ealing and in Fawley Court, that we talk more about our Founder. The fact that we now have a father manifested itself strongly in our communities. The puzzle pieces that we put together during our formation or later in life have suddenly fallen into place, displaying someone of utmost importance who has made the path of our Congregation complete and he has shown us its sense. For me personally, as for other community members, this experience of the father is very important.

Extremely significant is the fact that now we understand more clearly the Immaculate Conception and that we are the Marians of the Immaculate Conception. It is no longer necessary to explain to an outsider that a Marian Congregation is a community that runs shrines; now I am able to say much more. And we talk about this, too. We talk about it at table having meals in our house or during meetings with the brothers from Ealing. This is not just small talk, but serious conversations about our Congregation, about our experiences here and now, about our feelings and thoughts before the beatification, or about what is going to happen now, after the beatification. We also talk about religious garb. This question arose in the context of what Br. Andrew Mączyński said. My experience, unrelated to the beatification in particular, says that in the Western world, also in England where the society is becoming increasingly godless and where God is driven out, this sign of religious attire is exceedingly important. The fragment from Blessed George's *Journal*, which Br. Andrew Mączyński read to us, is very timely today. Maybe, it is necessary to evangelize through religious garb, as well, because there aren't any signs anymore. And this is also what we talk about. And I believe that we also need it. When I look at some of my confreres I realize that "T-shirt and fleece" style is very comfortable. We want to wear fleece, even colorful fleece, to somewhat intrigue or maybe even irritate people, but this style expresses nothing. It's just easier to be comfortable, laid-back.

We also talk a lot about The Divine Mercy since we run The Divine Mercy apostolate. We have questions as to how we ought to do it, how to incorporate this charism, along with the charism of the Immaculate Conception or the eschatological one, into our works. Thus, I think that the beatification bore fruit in the form of our decision to move the apostolate to London, to be closer to the faithful and to reach out better; to be among the people.

I also believe that the fruit of the beatification, and of this debate, is that we are planning concrete works of mercy. An idea was put forward to promote the *pro life* concept also in view of the fact that many Polish women go through abortion on the British Isles. So, we ask ourselves: can we serve as links between *pro life* organizations acting within the Church and among the British public and *Polonia*—the Polish community abroad?

About prayer. I often recite the Novena through the intercession of Blessed Fr. Stanislaus and I recommend it to people who ask us to pray for them. It is also important for me to know that they ask for his assistance with their problems.

JANUSZ KUMALA, MIC

Poland, Licheń, Director of the Marian Formation Center

There is a saying that no seed ever sees the flower which it produced. I think that it may be applied to the beatification of Father Founder and our generation that witnessed it. Father Papczyński was the seed that never saw the flower of the Congregation he founded, which came to blossom in Fr. Wszyński's time. As the Renovator, Fr. Matulewicz also was such a seed, but the true blossoming of the Congregation came after his time. In some ways, the beatification is yet another such seed that starts to make a flower (which we can see already), but what exactly this flower is going to be only the future generations will see. In any case, we must strongly emphasize one thing: the gift of the beatification inscribed itself into the great work of the renewal of our Congregation. Looking at the history of our Congregation, we notice that it was continuously undergoing some renewal and that its growth was achieved through this *rebirth*. And this is, one may say, the specifics of our presence within the Church: to live by the spirit of continuous renewal and reform. The beatification of Father Founder is the conclusion of a certain stage in our development, but it is also the beginning of a new one. Thus, it is not accidental that the time of the beatification coincided with the 100th Anniversary of our Congregation's renewal. Divine Providence wants to show us God's unceasing care for our community. The gift of the beatification is a clear and unequivocal confirmation of the Marian way of life. As the *Father and Guide of the Marian Vocation*, Fr. Papczyński appears to us in the grace of the beatification and he wants us to know that we're still following the proper Marian path. However, this does not mean that we've fulfilled everything on this path. The Founder's charism shines brightly in the light of the beatification and it encourages us to verify our faithfulness to the Marian vocation. Although the Congregation's history in the past 100 years was difficult, even traumatic at times (the period of our Constitutions' reform after Vatican II), nevertheless, our Blessed Fr. Founder wants to tell us today that we, guided by the Holy Spirit, Divine Providence and the Church, continue to follow the right path, as to our understanding of the charism and our presence in the Church. It means that we, as the Marians, for better or for worse, realize and participate in the charism left to us by Father Founder based upon the measure of our holiness or sinfulness.

Along with our individual charism, each one of us received the grace of the Marian vocation to benefit and to enrich our Congregation. This charism was also given to Father Matulewicz who, living out the grace of the Marian vocation, enhanced the Marian way of life with his personal charism, inscribing himself into the charismatic growth of our Congregation. I see this as a great sign of hope and confirmation for all those who don't live out their vocation in a dynamic and joyful manner because no one, perhaps, announced the good news to them: in you, the gift of the Marian vocation has been placed, which you live out in your individual manner—that is to say—marked by your individual charism. In this way, our various commitments contribute to building unity in its diversity.

I trust that our understanding of Fr. Papczyński as Father Founder will contribute to deepening the fraternal spirit of our Congregation and that it will find expression in a greater harmony of thoughts and actions. It means being closer in prayer, in our concern for vocations, in our communal responsibility for our efforts. While getting closer to the Father, we must open ourselves to our brethren.

What are the challenges presented to us by the Founder's beatification? First, it calls us to give thanks to God and to the many generations of Marians who believed in his holiness and did not tire in their efforts on behalf of his beatification. Also, another important task is for the superiors (but not exclusively) to find out how to strengthen the grace of the Marian vocation, with which we all have been endowed. They will be able to do so if they live it out and have a clear vision of the Congregation's charismatic path. The best way for our personal and communal growth is to demonstrate how we realize (or can realize) the Congregation's charism today. It's not so much a question of seeking the Marian path, as it is of becoming convinced that this path has already been found and that we are following it. This way of strengthening our vocation will foster greater fidelity to its requirements.

Also, we ought to think about providing a better definition in our Constitutions of the Congregation's mission in the context of the charism of the Immaculate Conception. It seems that both discovering Father Founder and taking a closer look at Father Renovator on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Renewal and Reform of our Congregation encourage us to revise our Constitutions to better express our present understanding of the Congregation's charism.

I think that the person who rejoices most from the Fr. Founder's beatification is Fr. Wyszynski. Thus, it is only proper to put more effort towards his beatification.

DARIUSZ MAŻEWSKI, MIC
Poland, Warsaw-Stegny, Provincial Secretary

The fruit of Fr. Founder's beatification that I carry within myself comes from my reflection on his entire life. I was sort of forced to do this reflection, because I participated in the preparations for the mass media campaign, which meant that I had to demonstrate a good knowledge of the reliable facts about his life, which would encourage people to get to know the new Blessed. People who work in the mass media today are down to earth and they want to show the reality. Unverified legends about levitations and calming storms or tales about a killed dog, often told by our Fr. Founder's biographers, surely become a good vehicle for curiosity-enticing revelations; however, they bring the life story of our Founder down to the level of sensational materials published by the tabloid press seeking readers. It seemed important to extract from Fr. Papczyński's biography such facts that would help to see the new Blessed as an advocate. To me personally, this important factor appeared in form of the path of faith followed by our Fr. Founder. Looking at my own experience of faith, I begin to realize that no one, not a single man, is born with faith, which means that there is no such receptor in the human mind that controls the development of faith, as it happens with our senses. This is why people begin to convert, begin to believe when, realizing the consequences of their sin, they say: NO! This is the only way for people to recover the proper relationship with God. When they become terrified of themselves, of their vision of things which they call "their own good," only then will they begin to seek the truth about themselves and about God. First, people must realize that they have lived in a world meant exclusively to serve their ambitions, comfort, and fears. I discovered this process in the story Fr. Founder's life. It began with his perceiving the slavery resulting from living for himself, just as St. Paul said in his Second Letter to Timothy (3:1-5): "But understand this: there will be terrifying times in the last days. People will be self-centered and lovers of money, proud, haughty, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious, callous, implacable, slanderous, licentious, brutal, hating what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power."

In his youth, Fr. Papczyński nurtured ambitions which were disproportionate to the means available for their realization and God turned them into an instrument for his conversion. The way of his return may be found in the words of a prayer published in its modern rendering in the book of the Marian prayers: "My God, my Father and my Guardian, be adored forever. Lead me by your hand along the paths of this world. You know, O Lord, that by myself, I am not able to accomplish anything that is good. May your Divine Providence guide me until

the end of my life. I trust and believe that so it shall be. Be glorified in my every word, thought, and deed.”

It is necessary to realize that Fr. Papczyński composed this prayer at the end of a long path of an unrelenting search for self-realization. Coming to understand this fact in one’s own personal Marian vocation history is, as I see it, an indispensable beginning to establishing one’s place in the community, because religious families have always blossomed when there were people fascinated by the history of their founder. However, knowledge alone about someone who has followed a certain path can not replace actually following in this person’s footsteps. Taking the path of merely observing our Founder would instantaneously place the observer in the position of a teacher who can even bring to perfection the manipulation of the facts from the Founder’s life, but whose own life would follow a side track. Merely observing instead of entering into the reality will always be a fearful form of existence. A consecrated person, who is terrified of himself and of God will turn his religious life into a safe haven in his flight from life. However, Fr. Papczyński’s life story shows us that God was always fighting for him and He crowned this battle with victory.

ANDREW MAĆZYŃSKI, MIC

U.S.A., Stockbridge, General Promoter of the AMH

I’d like to start with a brief personal reflection. Without the least exaggeration I can state, that apart from the day of my first religious vows, the day, on which the Church elevated our Founder to the honors of the altar, was the happiest day of my entire religious life, for which I waited and worked, in every way possible, for almost 30 years. Even though I always considered Fr. Founder a holy man, yet, I remember, that when information on the rapidly advancing process of the verification of the miracle started to pour in, my feelings of joyful disbelief were mixed with a certain fear that for some unforeseen reason, the matter may come to an impasse, as had happened in the past.

By my conference, I would like to draw your attention primarily to the practical aspect of our Institute’s life. We deal with this aspect daily and it represents a real measure of how the outsiders see the sons of Blessed Stanislaus—the custodians and successors of his spiritual legacy.

In my deepest conviction, the gift of the beatification of our Fr. Founder is a challenge for our entire community to strengthen all the more in our life, the three elements of Blessed Stanislaus’s founding charism.

The first of these is our “Marianism” (devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary) in its broadest sense. Even as we consider the

various initiatives of the recent past, as I see it, Marians are always just a bit Marian. This is reflected in our internal religious life and apostolate, but more than anything in our very selves, in this, on how we think and live as particular individuals—members of an Institute, which according to the *vision* of our Founder was to be Marian to the core—as members who “zealously praise and promote the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin [...] and lay down our lives and shed our blood, if need be” (cf. *Rule of the Order of Marian Fathers*, Vilnius, 1791, p. 10). This is based on my memory of a word by a certain Provincial Superior during one of the Chapters in the late 1990s, he ventured a sad hypothesis that a good number confreres believe, especially those who were to leave our ranks, that the Marians are, at most, a kind of *an Association of Diocesan Priests with a slightly deeper than usual Marian spirituality*. I believe that we must do everything in our power that such a disastrous outlook, if it still exists somewhere, needs to be rooted out.

Before starting our Congregation’s main Internet page, I made a point of investigating every available Internet site of religious institutes, concentrating particularly on those with a Marian character. With some jealousy and admiration I investigated the sites of such congregations as the Carmelites, the Servites, the Marists, the Marianists—to name just those best known. Even at a glance, I could tell that these were the communities, which above all, lived in accord with a Marian spirit ... Oh, how many of their writing can be seen as initiatives promoting their charism! Everything, which they undertake, is clearly marked by a Marian spirit.

It’s good that we have *Salvatoris Mater*, the famous Licheń and Stoczek, the Marian Publishing House in Poland and the Association of Marian Helpers in nearly every administrative unit of our Congregation. What, therefore, stands in the way of our having, in each of our parishes, the Legion of Mary, but above all the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, which was so particularly encouraged by our Blessed Founder and so zealously promoted by the Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszyński? (cf. *Constitutions of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M.*, Vilnius, 1791, 8–II) Despite appearances, today’s people are drawn to the Blue Scapular, which, other than the Marians, no one else in the Church promotes on such a large scale. We ought to remember that, while promoting the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, we not only spread the Marian charism, but also our eschatological one, because, in accordance with the Founder’s will, who linked spreading of devotion to the Immaculate Conception with help for the dead, the primary goal of these confraternities was to assist the Poor Souls in Purgatory.

Our service in parishes and retreat centers presents a perfect opportunity to develop in a practical and organized manner, certain elements of our spirituality.

I believe it suitable that a note about the need to promote the associations with Marian characteristics, and particularly the *Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, as a particular feature of our apostolic work, be placed in our Constitutions (§18 or §117) or in our Directory (§93). Furthermore, I think that §3 of our Constitutions which speaks of the Congregation's principle works needs to be more specific. It does not mention the promotion of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. nor the assistance for the deceased. What is more: for dozens of years its content has been quoted, among others, by *Annuario Pontificio*, thus creating much confusion and even distorting our charism, instead of providing its clear and concise image. We, on the other hand, always write in our vocation publications that it involves the promotion of devotion to the Immaculate Conception, praying for the deceased and apostolic work in its broad meaning...

The second element of our founding charism which needs, in my opinion, a complete revision is the eschatological element, which should not be limited to the chanting of Vespers during the Octave of All-Souls Day (because others are doing this as well), or a few pious notes in the Constitutions. The Marian eschatological charism ought to have a more visible and practical form so that it may be a clear and inspiring characteristic of our life and mission in the Church. This is what Blessed Stanislaus calls us to in his *Norma vitae*, making the prayer for the deceased the second most important cause of the Marian Institute after spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M.: "Lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord, (...) with utmost zeal, piety and fervor assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains—especially the souls of soldiers and those who died of pestilence" (NV I, 2).

Beside this, I don't have any sort of exceptional public mortification in mind or any lengthy prayers for the deceased. At this present time in our lives, I think it adequate to introduce the custom of weekly chants of Vespers for the deceased along with our faithful, in imitation of our many parishes, and to give this practice a legal status in our Directory (§ 93) or at least in the Statutes of the individual Provinces. We ought to permanently introduce into the prayers of the faithful during each Eucharist celebrated by the Marians, an intention for the Poor Souls in Purgatory—it does not take much to always remember this. Besides, wouldn't it be possible for us to celebrate a Holy Mass according to the formula for the deceased whenever the Liturgical Calendar allows, or to petition the Holy See for the privilege of daily celebrating the Holy Mass for the Deceased according to our own formula during the Octave of the Solemnity of All the Faithful Departed? (cf. *Constitutions of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M.*, Vilnius, 1791, 8–IV) I believe that adding a short note to our Constitutions (§19 or §75), stating that the Marians offer their daily rosary for the

deceased may bring much spiritual good to our community. It would also be a direct link to the old Marian tradition, which existed before the renovation of our Institute (cf. *Constitutions of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M.*, Vilnius, 1791, 8–IV).

Finally, I cannot omit yet another, in my opinion, element of the Blessed Fr. Stanislaus’s founding charism. It is a charism deeply rooted in the hearts of many of us—let’s say it frankly, but which we fear to openly acknowledge for fear of derisive and sarcastic remarks from our confreres of a different persuasion. I speak here of the habit, or a religious garb, if you will. We must remember that to our Founder the white habit, which he prescribed for his own, as he called them, in honor of the pure Conception of our Lady (NV, IV, 4) did not establish for Blessed Stanislaus a sign of religious consecration, but a kind of a life program for his spiritual sons, a means with which they had to remind the world of the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To him, it was a sign of the particular charism that the Marians undertook in the Church—*Lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord, to the utmost of strength you will promote the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God (...)* (NV, I, 2) (cf. *The Rule of the Order of Marian Fathers*, Vilnius, 1791, p. 10) (cf. *Constitutions of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the M.B.V.M.*, Vilnius, 1791, 2–VII). The instruction, which our Blessed Founder left in his testament from 1701 testifies to the fact of how dear and important the matter of the white habit was to him: “If Fr. Joachim is approved again as the coadjutor by the Priests’ agreement, then I bind him on pain of God’s Fearful Judgment not to change anything in the habit, name of the Order or dare to sinfully thwart the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary (...)”

Personally, I am deeply convinced that the final words have not yet been spoken on this topic in the history of our Institute. Why? Because I closely observe the modern Church, especially the one, in which I live day to day in America. It is quite obvious to me that modern man, especially young men, need a clear sign—which is the religious habit. It needs to be a sign that would emphasize with particular strength the fact of becoming a *new man*, which we all strive to become the minute we make our religious profession. Today’s young men who wish to give themselves to God in consecrated life, especially those in the U.S., are very radically disposed and are in need of strong structures and expressive signs. The element of *religious solitude* from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is completely alien to these men. The young wish to courageously and openly proclaim Christ with their lives and to use to this extent all available means—and this must be respected in them. What is more: American society expects Religious to display this very attitude. I often see in Stockbridge the great trust, with which people are drawn to a priest or a Religious when they

recognize him by their appropriate garb. I've seen the respect with which they looked at a nun who continues to wear her habit, in spite of the trend to abandon their religious garb for the sake of comfort and alleged ease in apostolic work, prevailing until recently among the American consecrated women. Thus, it's a small wonder that religious orders with strong structures, expressive charism, and the wearing of the religious garb have the most vocations in the United States, regardless of the crisis of religious life so often spoken of. Even though it's silent, the religious garb gives a very strong and inspiring witness of life for Christ on the road of a concrete religious charism. Unfortunately, I must note here with sadness the latest drastic decrease of vocations to our religious family in many provinces of our Congregation.

I think that Blessed Fr. Renovator's great openness affords us this manner of thinking. In his *Spiritual Diary*, he noted on October 27, 1910: "May all our thoughts, desires, and longings be directed toward that one goal: to bring Christ everywhere, to restore all things in His Spirit, to glorify the name of the Catholic Church in every place. In order to achieve this, we should make use of any lawful and worthy means available to us: the cassock of the priest or the habit of the Religious or, if need be, the clothes of the layman; we can use every trade, profession, every field of learning or labor—and even our own blood—everything that is good and created by God can be used, if need be, for the greater glory of God and for the good of the Church." The world changes, so too the face of the modern Church changes, in spite of our likes or dislikes. I believe that, in order to remain faithful to the spirit of our Marian Renovator, we must continuously adjust our life and apostolate so that we may respond creatively to the changes that happen all around us.

PAWEŁ NAUMOWICZ, MIC

Poland, Warsaw-Stegny, Provincial Superior

The beatification... The majority of confreres from the Divine Providence Province wished to participate in the beatification; and indeed the majority participated. Many joined in its preparations. The majority rejoiced in the very fact of the beatification while the preceding preparations and works united us all even further. It seemed at first, that the beatification was the crowning of a long process. We were saying: "Finally, after 300 years..." However, later we began to understand that the beatification is not just the crowning of all of the prayers and endeavors, but also the beginning of a renewal. It is not a "return" but a starting point towards something new.

Father Papczyński... Many confreres, also the oldest ones, emphasized the fact that they established a relationship with Fr. Papczyński—our Founder—for the first time. The confreres of my generation and those close to my age group, used to speak about this situation as if we've been raised without a father, that we've been hereditary orphans. And that orphans have brought up other orphans. Today, it seems as if we came back to our father, discovered our father or at least began discovering him as a man of flesh and blood, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, through whom the Spirit acted then and is acting in us today. This is very helpful for me and for many others in understanding where we come from and who we are. In short: Father Papczyński has become a father to many of us.

Our charism—The Immaculate Conception... I can see that many of us have already discovered or are in the process of discovering the Immaculate Conception as our charism, the center of our spirituality and the point of reference for our life and apostolic activities. I'm not saying that we did not hear about the Immaculate Conception; I'm saying that now we've heard about it in a totally new manner, with a totally new force. For the very first time, it was that powerful. It seems that before, we often regarded ourselves as parish or shrine priests, as professors and editors-in-chief, but now we discover that we are of the Immaculate Conception, regardless of what we do, regardless of the offices that we fulfill. The Immaculate Conception is what defines us. This is our hallmark, it marks all of our actions. It seems that many of us felt before as if we were wandering in the fog, without an identity, and consequently, each one obtained his own identity—that of a professor, an editor, a pastor, a catechist, etc. But now a much more profound identity is in the making and it flows out of the Immaculate Conception.

PAVLO OSTROVSKIY, MIC

Ukraine, Khmelnickiy, Vicariate Superior

I'd like to begin my reflection about Fr. Founder's beatification by repeating what's been already said here: we've discovered our father. I think that Fr. Papczyński has never stopped being our father. It was only a question of the extent to which we felt that we were his sons. When in 1992, I came as a student of the diocesan seminary in Riga (Latvia) to the Marian Seminary in Lublin (Poland), students there used to say: "Father Papczyński won't ever be a saint." It sounded sad and incomprehensible to me, who found himself in the Marian community for the first time. I thought to myself that our Founder would not be proclaimed a saint as long as the Marians "don't build a landing pad" for him to "land as a saint" there. Today we rejoice in the fact that this time has come,

that the Lord God found this “landing pad”, that He found faith—a foundation on which He can show us Fr. Papczyński’s sanctity and his message for the Church, and particularly for us—his spiritual sons. Thanks to God, we opened ourselves to this grace. Father Papczyński has always been our father but we did not always regard ourselves as his children. We come back to our father as did the prodigal son. And we have received sandals, a cloak and a ring. We held out our arms and called ourselves his sons. This is a true joy. And this joy was with us during the last day of recollection (the first after the beatification), in which all of the members of the Ukrainian Vicariate participated.

A step was made, a very concrete step. The future lies before us. We are meeting here, discussing our challenges, reflecting on our charism, talking about our works that we’d like to bring to life. Those are the very concrete steps, which are to lead us towards discovering the entire depth of the gift of the beatification. During the Jubilee Year of the 100th Anniversary of Renewal and Reform of our Congregation which begins tomorrow, let us turn in a special way to the person of Fr. Renovator. He left new means for us to follow the path of the Marian vocation. We are facing the task of discerning and accepting God’s abundant gifts which we’ve been given so that we can wear these sandals, the cloak and the ring in a worthy manner.

ANDRZEJ PAKUŁA, MIC

Italy, Rome, General Councilor and General Postulator

Certainly, Fr. Papczyński has become better known and closer to us recently especially through his writings (I’m thinking primarily about Polish-language publications), which appeared in print for the first time in the year of his beatification. Also, of no small importance is the work of reconstructing Fr. Papczyński’s likeness based on his skull, which seems to be quite credible and close to reality. Generally speaking, it is possible to say that our Congregation experienced something of a discovery of the fatherhood of the Congregation’s Founder. It is a very important matter because it places us spiritually in a closely-defined relationship with him and gives us an identity. Our research and discoveries conducted in the framework of the beatification gave us an impulse to seek to understand the idea that guided him in founding our Congregation, as well as new ways of interpreting our charism in such aspects as, e.g., the Immaculate Conception, prayers for the dead, the concept of our Congregation and the intentions behind its founding; and finally, the riches of Fr. Founder’s personality. Consequently, the Congregation turned its greater attention to the matter of self-awareness. The beatification was perceived as the Church’s confirmation of our way of life

which was tread not only by our Founder but also by these who followed in his footsteps. This strengthens us further in the belief that our sanctification can be found on this path; that we can lead our lives like our Founder; that we may be guided by the same ideals and motivations that guided him and to be sure that they were right and evangelical and led him to heaven. This understanding is necessary when we recollect his life's difficult moments: deliberations, tensions, doubts, even occasionally resisting his superiors. We have here one of the most important questions of the religious life: is it really possible to obtain holiness, having a difficult character? Because this is how Fr. Papczyński's personality has been always interpreted. Or maybe, some of his deeds should be recognized as incendiary and unacceptable within a religious community. Having freshly done the work of coming to understand Fr. Papczyński's attitudes and motivation in the light of a historical perspective and his beatification, we found out that there should be room within a community for something that is difficult, something that may occasionally bring down long-standing patterns. Unfortunately, it seems as if there is no room in the religious life for something that shakes down the existing peace and quiet, the long-established order. Usually such attitudes are not welcome, regardless of the intentions behind them.

What, in my opinion, are the needs? I think there is a need to absorb the contents that are being discovered in regard to the beatification. I'm thinking of the need to go for a certain authenticity of life, to make practical conclusions and applications from what is being discovered and what delights certain confreres so that these delightful discoveries won't just stay in the domain of intellectual and emotional enjoyment but become applied at the functional level of our community, in our works or quality of religious life and ministry. Another matter: I believe there is a need, and a pressing one no less, to reflect on the path of our Congregation, and not only on its founding charism. I've noticed that an unjustified juxtaposition is being made between Fr. Papczyński and Fr. Matulewicz along with drawing attention to second-rate matters unrelated to the essentials of the Congregation's charism and clinging to certain old forms and commonplace thinking patterns. Without a profound and source-based reflection, we'll be threatened by the shallow indoctrination and the aspirations of strong individuals' (as well as those of the people in power) to forcibly fit all others into the same ideology.

ZBIGNIEW PIŁAT, MIC
Italy, Rome, General Secretary and Procurator

I'm truly happy that I could participate in the beatification ceremonies in Licheń. Those couple of days in Poland gave me lots of joy and satisfaction. Our Congregation presented itself as an international [Institute]: brethren have come from all over the "Marian" world. A good atmosphere was created between us, the Marians from various countries, and even language barriers did not impede communication, we had no problem finding common ground which is our fraternity.

Another reason for joy comes from the publication of Father Founder's *Pisma zebrane* [*Collected works*]: sure, it is not a mystery novel, but it reads well. I'm glad that we can finally reach to the sources themselves, for these are not commentaries [on his work], although they are also important. Finally, we can glimpse at our Blessed Founder directly, touch the source, as it were.

I regard the beatification as an invitation to conversion. Just as the Church gives us Advent and Lent to reflect on our life, similarly, the Congregation has its special moments, and the beatification was undoubtedly one of them: the moment containing a strong call for conversion. This is also being repeated now, during the time of this Convention. We see that the goal of every religious order, the very first one, which is personal sanctification, has been strongly outlined, because it is the basic goal. I want to evoke here an image from Fr. Founder's *Pisma* (*Collected Works*) which tells us that membership in a religious order does not automatically mean salvation. A religious order is a place of privilege on the road to salvation; we can cross the waters by sailboat, but woe to us if we take the sail down too fast, because we may just never reach the port that looks so near. This image has made quite an impression and stayed with me. I brought it up also in the context of Fr. Dariusz Mażewski's speech about the *kerygma* and evangelization, because it strongly reverberated there, too. As to our superiors, I would ask them not to regard us as perfect Religious. Please don't try to seek only communal ideals for we are all sinners and will probably remain such to the end. I hope that in our time of conversion, the Lord God will have patience and mercy for us sinners; He gave me life so that I would convert. We meet and interact in the concrete circumstances of life; it is a process and there is a chance that I'll convert today, but will fall back into the same sins tomorrow. Let a superior near me understand my sinfulness and my failures, but also let him see my efforts. In his speech, Father House Superior drew quite a pessimistic picture of our [Roman] community. I would like to straighten it up a bit. I've been in this community for 10 years now. It is constantly changing. New students arrive. Father Provincial was also here, along with Fr. Wojciech Skóra and the others.

Every year brought new brethren with whom we've established good contacts, had many nice communal meetings, and did various works. For all this, I want to give you my thanks. One of the confreres who recently went back, gave this witness: "At last, I lived in a normal community." It's impossible to judge a community based only on the communal prayers, which are necessary, but not the only [functions]. We also look at our life, our problems, and our mutual relations. What good does it do to anyone, if a person attends all the prayers all the time, but is impossible to talk to afterwards? I do not negate the need for prayer. But there also is another side to it. What is the fruit of prayers in our life?

Going back to Fr. Papczyński, I want to add that in the past two years I had many opportunities to talk about his work, especially with Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, MIC, who was preparing his Doctoral thesis. I used to stop by his place frequently and he would share with me his thoughts and would read large fragments of his work. This enriched me a lot; we had interesting conversations about our Founder.

BASILEU DOS ANJOS PIRES, MIC
Portugal, Balsamão, Vicariate Superior

Perhaps, it's a little early to talk about fruits, but I can say for the Portuguese Vicariate that thanks to the good program of preparations and the materials for the Year of Thanksgiving provided by the General Curia in our mother tongue (for which we are very grateful), the beatification urged us all to reflect on the person of our Founder. We had the opportunity to get to know him better and to give him greater respect and honor, something that hasn't been done before. Father Papczyński has become a living person, close to us. The beatification has awakened our gratitude and enthusiasm which flows from our vocation.

We believe that with the beatification, our founding charism regained vitality and clarity, and maybe even something new. The three components of the founding charism: the Immaculate Conception, the Poor Souls in Purgatory, and the apostolate among the poorest, have come closer together through the charismatic person of our Founder, which allowed for them to be better understood. To illustrate: we realized that from his early youth until the end, the life of Blessed Stanislaus was marked by suffering. This suffering was always illuminated by his faith in Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen. Father Papczyński's mystical experience during the time of the founding of the Congregation was the vision of the suffering of the souls in purgatory. Indeed, we say that the Congregation of Marians has been founded to bring support to our brethren in purgatory. Having known suffering, Fr. Papczyński was sensitive to the suffering of others.

The homily of Cardinal Bertone, as well as our Founder's writings and his entire life, show him to be an apostle of merciful love expressed through his concern for the deceased and in his proclaiming the Gospel in the midst of the poor. This way we've been encouraged to become untiring messengers of God's merciful love, following the example of Fr. Papczyński and keeping our eyes on Mary Immaculate.

We shall not forget Mary in her mystery of the Immaculate Conception, for which our Founder was prepared to give this life; this mystery, understood as a gratuitous gift of God's merciful love, has its source in the paschal mystery of Christ. The beatification proved that our Founder was much more Christological than Mariological. It is the same for the charism that he left to us.

We, in the Portuguese Vicariate, wanted to express the charism of our Founder in a monument which was built during the Year of Thanksgiving for the gift of the beatification. I would like to give each of you a photo of this monument, which symbolically shows different components of our charism. The source of inspiration is in the merciful and freeing love born out of the cross. The Immaculately Conceived [Mary] was the first to be endowed with this freeing love and thus she became the icon of a human who has attained salvation.

Just like Mary Immaculate, Blessed Stanislaus also experienced this merciful and freeing love, which finds its roots in the paschal mystery. He is among those "wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands" (Rev 7:9) of whom the Book of Revelations says: "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:13-14). The Cross of Our Lord, Jesus Christ has become his glory. To him the world has been crucified, and he to the world (cf. Ga 6:14). Thus, he became able to proclaim the freeing and merciful love of Jesus Christ.

Guided and helped by Mary Immaculate, Blessed Stanislaus also learned to show mercy to others, proclaiming the Gospel—*Deus caritas est*—to the poorest of the poor (who are represented with faces which emanate joy), and through his prayer (represented by the rosary beads) he interceded for the souls in purgatory, symbolically presented as a hind seeking water, the source of which is prayer. This is the reference to Psalm 42: "As the hind longs for the running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God."

The broken chains express the force of love that sets us free. The happy faces of Mary Immaculate, Blessed Stanislaus, and other two people manifest the great joy of those who accept the gospel of merciful love and allow themselves to be transformed by it. In the Bible, the cloud is the symbol of God who is hidden and who reveals Himself. Blessed Stanislaus's entire life was marked by faith in the hidden presence of God. Here, the cloud also represents longing. It is our Blessed Father's longing to found our Congregation. To this goal, he is guided

by Divine Providence, symbolically presented as a triangle and the eye of God who sees and fulfills our needs, leading us through history.

We want this monument to be a lasting appeal addressed to the Marians in Portugal.

MARIAN PISARZAK, MIC

Poland, Warsaw-Praga, House Superior

The beatification of our Founder has become a time when the attitudes and the emotions of the Marians were revealed. The positive ones definitely prevailed. However, next to the radiance and bright rays dirty streaks and shadows have appeared. I assume that the latter were of a very personal nature. Maybe, someone's vocation crisis reflected badly on the perception of the event, so very important in the life of a religious community. I've heard statements, in which these shadows were largely discussed. I want to talk about two positive moments. I'll start by presenting an analogy of the events.

1. In the life of the universal Church, there is a day on which the Church receives and accepts a Pope as a gift, a new father and the guardian of faith. All of this is expressed in the phrase: "Habemus Papam!" Personally, I'm convinced that the beatification gives us such a gift in our Father Founder—the father of our charism—in the life of our Congregation. Many confreres voiced this very opinion. The beatification was a time to discover this truth: the children (sons) have their father! This fact has become for many, an opportunity to express their joy and gratitude.

The Marians of old addressed their Founder using the title "Father", "Father Founder", "Pater Institutor." They did not use the word "fundator," because this word has a different meaning in the life of ecclesiastical institutions. It is worth mentioning here that the introductory rite (collect) of the Mass approved by the Congregation of Divine Worship for liturgical commemoration of Fr. Stanislaus on May 18th uses the term "Conditor." It would be good, if the expressions such as "our Father," "Father Founder" or "Father Stanislaus" would appear more often and become predominant. I noticed with sadness that some of us say: "our Papczyński."

It has been an ancient tradition of the Church to honor the Saints and Blesseds with a proper title and name. In the litany, we always say "Blessed N." or "Saint N." This is how the Church gives honor and love to her great brothers and sisters in faith. And here, I take the liberty to appeal to us to properly address our Founder in various circumstances, in a manner filled with filial respect and love.

Consequently, we ought to introduce Blessed Father Founder in our prayers, both daily and in event-related ones, including the prayers of the Mass. Let us use for this purpose, the days of retreat and renewal: on a selected day during these spiritual exercises, let us use the Mass formula from the commemoration of Blessed Father Stanislaus, according to the norms of the liturgical calendar.

2. As to the present General Convention: the kind and content of the statements made in the sessions and behind the scenes prove that there is already in our Congregation a will to produce a synthesis of the contributions made by Fr. Stanislaus, Fr. Casimir and Fr. George. In our future work, especially at the stage of studying the charism, it will be very important to preserve the balance and the will to integrate all of the elements, without creating any competition or juxtaposition and particularly, without naively rejecting something. It is not a matter of syncretism, but of a living tradition.

JOSEPH ROESCH, MIC
Italy, Rome, General Councilor

I cannot say too much about the fruits that the beatification of Fr. Founder are having in my Province, since I spend most of the year living away from my Province. However, I did have the opportunity to spend time with them at the beatification and on the pilgrimage immediately afterward. I also had a chance to be with them this year during the retreat which was offered by Fr. Zdzisław Żywica on the charism of Fr. Founder. In both cases, I found great enthusiasm among the men, since the person of Fr. Founder came alive for us. He had been for me, as he had been for many others, an abstraction, not someone who seemed very real or who I had felt very close to. During the events surrounding the beatification last year and at the retreat this year, I found my brothers in the Province finally beginning to make a connection with a long lost father. They seemed to realize that he had been in the background all along, but that a number of factors had made it difficult to get to know him better. In my local community here in Rome, the monthly retreat days of reflection on his writings and his thoughts have also helped me to grow in my appreciation for Fr. Founder.

I was very touched by the retreat reflections offered this year by Fr. Zdislaw regarding the Community's charism. He helped us to see how our Founder lived out the paschal mystery of Christ in his life. The cross of Jesus Christ was always at the center of his life which was filled with obstacles, sufferings, frustrations and challenges over and over again. The charisms of the Community—the promotion of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the praying for the souls

in Purgatory and the offering of assistance to the diocesan clergy are each intimately connected with the paschal mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Mary Immaculate was saved in an extraordinary way through the merits of the sacrifice of her Son. This is a foretaste of the gift of salvation that the Lord offers to each of us. The souls in purgatory endure their purification as they look forward to the glory of heaven. The ministry of the diocesan clergy, which we are called to support, is centered in the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, in which heaven and earth are united. Here on earth, we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Father and Son send forth the Spirit to continue the work of the Son on earth, and to bring us all safely home to the House of the Father. There is also an eschatological element to our charism which is intimately tied to the Church suffering, the Church militant and the Church triumphant.

I was very pleased to see the younger members of our community in formation feeling inspired by our charism which they could now articulate more easily as a result of the retreat offered in Washington. I came to see the importance of our work for Christ and the Church in light of all that our Founder endured. He was indefatigable in his missionary zeal and he calls his spiritual sons to pour ourselves out as a spiritual gift to the Church. His sufferings and the context of the times in which he lived help to put into perspective the pastoral challenges that we face in our world today. The more things change, the more they stay the same. There is always the danger of minimalism in our trying to lead the spiritual life. What do I have to do to get by? I sometimes try to take the easy way out in a situation. I think a deeper contemplation on the sacrificial and ascetical aspects of Fr. Founder's life could inspire us further on the path to conversion. I have not yet seen enough fruits of conversion in my own life. The more authentically we live our charism, the more the Lord will bless our efforts and send us good vocations.

I was especially touched on the retreat this year by some reflections of Fr. Zdzisław on the Divine Mercy. It is no accident or mere historical circumstance that our community has been asked to promote this message to the world in a special way. God used the encounter of Blessed Michael Sopoćko and Fr. Joseph Jarzębowski, MIC to call our community into a specification of the mission which had been present from the beginning. Our work for Christ and the Church involves going where the need is greatest. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception involves God's saving design for the world. Interceding for the souls in Purgatory involves ensuring that all make it safely home to the House of the Father. The entire Divine Mercy message as revealed to St. Faustina is steeped in the paschal mystery. The image of The Divine Mercy portrays the Risen Christ who bears the marks of His passion. The rays that emerge from His heart sym-

bolize the blood and water that poured forth from His side after His death on the cross. Praying at three p.m. calls to mind our Lord's sacrificial gift of Himself. The celebration of Mercy Sunday takes place on the Octave of Easter, "the last and greatest day of the feast" (Jn 7:37a). The fullness of Easter graces is poured forth on the world on this day. The Chaplet of Mercy is a powerful intercessory prayer addressed to God the Father in which the priestly people of God offer up the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross as an extension of the power of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Our lives will only make sense if we understand how we are called to live out the paschal mystery as Fr. Founder discovered. That is why this message of proclaiming God's mercy is so timely for our world today in the precipitous times in which we are living. I believe we have been led to re-discover our Founder today through the gift of his beatification so that we could rediscover this truth about his life. He became like the suffering servant. Christ lived in Him. He is calling us to do the same and to lead the world along the difficult path of the Gospel. To be true to who we are as Marians, we must remain at the foot of the cross alongside our Immaculate Mother like the Beloved Disciple. We cannot give into the temptation to flee like the other apostles and to take the easy way out. We cannot fail to remember to intercede for the souls in Purgatory. We need to become even more creative in finding ways to assist the diocesan clergy in the work of evangelization. And we need to boldly proclaim God's mercy to a world which desperately needs it. We live in a world that is giving into the trap of the original sin of Adam and Eve, to believe that we can do it ourselves, that we don't need God. Without the Lord, we can do nothing (cf. Jn. 15:5b)!

We don't need new programs, we just need to live out the life we have vowed to live! We should follow our rule regarding our community life, our prayer life, the structure of our communities. We need to observe common prayer, retreat days, monthly house meetings, interviews with the superiors. We need to let God work through the structures of our lives. They are there for a reason. And each of us needs to develop the habit of contemplative prayer. The Lord longs to have a deep, intimate relationship with each of us so that he can empower us to fulfill our call. Fr. Founder is calling us to get back to the basics and to live our lives in spirit and in truth.

WOJCIECH SKÓRA MIC

Poland, Góra Kalwaria–Marianki

Former Postulator General, Custodian of Blessed Stanislaus's Tomb

The first fruit of the beatification is the growth of devotion to Father Stanislaus. Let me illustrate it with the book from the Church of our Lord's Cenacle,

where people inscribed their petitions and thanksgivings. Throughout the past 10 years the book was only two-third full; the remaining one-third was filled up in the last 10 months! It contains thousands of entries. Undoubtedly, the awareness of Blessed Father Stanislaus's powerful intercession before God increased. However, the development of devotion among the laity does not translate into the same action among the Marians. In recent times, only three pilgrimages from Marian parishes came to Marianki. This is not a comforting fact. But even more disconcerting, was the absence of many young Marian priests at the youth meeting held at Marianki last May. They probably took their young either on an excursion or pilgrimages to other shrine in this very period of time. I'm not saying this out of contrariness, but out of sadness.

Also, I would like to share with you some thoughts from Fr. Antoni Andrzejczyk of the Ukraine. Last July, he participated in the Quinquennial Renewal held in Sulejówek. In the context of the reflections on Father Founder made during the retreats and the renewal, he often said: "We have unearthed the foundations. We were shown the foundations of our vocation and our Congregation." I asked him what his thoughts on these foundations were. He replied that the foundations were unearthed, but that nothing had been built on them! In other words, he suggested that our present Congregation has little in common with Fr. Founder's Order. An important question arises that must be put to the Convention: Did Fr. Matulewicz build our religious house on the same foundations as the Founder, or maybe on different ones? Do these foundations, which we are unearthing now, exist only for the purpose of being described and presented for viewing—as it happens with historical ruins? It is possible to approach Fr. Papczyński in such a way, that he would be nothing but a well-described relic from the past—a fruit of archeological study. But it is also possible to have a building put up on those foundations that have been unearthed. Personally, I believe that part of these foundations still have nothing built upon, and that would be the task of our generation.

Thus, here is my concrete proposal. I believe that the reality to be discovered is our eschatological charism. But it's not a question of some task to be carried out or a necessity to add some pious practice. I believe that at the foundation of our vocation, there is incorporated a gift that may still remain undiscovered, still buried and asleep. I think that our reflection on this aspect of our vocation is extremely important for the Congregation and for our future.

JAIR BATISTA DE SOUZA, MIC
Brazil, Curitiba, Provincial Superior

It seems that the fundamental fruit of this event [the beatification] was a deeper Marian identity. According to my insight, this deepening did not happen first and foremost on the intellectual level. I mean that we, the Brazilians, did not have any great reflections about our Founder and his ideas. Our getting closer to him happened on the level of everyday life or in our experiencing his spiritual presence and the presence of his legacy in a deeper way. The following instruments were used in order to achieve this goal:

- The reflections prepared by the Curia General for our monthly Days of Recollection. These materials allowed us to discover the timeliness of Fr. Founder's thought and spirituality in our present life;
- The participation by a good number of our confreres in the beatification ceremonies. We were able to send nine brethren to this event; in the selection, we gave priority to our youngest priests. All of our confreres, who participated in the beatification, lived it out as a great grace. They also had the opportunity to get to know places where our Fr. Founder lived, which certainly brought him closer to them and made him more concrete. It was especially important because the history of our Congregation frequently seemed to be no more than a collection of first and last names, unpronounceable for us. They lived in places, the names of which we couldn't say, either, but of which we learned mostly from the *Album of the Dead*. Personally, participating in the beatification program made these persons and places more real to us.
- Another important instrument was the renewal conducted for all of the Province members by Fr. Michał Kozak, MIC. The renewal reflections were based on classical topics appropriate for the period, and Fr. Michał conducted the retreats on the base of Fr. Founder's writings, which brought his thoughts and spirituality closer to us.
- Our annual retreat run by Fr. Zdzisław Żywica, MIC, brought the person of our Founder and the charism of our Congregation closer. Undoubtedly, this retreat greatly enriched our spirituality. Practically, all of the confreres who took part in this retreat considered it to be an important moment in their lives. We are grateful to Fr. General for making this experience available to us.
- The beatification has shed new light on certain aspects of our lives. The fundamental aspect of our lives, on which the beatification shed a new light, is our Marian identity and the living out of our charism. During the four years in which I served as the Novice Master, I always felt a certain embarrassment when it came to talking about these matters. It was because I myself was not

too sure as to our charismatic identity. I believe that the beatification opened our eyes to the necessity of continuously deepening our charism.

- What needs to be improved? I believe that we do not live out our charism sufficiently. I see the beatification as a time for renewal and re-founding the way that the theology of consecrated life speaks about it. However, I fear that we may stop at beautiful inspirations and resolutions. At the same time, I hope that the seed, which the beatification planted in our hearts, will blossom and produce concrete fruits in the life of every Marian.

MAREK SZCZEPANIAK, MIC

Italy, Rome, Vicar General and House Superior

The beatification brought us all great joy and satisfaction. At last, our Founder was elevated to the glory of the altars! There is an atmosphere of joy and thanksgiving to God for this gift. It was possible to organize our schedules in such a manner, that all of the members of the General House were able to participate in the beatification festivities. A mosaic image of the new Blessed was placed in a central place in the chapel. I'm sure it encourages our reflection and prayer through his intercession. We were given our Founder's many written works and other printed materials to help our meditations during the monthly days of recollection. All we have to do now is to find the time to read and to ponder them all. Undoubtedly, these materials will enrich our ongoing formation.

I don't know what each of us feels inside, but on the outside, I don't see any particular revival, spiritual awakening, or any significant improvement of communal life, participation in communal prayers, etc... And yet, Fr. Stanislaus was a "stickler," an ascetic, a lover of the religious way of life, which he treated very seriously. Even the celebrations on May 18th on the first anniversary of his beatification weren't any more enthusiastic than any other similar event. Certainly, the House Superior (meaning myself) was at fault, but there were no grass-root initiatives, either. I don't wish to sound pessimistic, which I'm not by nature, but I didn't notice any special "outburst." Naturally, we work a lot; there has been and still is a lot going on in the matters dedicated to our Founder and now in the matters of the 100th Anniversary of the Congregation's Renewal. The General House has this purpose: to work for the benefit of the entire Congregation. The General always comes up with new ideas and then "puts us to work." However, I believe that in this whirl of occupations, we forget ourselves, we neglect ourselves... and Saint Paul does not approve of it.

The nature of the miracle that led to Fr. Papczyński's beatification is that we have begun to see him more clearly as a "protector" of life, a "patron" of the

dignity of life from its beginning (conception) until its natural end (death)—a life free from the bondage of sin and of addictions. This viewpoint is strictly linked to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, of which he was a great venerator and defender. Father Stanislaus’s written works and commentaries on them allowed us to see him as an apostle of mercy also, which has its connection with the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as the most beautiful fruit of The Divine Mercy. Such a deepened understanding of our main charism (the Immaculate Conception), made possible through a better acquaintance with the life and the thought of our Founder, inspires us all to undertake new works: The Divine Mercy apostolate, apostolate of protecting the dignity of life (helping the addicted, the abandoned, the elderly; running counseling services, hospices, etc.) As our thanksgiving votive offering for the beatification - the mission in the Philippines came to life. Father Papczyński fervently proclaimed parish missions.

Father Stanislaus also was a great “advocate of the Poor Souls in Purgatory.” I believe this aspect, this domain of the eschatological matters has also not yet seen any revival in teachings, in the raising of awareness, or in coming up with new pastoral initiatives as to the ultimate matters. And yet, it is a great field of evangelical action in which we, the Marians, must be “experts.”

Today, Blessed Father Papczyński invites us to “be on fire” with fervor for the salvation of ourselves and our neighbors. He calls us to not spare ourselves in working in the Vineyard of the Lord, but to give ourselves fully. “Give yourselves fully!” (St. Theresa of Calcutta). “He who wants to be a fisher of souls must put his own heart as a lure on the fishing hook” (Bp Albano Cavalin from Brazil). *Qui non ardet, non incendit*—he who is not on fire, won’t ignite the others, and he (Fr. Papczyński) was on fire and thus ignited the others.¹ The Lord Jesus does not extinguish a smoldering candle-end, but if we want to ignite the others, to pass on the ardor to them, we must be on fire. An Italian political saying goes: “Even thousands of extinguished candles won’t give light or a sparkle, but one burning candle may ignite thousands.” Today, we lack leaders fired up with the matters of God and Congregation who can enrapture us.

I believe that we must take care of matters *ad intra* because now we’ve got too many things going *ad extra* to the detriment of our spirituality, the very essence of our religious life. We must pay a little more attention to ourselves. We must take our religious life and its requirements seriously, because if we won’t, then everything will become “blurred”, the religious life will lose its sense, and we will lose our enthusiasm. “Since every religious order blossoms and lives for a long time, rooted in these two [principles]—the virtue of obedience and love

¹ Cf. Ks. T. Rogalewski MIC, *Mąż Boży*, Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów i SPM, Warszawa 2007, p. 39.

for prayer—who wouldn't cry out in horror that a disobedient and prayer-neglecting religious shall perish?"²

Father Papczyński's reprimand is very timely. When he was interviewed by the Italian agency "Ansa" at the beginning of this year (2008), Franc Cardinal Rodé, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, stated with concern that the consequences of secularization had become all too visible in the religious orders: "The lifestyle of some consecrated persons is exceedingly casual; they want to be free without limits; they are reluctant to wear habits; a progressive devaluation of prayer is noticed, a deficient communal life and unsatisfactory obedience." "There is no religious life without religious life," as one of our confreres—a professor of Canon Law—likes to say. This sentence seems to be a pure syllogism yet, in fact, it is a succinct diagnosis of the religious life today, a warning and an admonition. Father Stanislaus talked about taking the religious life seriously and gave us a warning: "Take heed that it would not appear as if you imitate Jesus only because you wear the religious garb, while in fact, through your sordid customs, you present yourself worse than any layman. The state of a religious person is not salvation in itself, but living out the religious life is. (...) May God protect you from being a religious only by name, not by truth."³

We must take to heart Fr. Founder's appeals and admonitions. We frequently quote and take literally some of them; the others—we interpret in the context of the circumstances; yet some others are either not very popular or are regarded as obsolete, like, for example, this one: "For the secret love of God, this drink is foreign to our Congregation."⁴ "To honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, suffering from thirst on the cross, drinking hard liquor, both outside and inside the [religious] house is forbidden on pain of losing God's blessing, as it has been, in fact, thus far observed by all our [members] devoted to piety and sobriety."⁵ The final statement was made by a Marian who edited the protocol then. Indeed, could we sign under this declaration today? The fall of the Christian (religious) life in general has been noted and, consequently, the fall of the religious orders' life, as well. We all feel the drastic decrease in vocations! Who knows if, in our case, this is not a result of "losing God's blessing" because of not living by Fr. Papczyński's spirit in this aspect, aside from other generally felt factors?

I believe that daily spiritual reflection, lasting half an hour and best conducted communally, is the vital element of the religious life. Of course, this also may be omitted! "Wise is the man who grew to know people. But far wiser is

² *IC*, p. 769.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 629.

⁴ *T II*, 15.

⁵ Bł. Stanisław Papczyński, *Praecepta*, 5, in: same author, *Pisma zebrane*, p. 1507.

the man who grew to know himself.” One of our confrere once wrote this. He recently left our Congregation and the priesthood. Is it true that he explored all of the options offered by religious observance in order to get to know himself while he was in our Congregation? One of the main means of getting to know oneself is through meditation, when one comes in all truth before God.

The element of forgiveness. Many have left the Congregation or are breaking up religious or parish communities because they cannot forgive; the confreres cannot mutually forgive: “Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned. Holiness increases the capacity for conversion, for repentance, for willingness to start again and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness.”⁶ And in this spirit of reconciliation, our Founder ought to be an inspiration for each one of us. Indeed, how many had he himself to forgive?!

In his Doctoral thesis, Fr. A. Pakuła said that one of the features of Fr. Papeczyński’s spirituality was his belief in love and forgiveness. In this very spirit, the First Chapter of the Congregation was celebrated in 1685; and the General Chapter of 1725 established an annual communal act of forgiveness: *deprecatio mutua*. Wouldn’t it be worthwhile to get this practice back? Maybe, we can appoint a date for this (in a future issue of our MIC Calendar)? Who is to know, if this won’t be an opportunity to rebuild bridges and to melt a lot of ice of aversion which now exists between us?

ANDRZEJ SZOSTEK, MIC

Poland, Lublin, General Councilor, Professor at CUL

I’ve got the reflexes of a chess-player who plays by correspondence, and I don’t always recognize the importance of things instantaneously. Maybe, within five-years, my reflections with regard to the beatification will be more mature. In any case, all that I’m going to say now, in the following five parts, would be of a somewhat provisory and cautious character.

1. To me, Fr. Stanislaus’s beatification is not only an opportunity to recall his idea of the Congregation that he founded, but also—and maybe even more—a chance to bring his way of striving for sanctity closer. This is not the sanctity of a Stoic, pagan character, some sort of showing off one’s moral fitness. This is a humble, simple trust in the Mother of God, a fervent meditation on Christ’s Passion. And let’s see what an unusual person this little boy had finally become, this stubborn and frequently troublesome confrere from the times of the Piarists!

⁶ Benedict XVI, General audience on January 1, 2007.

There is something extraordinary in what Blessed Stanislaus reminds us of: that the greatest work we have to do in this world is not churches or institutions, but ourselves, because Our Lord God is concerned with us above all.

2. I'd like to go back to what Fr. Andrzej Pakuła said, although I did not consult him—or anybody else, for this matter—while preparing this little speech. I have in mind the matter of strengthening the Congregation because of our Founder's beatification. May more and more of our Congregation's members be beatified and canonized, but the step that the Church made now in the case of our Founder has a special meaning. This is a confirmation—and a confirmation given in our day—that the Holy Spirit wants the Congregation of Marian Fathers to go on. We believe that in Fr. Stanislaus's times, our Congregation was consistent with Divine inspiration and that the Church needed it throughout the past 300 years. But in the present beatification, I see the sign that it is still important and may be valuable now also, on the threshold of the 21st century, and that our Lord God cares for us, the Marians.

3. However, we have to deal with the co-relation between Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George, and we must clearly formulate this problem because the moment of the beatification of our Congregation's Founder coincides with the Jubilee of Renewal. We must not patch up this problem with easy phrases and assurances that in fact it has always been the same Congregation; nor shall we use easy comparisons saying that the orientation of the Marians today is taken from Father Renovator. This is far too important a problem—and the beatification has made it even more timely—than to be dealt with in hasty, and thus superficial, inaccurate phrases, however skillfully composed they may be. Let us please differentiate between skillfully composed formulas and the profound understanding and integration of sorts within the Congregation of the spirituality of our two Blessed Fathers whom we want to keep in our hearts.

4. It is necessary to note that there are three types of apostolic congregations. To oversimplify, it can be said that some congregations, like the Divine Word Fathers or the Salesians, have a clearly defined goal: e.g., the missions or work with the youth. Others, like the Jesuits—who were the model community according to Blessed George Matulewicz—are communities whose specifics is not so much the ministry that they run, as rather the manner and means in which these communities live within the Church and serve Christ and the Church. I'm saying this so that we may fully realize that some ministries—like running the shrines and spreading The Divine Mercy Message—are closer to us today than they ever were before, and that they justify our new missionary initiatives at least for the

fact of being closely related to the mystery of The Divine Mercy. Those are good works: among the poor, establishing hospices, selecting the missionary posts in a manner indicating that they haven't been chosen for commercially-material reasons. However, I would like to warn against an exceedingly narrow understanding of the tasks that we are to carry out in the Church. Even the Salesians or the Divine Word Fathers have scholars—I beg your pardon for promoting my own field—who do not participate in the missions or work with the youth, but who nevertheless have a sense of their work being needed for the completion of the main task and attaining specific goals. Even more so, in our own midst, we must have a wide outlook on matters and know how to accept the variety of tasks that we undertake; however, it must be always done with a conscious emphasis on our character more than on our concrete works that are supposed to define us or by which we are supposed to be identified.

5. We are still feeling this pain—and I, in Lublin, may be feeling it even more than others—of the lack of vocations, of the crisis of vocations, which is also a sign for us, a warning sign. I never believed that the number of vocations depended only on skillfully conducted actions of a gifted Vocations Director. It is a question of our witness. Thus, we are going back to the point that I started from: on the one hand, this is a sign of the Church who wants us to be here; on the other, it is a warning sign saying that we need a certain youthfulness. This youthfulness, however, is born out of our dedication to Christ. Therefore, our focus must be first on what kind of the Religious we are. If we are convincing, true witnesses to Jesus Christ, then there will be people who will follow us and go along.

RYSZARD WOJCIECHOWSKI, MIC

Czech Republic, Brumov-Bylnice, Vicariate Superior

I belong to the generation of the Marians-orphans raised without a father, as Fr. Paweł Naumowicz said. We all got to know Fr. Stanislaus to a certain obligatory extent, but his person remained distant and unattractive. I began to discover the depth and importance of Father Founder's person before and after the beatification. We read various books, materials, and conferences for the days of recollection which had been prepared for this occasion. I am grateful to the Lord God for all of these discoveries. They let us note and experience a father in the person of our Founder. Learning about Fr. Stanislaus, and striving to lead a life like his doesn't end with the beatification. For me, the beatification is just the beginning. Everyday, I learn how to be a son of Fr. Stanislaus, although this does not come easily either in my personal or in my communal life.

Through our charism, we more deeply understood that our mission is to promote the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. This mission takes on a special meaning in the light of protecting the unborn. There are many abortions in the Czech Republic; even women from Poland come there to have it done. Another thing, of which we've become more aware in our Vicariate, is the prayer for the dead. We preside at many funerals. People die unprepared. Even baptized people often can become non-believers. They die without the sacraments. They don't feel the need to confess before dying. For this reason, we the Marianists, become aware of the need to pray for the dead, as well as to prepare people for death. The Czech Republic is an extremely secularized country. For this reason, people push death aside; they don't want to talk about it. We see the need to prepare people for death, to speak about it, as well as to pray for the dead.

Jan Graubner, the Archbishop of Olomunec, participated in the beatification festivities in Licheń. When I visited him at his residence after the beatification, he expressed a great joy from the fact that he could be part of this event. At some point, he asked me: Ryszard, are you glad to be a Marian? This question surprised me greatly. I said "yes" without even thinking, but on my way back home I started to think it over and still do. I try to give an answer to this question with my whole life.

MACIEJ ZACHARA, MIC

Poland, Lublin, Professor at the Marian Seminary

My direct involvement in the beatification consisted in preparing and coordinating the liturgical matters. Honestly, it meant a great deal of effort and stress for me. Later, I had to "put these matters behind" in order to be able to embrace and to reflect on the importance of this event. I can also say that when I joined the Congregation, I did not observe any special regard for Fr. Papczyński as a person of importance. I'm not saying that out of rancor, just stating that far greater interest was given to Blessed George, while Fr. Founder was treated as a venerable relic from the past, but nobody of importance today.

I see that the beatification helped me and many others to discover the person of our Founder as someone very important. A few months before the beatification, a one-day retreat session was held in Licheń by Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, during which several conferences on a variety of topics about Fr. Stanislaus were delivered. The preparation of the conferences was assigned to a group of about 10 confreres, including me. At the closing of the retreat, we shared our impres-

sions and we probably all noticed with joyful surprise that we had found a living person in Fr. Papczyński, a witness to Jesus Christ, a witness to faith. The story of his life, his witness to Jesus Christ has an important meaning to us today. This is how I see the first fruit of the beatification.

The second matter is my satisfaction from belonging to a community, like Fr. Ryszard Wojciechowski spoke about earlier. I notice that this topic has recently come up more often in our midst. On various occasions, we ask ourselves about the unity in our Congregation as a whole, and about its unity in its individual communities; we also discuss the quality of our mutual relations. It is very significant that Fr. Founder's elevation to the altars prompted these kinds of questions, because it is a matter of our identification with the Congregation. I want to say that my sense of belonging to the Congregation definitely increased since the beatification.

Also, I noticed that the beatification promotes a reflection on our fundamental charism—the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, not only and not primarily in its devotional, but in its eschatological aspect. The Immaculate Conception is the hallmark of the new life in Christ, which is strongly connected to my baptismal and religious consecration. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is a sign calling me to ongoing conversion.

PĀVILS ZEĪLA, MIC

Latvia, Rēzekne, Provincial Superior

What did Fr. Stanislaus's beatification bring to the Latvian Province and to each one of us? We talked about it after reflecting on one of the conferences. We found that each of us had lived out the beatification in his individual way. Our elders, who are nearing their 90th birthdays, said that the beatification did not give them much because they've heard it all in the novitiate already, at which time Fr. Benedict Škrinda acquainted us in detail with Fr. Papczyński's life, his trials, and his striving for holiness. Our elders always believed Fr. Papczyński to be holy and that it was only the Church that had delayed the official beatification, for unknown reasons. On the other hand, our younger generation, myself included, although I'm over 60, did not hear a lot about Fr. Papczyński, his life and work. It was as if the beatification opened our eyes to the fact that we are in possession of a great treasure. We read all of the available printed materials. The participation in the beatification ceremonies has become a great experience for us, the Latvians. Maybe, some of us, who were directly involved in the preparations of this event, had not lived it out as strongly as we should have. We arrived

in Licheń to see with our own eyes, our Father Founder elevated to the glory of the altars and to hear for ourselves the Holy Father's Legate announcing that our Founder was given the title of Blessed.

Now we talk a lot in our parishes about Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński. His relics are surrounded with great devotion. Many people come to light a candle for the deceased.

And God granted us another great joy through the intercession of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, as we all believe. Our house in Chicago has been closed because our mission for the Latvians there was fulfilled. We needed another house in Latvia, for we had to leave the post in Riga. We believe that thanks to the intercession of Blessed Stanislaus, the Bishop of Rēzekne offered us a beautiful post in Daugavpils: a new parish and an unfinished church. We extend our gratitude to Father General for installing a house under the title of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński there. There is a large field of work, many young people and schools. We hope that Blessed Stanislaus will help us to find vocations in our new parish in Daugavpils.

JAN MIKOŁAJ ROKOSZ, MIC
General Superior, Italy

While participating in the preparations for the beatification, I witnessed Divine Providence fulfilling its plan to make a marvelous event out of the solemnity of the elevation to the honors of the altar of its faithful Servant, who had suffered a great deal of humiliation and adversity for the greater glory of God during his lifetime. We've been asking ourselves this question: why is this grace of the beatification being granted to our generation, while so many previous generations had been anxiously awaiting it? What is it that God wants to tell us through this gift? I was convinced that it was a particular *kaïros* for the Congregation, according to the standard of our history. The way that we have been living it out seems to confirm this idea. The commitment of the people in charge of organizing the beatification—both the Marians and our lay friends and associates—as well as the unity and the understanding among us have become an exceptional fraternal and spiritual experience. For probably the first time in the history of our renewed Congregation, the worldwide Marian community has united around Father Founder who had remained in the shadows since 1909 as a little-known and controversial figure. The beatification was a moment of communion with our Father Founder and with all of the Marians, both living and deceased, beginning with Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz and with the Blessed Martyrs of Rosica.

Father Founder's beatification "forced" us, as it were, to quickly publish his works in Polish, to first learn about his life and spirituality, and then about the sources and history of our Congregation, especially from before its renovation, which was not a well-known part of our history. The most significant fragments of the Founder's writings have also been published in English, Portuguese and Spanish. Throughout the entire pre-beatification year, Father Founder was speaking to each one of us through his writings, which were read daily before meals and on the days of recollection. I remember our delight, bewilderment and shock. A person, who was completely different from the one existing in our minds, emerged from his written works and biography, along with a clear vision of our Congregation's beginnings. During these readings, some of the fragments which I had already known spoke to us in a more powerful manner as if a special light of the Holy Spirit was shining on the words of our Founder. I did not believe my eyes when I was looking at the sources of our history: some which I had forgotten, and others which had been previously unavailable to us. We retrieved a Father and a starting place, out of which the vocation of each one of us had come.

In his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, Fr. Papczyński writes: "God's vision, carved out in my soul, concerning the foundation of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, (...) compelled me to its aim. (...) I was searching for ways to set up a Society of the Immaculate Conception, already formed in my mind by the Divine Spirit" (*Lest You Remain Without Work in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 103). Our beginnings are clearly defined and certain. We did not come into being as a result of human design. The vision of the Congregation was formed in the mind and heart of our Founder by the Holy Spirit. These are our roots and the source of our life. This is the foundation of our charism and the sound tradition of the Order. Father Stanislaus risked everything and dedicated his entire life to the fulfillment of this vision, and he has been declared Blessed... This vision is also carved in the soul of every Marian, and in my own soul, as well. I must seek the Congregation's spirituality and charism primarily in the Founder's original experience, but I also have to seek it within myself, in the experience of my own life. Just as I once read through all of the documents of the Church, now I read with an intensified curiosity all of the Founder's writings about his vision for our community.

We are the *Congregation of the Immaculate Conception (Oblatio, 2)*. We are to "promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God" (*Norma vitae*, I, 2). Out of a *Divine inspiration*, Father Founder put on the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (*Testament II*, 3). For the Marians, the heart of the Holy Spirit's vision is the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. The Founder does not speak

of Mary, the Immaculately Conceived one, but of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God in all instances of key importance to us. Comprehension of this subtle yet essential difference became the turning point in my understanding of the essence of our Congregation's spirituality and charism. There are many male congregations of the Immaculate Mother of God, but, as far as I know, only one of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, the goal of which is to promote this salvific mystery: the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. By the power of God, through the work of Fr. Papczyński, we've been called within the Church to become the custodians of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God and of the prayer for the deceased. What it means in practice may very well be the most important question to which the Marians have yet to find an answer after the beatification of our Founder.

How little we've been aware of who we are and what the Immaculate Conception means is shown by the following fact. During the 1995 Provincial Convention in Poland someone made a motion to bring back Fr. Papczyński's invocation: *May the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception be our salvation and our protection* [in Polish: *salvation—not health—note of the translator*], we found it to be theologically incorrect, because Mary cannot be anybody's salvation. We did not see that this brief prayer is not related to the person of Mary, but to the salvific action of God in her life, which is the Immaculate Conception. May God, who redeemed Mary so marvelously and completely outside of her merits, come to our assistance because His gratuitous grace is our only hope.

It was only the beatification of Fr. Stanislaus that caused the mystery of the Immaculate Conception to become the topic of our extended discussions and theological studies, to fascinate us, to enliven our spiritual life and to urge us to preach it. The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God is an icon of the Divine Mercy in its pure form. Promoting the honor of the Immaculate Conception is, above all, to allow God to make us "holy and without blemish" (Eph 1:4). To be an apostle of the Immaculate Conception, is to proclaim to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Good News about living God's love and mercy and to show unselfish love and mercy for the living and the deceased.

The Immaculate Conception arranges all the elements of our charism into one, logical unity. These elements had either been detached or lost throughout our difficult history, including even those that have been the topic of some disputes. To me, the Immaculate Conception has become a key for understanding Mary and her role in the spirituality of the Marians. Seen "as the perfect work of God, the best fruit of Christian redemption" (C 117), Mary is a model for us and a most efficacious Mother and Advocate. Mary is the masterpiece of the Most Holy Trinity. When I give honor to Mary, I worship God the Father, the Son and

the Holy Spirit. I knew these truths before, but now they began to touch my mind and heart in a more profound manner.

If our originality within the Church is best defined by the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, then we probably are entitled to speak about the Marian school of spirituality of the Immaculate Conception.

Historical facts have put an end to the thesis that the “white” Marians were doomed to die out anyway because of their controversial Founder and the vague charisma, even if the annihilation of religious orders would have never taken place (by order of the Czar after the January Uprising in 1863). In fact, after many years of crises, a very energetic community working in various countries and cultures had emerged out of the small, little-known and nearly eremitic Order. The Marians reached the peak of their growth in 1786, when they prepared the new Constitutions, which more accurately reflected the spirit, as well as the charismatic and apostolic ideals of Fr. Papeczyński. According to the new laws, the Marians were to work “not only within the Kingdom of Poland, but also in other Christian countries (...), villages and towns in order to guide all people of different walks of life, condition, and intelligence on the road to salvation.” Their other task was to “provide education to the youth in such locations where there was an opportunity for it.” At that time, the Congregation had 26 missionaries whose only occupation was to run missions, retreats, and to assist the local pastors. In some dioceses, the Marians were regarded as the best preachers and retreat masters. In cooperation with the National Education Committee, the Marians had set up schools and hospitals for the sick and the poor at each of their monasteries. Marian-run parishes were exemplary and attracted the faithful from distant parts. At least 12 Marians held the office of theologian and chaplain at the aristocratic courts in the Commonwealth of Poland. Among the Marians, there were men of art and culture. The Order had many candidates who were studying in the novitiate and the seminary. The Roman house provided an opportunity for studies on the highest possible level. It seemed that an outstanding period of growth was in store for the Order. Unfortunately, the religious way of life was then forbidden wherever the Marians served.

God did not allow the Order which He had raised up to carry out a specific mission in the Church to perish. Blessed George rescued the Marians from extinction and creatively implemented the ideals of Father Founder and the “white” Marians.

It is fascinating to see the hand of God working in the soul of Father Renovator who received the comprehension and love for the essence of the Marian vocation on the path of mystical experiences. Father Renovator gave voice to this in his “Instructions” and “Journal.” On January 13, 1911, he wrote: “I thank you,

Lord, for having given me such extraordinary feelings of love for the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the past I found this prayer difficult. But now, how sweet it is to fall at her feet and to immerse myself in prayer! Overwhelmed by these feelings of incomparable sweetness, my soul swoons and my body is filled with wondrous, incomprehensible, and inexpressible tremors. It is like the feeling I had when I pressed the holy cross to my heart” (*Journal*, p. 60). Christ’s cross and the paschal mystery, as well as the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, are Fr. Papczyński’s fundamental experiences.

Led by Blessed George, the first Marians of the renewed Congregation made efforts to reopen Fr. Stanislaus’s beatification process, to safeguard his tomb and the Church of Our Lord’s Cenacle, as well as to research the history and traditions of the “white” Marians. The more attentively we study the legacy of Fr. Founder and of Blessed George, the better we perceive the charismatic continuity and the identity of spirit. The “white” Marians did not leave us [organizational] structures, customs, or possessions, instead they left us something far more important: the vision which the Holy Spirit first imprinted on the soul of Fr. Founder and then on the soul of every Marian. Unfortunately, the specific circumstances of our renewal and other priorities of the Congregation led to the fact that this vision wasn’t fully defined in the Constitutions of the renewed Congregation and didn’t become the widespread daily experience of the Marians.

Perhaps, the most important goal of Fr. Stanislaus’s beatification is to urge us to discover the entire truth about our vocation and mission in the Church and the world. Thanks to the Founder’s beatification, we have retrieved a Father and a source out of which flows the vocation of each one of us. This is yet another sign of God’s love and mercy for the Congregation, a sign that calls for our response.

**DEBATE
AND CLOSING OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

Debate and Vote on the Motion in Regard to the Office and Mass for the Dead¹

At the closing of the debate on what must be done to have the founding charism shine out with a new strength, the Superior General, Fr. Jan M. Rokosz, MIC, proposed the following question to the Convention participants:

Is it worthwhile to bring back the continuing recitation of the Office of the Dead as an expression of our charism? The idea is not to go back to a 200-year old practice, but rather to acquire from the Apostolic See a privilege for the Marians worldwide to recite the Officium defunctorum weekly on a given day (e.g. Monday or other), aside from the obligatory memorials prescribed for the day. The goal is to undertake an ongoing communal cause of praying for the dead. We must decide if this kind of practice would be obligatory or ad libitum, according to the decision of individual Provinces, house communities, and confreres. It is not certain if the Congregation for Divine Worship would be willing to grant this privilege.

Giving the background for this motion, Father General drew our attention to the fact that many proposals were made in the Convention to return to the original Congregation's charism. Some keynote speakers, demonstrating the essential elements of this charism, also pointed out the need to amend our Constitutions so that they would better reflect our spirituality and mission. It was primarily a matter of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, but also—prayer for the dead. At the same time, many confreres emphasized that the most important needs are changes in our attitude and living authentically according to the charism. For this reason, Father General believes that a return to some sort of a regular, continuous practice of reciting the *Officium defunctorum* by the entire community may become a significant step towards a greater faithfulness to our original mission.

¹ This is the report on just one part of the debate followed by a vote on a concrete motion. Statements made in regard to other matters were aimed at presenting the opinions of the Convention members for later use by the General Government. Among discussed topics were: possible amendment to our Constitutions to better express the Marian charism, especially defining the spreading of the cult of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM as one of the Congregation's particular goals (such a statement is absent, cf. C 3, 18); possible return of the white habit and grounds for holding a poll among the confreres in regard to this problem; means of enlivening the ongoing formation and renewal of the religious spirit.

Father General reminded all that our Founder instructed the Marians to recite daily the *Officium defunctorum* already in his *Norma vitae* (NV, VI, 2.4). In fact, until the renovation of our Congregation, the Marians faithfully carried out this practice, even though it took on various forms. Appeals for the daily recitation of the *Officium defunctorum* may be found in every law published before the time of the renewal (1687, 1694, 1723, 1786). What this practice looked like in real life is illustrated by e.g., the book of ceremonies *Horologium Marianum* and the prayerbook entitled *Rahelhet manual*.

As we all know, in his first project of the Constitutions, Fr. Renovator left out the eschatological element of our charism. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, concerned for the preservation of the Congregation's charismatic continuity, brought back the prayer for the dead as one of our particular goals. At that point, only a general encouragement was given and no provisions were made as to any regular or communal practices of prayer for the dead. Although in time, Blessed George began to encourage the Marians in his instructions actively to pray for the dead and various attempts were made in the following years to revive this practice, nevertheless, until the present day, the Congregation does not have a uniform regular communal practice of prayerfully supporting the deceased. The Superior General expressed his conviction that now, after the Founder's beatification, it is necessary to seriously consider the regular practice of a designated part of the *Officium defunctorum*.

Father Zbigniew Piłat was the first to take the floor in the debate. He expressed his doubts as to the need of petitioning the Apostolic See in this matter, promoting instead the idea of issuing an appropriate decree obligating the entire community to carry out certain practices as defined by law. Father Andrzej Pakuła stated that, before going to a vote, it was necessary to make the motion more precise by appointing the day on which the *Officium* would be recited. Father Vytautas Briilius asked if the potential privilege could be extended to the laity among whom we minister. Several people in the room spontaneously supported this proposal. Father Briilius continued by saying that this project would have far lesser grounds if it was to include the Marians alone; however, if we were to pray along with the faithful (e.g., Marian Helpers) then it would make greater sense. Father Basileu Pires was against making the breviary prayer for the deceased an obligatory norm for the Congregation. Father Wojciech Jasiński took the contrary position. He also said that our confreres in England pray for the deceased every Tuesday. This idea was born in one of the house meetings and was accepted as a means of fulfilling our eschatological charism. Father Marek Szczepaniak motioned to heighten the communal sense of responsibility for supporting the departed. In his opinion, the Directory must state that individual Provinces are allowed to define by their Statutes a day on which they would recite the *Officium* in order to avoid a mandatorily

appointed day, which may be inconvenient. He also expressed a concern as to the individual communities recognizing the vote of the Convention participants as final, when it is no more than a consultative vote. In Fr. Szczepaniak's opinion, it would be best to leave this matter to the next General Chapter's decision. Father Maciej Zachara said that, in his opinion, obtaining an appropriate privilege from the Apostolic See would be worthwhile, because it would present a perfect argument for all those who treat liturgical rubrics in a very rigorist manner; it may be also seen as an additional approval from the Church. Father Marian Pisarzak was of the opinion that the contents of our petition to the Congregation ought to be extended; a potential privilege ought to embrace also the Mass celebrated on a given day along with the obligatory memorial of the day. Thus, the petition to the Holy See would include three matters: 1. Office for the Dead; 2. Holy Mass according to the formula for the deceased; 3. the possibility to extend the privilege to our ministry—[to involve] the participation of the faithful in the Marian churches. He also added that Tuesday seems to be the most appropriate day, since Monday—as a day following Sunday—usually gathers a lesser number of people; and all other days already have their specifics be they Marian, or vocational, or some other—depending on the liturgical season.

When the debate was concluded, the Superior General stated that the vote on this matter would be only consultative for the General Government's use and that it would be an indication as to whether or not a petition for the privilege ought to be sent to the Holy See before the General Chapter, which is supposed to finally settle the matter. Without a prior suggestion or decision from the Congregation, the General Chapter would not be able to make a binding decision. Thus, Father General asked the following question:

“Who is for the motion to introduce the practice of reciting the Office of the Dead and to celebrate Holy Mass according to the formula for the deceased once a week, independently from being obligatory, prescribed by the liturgical calendar, memorials for the dead in the entire Congregation? And consequently, should the Superior General petition the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments with a request for granting the appropriate privileges? Concrete regulations in this matter would be established later by the General Chapter.”

Twenty eight members of the General Convention participated in the voting. The result was: 20 in favor and eight against.

Father General declared that, upon obtaining the General Council's consent, he would first consult the Congregation about the possibility of obtaining such a privilege, and then, in case of a favorable opinion, he would send an appropriate letter to the Apostolic See.

Recorded by *Rafał Zalewski, MIC*

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General

Word at the Closing

When the Holy Father, Benedict XVI made a decision about the long-awaited beatification of Father Stanislaus Papczyński, we all knew that for us, the Marians, it would be a very important event. However, it was difficult to predict that it would plant so very many positive seeds in our community. Along with its proceedings, debates, and giving witness, our present Convention positively proved it.

Once again, we came to realize that our Fr. Founder's beatification was a sign of God's special grace for our community. The beatification brought the person of Blessed Stanislaus closer not only to our Congregation—showing him to be our father and guide, but also to Christians today, revealing him as an illustrious 17th-century figure in the Church.

Many confreres emphasized that since the renewal of our Congregation, interest in the person and the spirituality of Father Founder faded into the background. In addition, we were not paying sufficient attention to the fundamental elements of the mission, for which our Congregation had been established. The beatification contributed to bringing Fr. Papczyński back to his rightful place in our community.

A charism left by the founder lies at the foundation of every religious institute. Reading our founding charism afresh in the contest of modern-day challenges is one of the fundamental criteria of fidelity to every institute's vocation; it is the condition for its vitality and growth. The founding charism must be constantly re-read and interpreted, but never changed or depleted.

Many confreres deepened their *identitas* in regard to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM. It has been also noticed that we've treated quite marginally what was supposed to be the most important special goal of our Congregation—namely, spreading honor to the Immaculate Conception of the BVM. And it is little wonder, seeing that paragraph 2 of our Constitutions, speaking of our Congregation's special mission, gives no details as to spreading honor to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. We must pay more attention to this special event in the life of our Blessed Mother since it contains an important message for our spiritual life and apostolate. Many confreres gave

witness that the study and contemplation of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God have become their source of life. The fact that we are one of the two male religious institutes in the Church dedicated to spreading this mystery puts a great obligation on us.

Many confreres voiced their great desire to practice *suffragium defunctorum*—to pray and intercede on behalf of the departed—not only as one of many pious practices, but as an essential element of our charism; it has been present since the inception of our Congregation. We must continue our reflection on the mystery of The Divine Mercy in our charism. The Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother is a wonderful fruit of this mystery. Also, the prayer for the deceased, as a form of showing mercy to those who are no longer able to do anything for themselves and immersing them in the mercy of God, inscribes itself perfectly into this great mystery.

Our key-note speakers presented a battery of proposals to provide a fuller definition of our charism in the Constitutions. Naturally, every proposal requires a profound examination. It is possible that we'll need to think about revising our Constitutions in the future. However, the opinion that outweighed other concerns was that of the utmost importance to us is changing our attitude and living more closely to our charism on a daily basis. Thus, it is necessary to study our charism more deeply, to contemplate and to live by it, keeping our eyes open to the main problems of the present day. Perhaps, only the ensuing changes in our lifestyle will clarify for us the necessity and direction of possible amendments to our Constitutions. However, it would be a serious negligence on our part, if we were to totally forego the verification of our Constitutions in the light of the post-beatification and post-Jubilee “discoveries.” I'm sure that our next General Chapter will take a stand in this matter since the Chapter alone has the authority to make those kinds of decisions, being the Congregation's highest legislative body.

During the Convention, we've discussed various forms of our already existing works and causes which need revival, and the new ones to be taken on.

The Convention decided that the Superior General should petition the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to grant a special privilege for the Marians to recite on one particular day of the week (e.g., Monday or Tuesday), regardless of any other obligatory memorials of the day, the entire *Office of the Dead* from the Liturgy of the Hours instead of the Office prescribed for that day, as well as to celebrate Holy Mass according to the formula for the deceased in their monasteries, parishes, and other pastoral centers in their care. This would establish a connection to the Marian tradition of the daily recitation of the *Office of the Dead*, which is more than 200 years old. I will soon consult with the Congregation of Divine Worship as to our chances of being granted this privilege.

A conviction, shared by many, emerged from our debates that an ungrounded juxtaposition between Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George, present at certain times in our history, has been overcome in the course of our Founder's beatification and the 100th anniversary of renewal. Father Matulewicz never believed himself to be the Founder of a new congregation. Instead, he considered his most important task in life to save the Marian Order. Blessed George's exceptional role consisted in rescuing Fr. Papczyński's work in the Church and prophetically interpreting the Congregation's mission in the light of the existing signs of the times. As we more profoundly study the persons and legacy of faith of our Father Founder and Father Renovator, the better we see the charismatic continuity, unity, and the same spirit, which makes Fr. Stanislaus's charism shine ever stronger when it is being read through the prism of Blessed George's thought and work. During our historical and theological symposium on the 100th anniversary of our Congregation's renewal, we will reflect on Blessed George's contribution to the Marian charism.

According to some members of the Congregation, the time has come to bring back the white habit. The debate, which was quite emotional, proved how highly sensitive and important this matter is. It was pointed out that the wish of the confreres who desire to wear the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, to which the Marians were obligated by their Father Founder, cannot be belittled. In the ensuing debate on this topic, there were voices definitely opposing the idea of returning to the white habits. Also, a concern was expressed that the re-introduction of the habit creates the risk of an unnecessary rift within the Congregation and may cause our religious life to come down to merely an external sign. It was further argued that the essence of the religious life lies in witnessing through the power of the spirit, to which Blessed George encourages us; in the light of this fact, the matter of a habit becomes secondary.

However, the matter of our attire will definitely be a topic of discussion at the future Chapters, because certain confreres have already submitted appropriate proposals or are planning to do so soon.

This Convention demonstrated a great need that exists in the Congregation for a profound, ongoing reflection on the life and charism of our Founder and his timeliness for the modern world. It is to be followed by our finding a response to the question: how faithful are we to our Father Founder's legacy and to our patrimony?

The availability of an ever growing number of source materials and historical works on the period in our history from the founding until the renovation and afterwards, is greatly facilitating this reflection, although some topics still require study and deliberation. It seems that there is still no comprehensive works about the shaping of our charism and the manner in which it was understood by

our confreres, especially before the renovation. While we possess a number of materials about assisting the deceased by the Marians of old, we have very few sources telling us how our predecessors were spreading the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and what it meant to them.

As part of the preparations for the General Chapter in 2011, I asked Fr. Janusz Kumala to produce, in cooperation with the Committee on the Charism that he chairs, a document called *Instrumentum laboris* on the topic: "The Charism of the Congregation of Marian Fathers and its timeliness for the modern world." I have great hopes for this document. I would like it to provide a synthesis of our charism as we understand it now, after the beatification of our Founder and the jubilee of the renewal.

Our reflection on the charism will make sense only if it leads us to a greater faithfulness to Jesus and the Gospel and to the essential elements of the religious life, such as the religious vows, the communal life, prayer, and asceticism. It is exactly by following Jesus Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels that consecrated persons make a more fruitful and anticipated contribution to the life of the Church. Thus, our apostolate will be fruitful only when it is not carried out at the expense of the essential elements of the religious life. Concentrating on our charism, let us keep in mind that a radical following of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the religious life, regardless of one's order (be it Marian, Jesuit, Dominican, etc.). If we were to somehow omit this aspect of the religious life, then our study of a particular charism won't bring about any genuine renewal.

It is true that the beatification does not automatically resolve all of the Congregation's problems or contribute to an instantaneous growth in vocations. However, after this Convention, I grow more and more convinced that it has been a great gift to us. Discerning this gift may change the image of our Congregation. We carry the responsibility before God and the Church of accepting this gift in its entirety. This responsibility raises concerns and anxiety. However, the hope prevails that God will come to our rescue, in spite of our ineptitude. Our hope also lies in Mary, the Immaculately Conceived, who is our Mother and Patroness.

I thank all of you for coming, for giving your conferences, for holding honest debates, and for creating this wonderful fraternal atmosphere.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

SUPPLEMENT

Vatican, December 5, 2008

CONGREGATION
FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Message to the General Convention

Most Reverend Father:¹

On the approaching General Convention that will close the Year of Thanksgiving for the beatification of your Founder, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, I would like to assure you, along with all the Major Superiors and representatives from various communities of your worldwide Congregation, of our spiritual participation in this important event.

We unite with you in giving praise and thanks to the Most Holy Trinity and we express our gratitude to the Church for the faithful and valuable apostolate, which your community has been carrying on for more than 300 years since its inception and particularly during the past century, which endorsed the renewal of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

Faithful to the charism of your Blessed Founder, continue spreading devotion to Mary Immaculate through your ministry of instructing the youth in schools and other institutions, where you carry out your apostolate. Therefore, it is an important reason to thank Our Lord in a special way. In the course of its history, your Congregation has lived through difficult times: political circumstances and regimes, opposed to faith and religion, which forced you to go underground; and when the end seemed imminent, Divine Providence gave you a new impulse and with blossoming vocations, your apostolate took on a new vitality.

Thus, look with trust into your future and believe that the Lord, who guided you through so many events, will continue to support you with His gift of good and numerous vocations for the continuation of your ministry full of merit for the Church.

¹ The message is addressed to the Superior General, Fr. Jan Mikołaj Rokosz, MIC.

May the Immaculate Virgin, the Star of Evangelization and your Blessed Father Founder accompany you on your road to holiness and grace, endowing all of you with faithfulness and perseverance so that you may continue to give witness to the beauty of following Christ and belonging to the Church before the modern world.

I am sending to all my heartfelt greetings and fraternal blessing in Christ Jesus.

† *Gianfranco A. Gardin, OFMConv*
Archbishop Secretary

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General

HOMILY

Opening of the General Convention

December 4, 2008

Today—the day we open our General Convention—the Church remembers Saint John of Damascus, Doctor of the Eastern Church. He was particularly credited with protecting the icons. Saint John Damascene put forward a thesis that it was possible, thanks to an intimate unity with God, to “write” an icon, which would not only show Jesus Christ but also, in a sense, make Him present as if in sacramental way. Just as it is possible to “write” an icon that makes manifest something of the divinity, thus—following St. John Damascene’s thought—every Christian who lives by the grace of God becomes ever more the icon of God, makes God manifest. The grace is not a man-made mask but a reality, which changes and adorns us from within.

This truth is confirmed by the lives of many saints. Look at the wrinkled and tired face of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. It was not beautiful in human terms, yet in it, people discerned something of the image of God. They could see that the sacrificial attitude of this good nun was not a sham. In this sacrificial attitude and in Mother Theresa’s smile, people saw the reflection of God. Similarly, people who met John Paul II perceived in him the beauty, goodness, and love of God. Also, thinking about our holy men: Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński and Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, we must realize that people recognized God’s power in them. Through the unrest and moral deprivation of the 17th century (Blessed Stanislaus’s lifetime) or on the threshold of the 20th century with its exposure to atheistic propaganda (Blessed George’s lifetime), people seeking spiritual guidance recognized God’s image in our holy men. God’s reflection in them was so powerful, that it awoke in many a readiness to dedicate their lives to the service of the Lord in this tiny little community, which was the Marian Congregation. For it was not certain that the community would survive and not disperse like some ephemera. There was no such certainty either at the time when our Congregation was founded or renovated. What is more: the chances of

success were nil. And yet, attracted by the true witness of our holy men's lives, which were based on their trust in God alone, the successors stepped forward because they could see the Lord working in them and their confidence in their action and their ministry, which flowed from the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is it that must happen in us so that we may be similarly marked by the light of God? Today's Gospel gives us an answer. "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Mt 7:24). These words sum up the Sermon on the Mount. We all know what it says: love your enemies, turn the other cheek, look at women without egotistic lust; it provides many evangelical counsels, which advise us to give to beggars, to share with the needy, not to turn away from the borrower! Isn't Jesus asking something in His Sermon on the Mount which cannot be fulfilled?

We'll find our answer in Jesus' appeal to pray: "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret" (Mt 6:7). And then, after each series of commandments, Jesus repeats as a refrain: "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Mt 6:4).

Above all, the Sermon on the Mount calls us to such a prayerful unity with God, in which our trust in the Heavenly Father is born. This makes us like Him. God, in whom we seek our foundation, will always give His grace. This turns the Sermon on the Mount, which would be impossible to fulfill on human terms, possible. In this way, we build our house, our life on rock, the rock which is Christ Himself, the living and omnipresent Savior, who sends His Spirit and revives the Church from within. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount does not horrify us with its impossibility because it supposes our conscientious relying on the power of God which is communicated to us daily, and not on our own powers. What seems impossible will become possible if only we will daily renew our act of faith. Through faith, we will create room for God's grace in our hearts. Only by being strong in God, will we become impervious to worldly influences. Such a change will come to pass in our hearts, that it will unveil something of the invisible God in us and through us, wherever we shall live and work.

Let us pray that our present Convention will help us to build our house on rock. Our house is firstly the life of each one of us. Our house is our Congregation, to which God has called us. Let us ask for the help of the Holy Spirit that we may heed and accept the word that God wishes to give us during this Convention. Let us desire to see those aspects in our own lives and in our Congregation, which we build by ourselves on sand. Let us ask the Lord to make the necessary changes in us, to transform our hearts, to give us strength so that we won't fear choosing what's difficult, as long as it conforms to our fidelity to Jesus and our charism. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven..." (Mt 7:21). We must not only talk about our charism, but live by

it in such a way, that everyone would become an icon of Christ; an original and unique icon showing Jesus Christ in a special way that only a Marian can create in the Church.

We call out to our Blessed Mother, Immaculately Conceived, in whom the power of the Holy Spirit was manifested, asking her to be our Mother and Mistress. We also ask for Blessed Father Stanislaus's intercession so that we may know the vision, which the Holy Spirit impressed in his soul when he was founding our Congregation. We also call for Blessed George's support in our endeavor to discover what we are and how we must serve Christ and the Church.

Jair Batista de Souza, MIC

Superior of The Divine Mercy Province in Brazil

HOMILY

December 5, 2008

“But a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard, and the orchard be regarded as a forest!” (Iz 29:17)

With these words of the prophet Isaiah, today’s Liturgy of the Word introduces us into one of the focal points of Advent’s spirituality: hope. According to the prophet, everything will change for the better: the whole of nature will become the scene and the manifestation of a world freed from pain. But this change will not come as a result of human endeavors alone. Nor will it be the fruit of well-thought out decisions and actions. This change, which will turn a desert into a garden, will occur through Divine action which transcends all human powers.

The same attitude of hope and trust is shown by the two blind men who came to Christ, as today’s passage from the Gospels tells us. They know that in human terms, their situation is hopeless. They are deeply convinced that Divine intervention is most needed in their lives, and for this reason, they do not stop pleading with Jesus, repeating persistently: “Have mercy on us.”

And yet, Christian hope is not a passive or only comfort-loving attitude towards life. It doesn’t mean that a person expects God to solve all his problems. The blind men from the Gospel must make an effort to come forward to meet the Lord. It is true that their strength is insufficient, but an effort on their part is fundamental for receiving the grace of their sight being restored.

Hope is something bigger than a feeling of confidence (or self-assurance) towards life. This is what they teach in self-motivation courses where a person is led to discover and to develop his abilities, which may sometimes be blocked by psychological factors.

Also, hope is something bigger than optimism which comes from positively dealing with problems. Because, to some degree, optimism is also a natural impulse; besides, it often proves to be deceptive.

Contrary to all this, Christian hope is the acceptance of reality without fleeing into psychological self-deception. It is based on faith that HE comes out to meet us and then, by working in our lives, HE leads us to the good, which we

cannot reach by ourselves, relying on our resources alone. In this way, a conviction is being born, which made St. Paul write to the Romans: “Hope does not disappoint” (5:5).

Someone who allows himself to be drawn by this kind of hope is already sharing in some way in the goods that await him. It is possible to say that hope is a prelude to possessing what seems to be an opportunity.

I believe that Divine Providence sends us these words in the context of our General Convention to help in our work and in our reflections, which we are going to face in the next few days. Thus far, we have been looking at our reality, noticing the various problems that we have had to deal with. The religious life—from a wide perspective as well as within our Congregation—is now undergoing a time of difficulties and crisis. We struggle with a shortage of material goods and decreasing vocations in many places. We struggle with difficulties in passing our spirituality and identity to the new generations. There is individualism that frequently impedes the realization of communal projects. These facts, and many others, seem to us difficult and even impossible to solve in human terms. All of this could steer us into discouragement, even into fear of the future. However, if we take a look at it from God’s perspective, thinking along these lines becomes totally unacceptable. Because the same Lord who acted in the past, demonstrating His might in the times of the Prophet Isaiah, the same Lord, who restored the eyesight of the blind men in the times of Jesus, is still working in our present times.

In our case, hope has its roots in the witness which is also given by our past. The Congregation was founded by Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński in very difficult times. It lived through times in which death seemed imminent, but it was revived and experienced a new growth thanks to the grace of God that inspired Blessed George; and now we are about to begin the celebrations of the Centennial Jubilee of its Renewal. These signs and many others allow us to see God’s actions manifested in our past and continuing to give us hope that the same Lord God will be still working in our times.

The Word of God invites us to renew our hope that our Congregation shall overcome difficulties, with which it struggles today, if such is the will of God, and that we will carry on the mission to which we were called by Divine Providence. Thus I believe that the voice of God, directed to each one of us, members of this General Convention, invites us to let Advent hope enter into our hearts and it will undoubtedly produce fruits in our reflections and decisions made during this meeting.

Stanisław Cardinal Rylko
Chairman of the Pontifical Council for the Laity
Vatican

HOMILY
Vespers on the Solemnity
of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM
December 7, 2008

I warmly greet the Superior General, Fr. Jan Mikołaj Rokosz, and all of the Marians who are going to celebrate their Congregation's annual feast tomorrow, as well as all esteemed guests who kindly gathered here to participate in our communal prayer, which introduces us into the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

The short reading from Vespers on the Second Sunday of Advent calls us to joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again: Rejoice! (...) The Lord is near" (Phil 4:4-5). The spiritual path of Advent is illuminated by the person of Mary Immaculate whom the Church shows us today as a beacon of light and joy. The Immaculate One—the new Eve—is a noble example of awaiting the Lord who comes to save us. In the Virgin from Nazareth, the prophecy from the Book of Genesis was fulfilled: "I will put enmity between you and the woman [said the Lord to the serpent], and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel" (Gen 3:15). Her Immaculate Conception opens a decisive stage in the history of the salvation of mankind, which reaches its culmination in the Incarnation of the Son of God and His Paschal Mystery. The "fullness of time" (Ga 4:4) has come. In Mary, God prepared for His Son a holy and most pure dwelling. In the bulla proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius IX thus wrote: "... the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin."² Mary of Nazareth represents the noble model of redeemed humanity. "Hail, Mary, full of grace! The

² Pius IX, Bulla *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854 (quote taken from "The Papal Encyclicals online).

Lord is with you (...). The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (cf. Lk 1:28.35). Amazing is the simplicity with which Mary responds to the extraordinary message of Angel Gabriel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to Your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary’s greatness is expressed in her complete, absolute obedience of faith. The Immaculate Virgin was the unconditional “yes” to God, to His will. This is why St. Anselm was able to say: “God, then, is the Father of the created world and Mary the Mother through whom all things were given new life. For, God begot the Son, through whom all things were made, and Mary gave birth to him as the Savior of the world.”³ This is the greatness of Mary Immaculate: She is indeed a shining beacon which God lit up for all of humanity.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM has a special significance for the Congregation of Marian Fathers because Mary Immaculate is at the heart of its original charism. Living out this memorial, the entire Congregation wants to rediscover again and again the fascinating beauty of this charism in order to receive it afresh with a renewed sense of gratitude and responsibility, to live by it more fully in their ministry for the Church’s mission. How could we not recall here the words of the Congregation’s Founder, Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński: “Oh my soul, (...) look today through a new, fresh, unseen Book—namely—the Most Holy Mother of God, the Book created by God Himself: written and ornamented. Can you possibly find anywhere else something that you would not have in Mary? Is it possible for someone else to give you more of what Mary has? This is a book of virtues and all perfection: it is divided into as many chapters, as there are virtues. Thus, leafing through this Book, apply yourself entirely to its study and pick flowers so very indispensable for your station.”⁴ This suggestion of your Founder is worthy recalling on the day of the closing of the Year of Thanksgiving for his beatification. We all have imprinted in our memory the celebrations that gathered vast crowds of the faithful at the Licheń Shrine on September 16, 2007. A great gift for the entire Church—the beatification of Stanislaus Papczyński—became a genuine time of grace, a true *kairos* for the Congregation of Marian Fathers, a stimulating impulse to live by the original charism with a renewed zeal and to make it a treasure in the service of the mission of the Church.

Today, a new special year begins in the life of the Marian Fathers: the Centennial Anniversary of the Congregation’s Renewal through the Reform undertaken by Blessed Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. That was an exceptional

³ St. Anselm, *Discourse 52*, in: *Liturgy of the Hours*, t. 1, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1975, p. 1229.

⁴ *IC*, p. 934-935.

intervention of Divine Providence so that this charism might continue in the life of the Church. All of us, who wish for your Congregation to live and to also grow further today, unite with you in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for this precious work of your Renovator. Let us conclude our reflection with the words of your Blessed Renovator: “Most Blessed Virgin Mary, I ask you to obtain from your Son the grace to love you more, to have ever more confidence in you, and to cherish your glorious protection more and more. Take our Congregation under your powerful protection, O Mother. Accept us, unworthy though we are—so destitute, such spiritual beggars—if for no other reason than, at least, because of the name we bear. Grant that our lives be pure and untainted.”⁵

⁵ George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, *Journal*, p. 92-93, Stockbridge, 2003.

Jan M. Rokosz, MIC
Superior General

HOMILY

**Closing of the Year of Thanksgiving for
the Beatification of Father Founder,
Opening of the Year of the 100th Anniversary
of the Renewal and Reform of
the Congregation of Marian Fathers**

December 8, 2008, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Today, more than any other day, we feel our unity with Mary at Christ's side. We are bound by ties that are stronger than blood: one faith, one vocation, our fraternal love, and one goal, which is our guiding principle. Today, we unite spiritually with the Marians worldwide. We embrace them with our love and prayer and, united in the holy sacrifice of Jesus Christ, together give our thanks at the altar.

By this General Convention, we have closed the Year of Thanksgiving for the beatification of our Founder. I believe that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, more than 300 years later, we are reaching back to the roots of our Congregation to rediscover and to re-ignite everything that is our life and mission according to God's everlasting plan. By the extraordinary decree of Divine Providence, we open the Jubilee Year of the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal and Reform of our Congregation, only a year after the beatification. The miraculous rescue of our Community from annihilation carried out by Blessed George was probably God's most powerful intervention in our history. It was an important demonstration of His concern for us and a confirmation that the Church needs our charism. We give thanks to God for the gift of The Divine Mercy and we ask Him to breathe His Spirit into each one of us and into the entire Congregation today so that we may properly discern what this gift means to us.

On this day, we turn to the Blessed Virgin, chosen by the Lord and full of grace. We give her thanks for her motherly care for us. We contemplate the

mystery of her Immaculate Conception which fascinated Blessed Stanislaus and which is, from the first moment, the sign, strength and joy of the Marian vocation. May it also be today our sign, strength and joy; may it also become our inspiration, hope and the path for our conversion and renewal in the time of our Jubilee.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception communicates above all God's triumph over sin. Humanity is under the legacy of sin, but the power of evil has never been total. This realization ought to be a source of consolation and hope for us in the first place. In various ways, we struggle against sin in our lives, our milieu, our communities, and our entire Congregation. The despondency may overcome us when we look at the human inadequacy in ourselves and in our Congregation. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception gives us courage and affirms that the powerful love of God is greater than evil.

Saint Paul wrote: "In love, He [God] destined us for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of His will, for the praise of the glory of His grace that He granted us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). Brothers, today, on our Patronal Feast Day, let us allow ourselves to experience the fact that we are deeply loved by God and let us rejoice in the gift of this grace, of which the Apostle speaks. May nothing turn us away from this joy, and may it not be obscured by anything! Let us be enveloped in Christ's loving gaze. Let us ask with faith, that we would be immersed in His grace, and let us become enraptured once again by the beauty of the life to which He has called us.

The truth of the Immaculate Conception reminds us that Christ is the One who saves us. Let us surrender to Him today all of our shortcomings and our helplessness. Let us give Him *the present and the future* of our Congregation. Note that Jesus did not expect any good deeds before performing one of His miracles: all He wanted was faith and trust. He was the first to embrace us with love, even before our conception in our mother's wombs. And He does not take His love away now, looking down on our lives marked by sin.

In our spiritual lives, we tend to get unduly focused on sin and the things that enslave us. The Immaculate Conception teaches us an entirely different strategy. Instead of focusing on sin, let us give our entire attention to God's love for us. Let us contemplate His love. The experience of God's love will allow us to conquer sin. What counts most in the spiritual life is not how adequate our love for God and neighbor is (which it certainly is not!) but rather how much we believe that we are loved by God, completely undeservedly, and how we respond to His love with our trustful faith in imitation of Mary, who cried out: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to Your word" (Lk 1:38).

Today, as we renew our vows, standing in humility before the Lord, let us repeat after Mary: “Behold, I am Your servant. May it be done to me according to Your word.” Let us state this on behalf of our entire community: “Behold, we are Your servants. May it be done to us according to Your word.” Let these words express our desire and our readiness to fulfill, both personally and as a Congregation, the Divine plan for this very special moment in our history—our Founder’s beatification and our present Jubilee.

Dear Confreres: May our conscious uttering of those words become the demonstration of our readiness to give God everything that He may ask of us: changing our lifestyle, giving up our plans and visions, abandoning human securities in order to carry the cross. Yes, it may be painful, it may entail a struggle, but life, joy and peace will be ours when we fulfill the will of God and follow Jesus Christ. Nothing is a better reward than God Himself.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception gives us a key to understanding the life and work of our two Fathers: Blessed Stanislaus and Blessed George. They both let themselves be taken in by the newness of life in Christ, the fullest example of which we see in Mary Immaculate. Neither Blessed Stanislaus nor Blessed George wished to do his work for its own sake. They had one goal in their lives: to be united with God and to spread His kingdom. They discovered their calling to specific actions as their lives unfolded, as a fruit of the grace of God acting within them. Their total dedication to the Holy Spirit and permission to guide their lives brought fruits in concrete actions of fulfilling the will of God and accomplishing things which God had planned. At the same time, neither of them thought that he was doing some grand work, which was worthy of God’s special gratitude or reward. Living in union with God and doing His work is a reward in itself. In their lives, only God was to be surrounded by praise, not them.

We reflect on the challenges that face us at this point in our history. Today’s Solemnity and the witness of the lives of our Blessed Fathers suggest that our most important and primary task is our conversion or opening our hearts to a new life in Jesus Christ, the example of which we see in Mary Immaculate. All of the saints of the Church, along with our Blessed Fathers, also gave witness to it. A new life in Christ enables us to accomplish new works or good deeds, which God has been planned for us to carry out from before time began. Our deep roots in the life of God will allow us to discern His every call, while He continuously gives us courage and magnanimity to fulfill His will.

Let us be less concerned with the future of the Congregation and the success of our enterprises and put more effort into pleasing God, because then God will fulfill through us the work He has already planned.

I would like to close with Blessed George's words: "We have, dearest brothers, enough reasons for our trust in God: this is the power of the right hand of the Most High. Just as the Wisdom and Goodness of God, our Creator and Lord, has resuscitated and given life to this Congregation, so too will his Wisdom and Goodness preserve and govern it, help it to advance in perfection and spread in its holy service. Let us learn to place our hope, not in earthly riches, not in human beings, not in ourselves—but in Him, who strengthens us, and for whom nothing is impossible. For, just as he gives us the grace to desire, so he bestows it to accomplish what has been desired."⁶

⁶ Circular Letter to the Confreres of Jan. 12, 1924.

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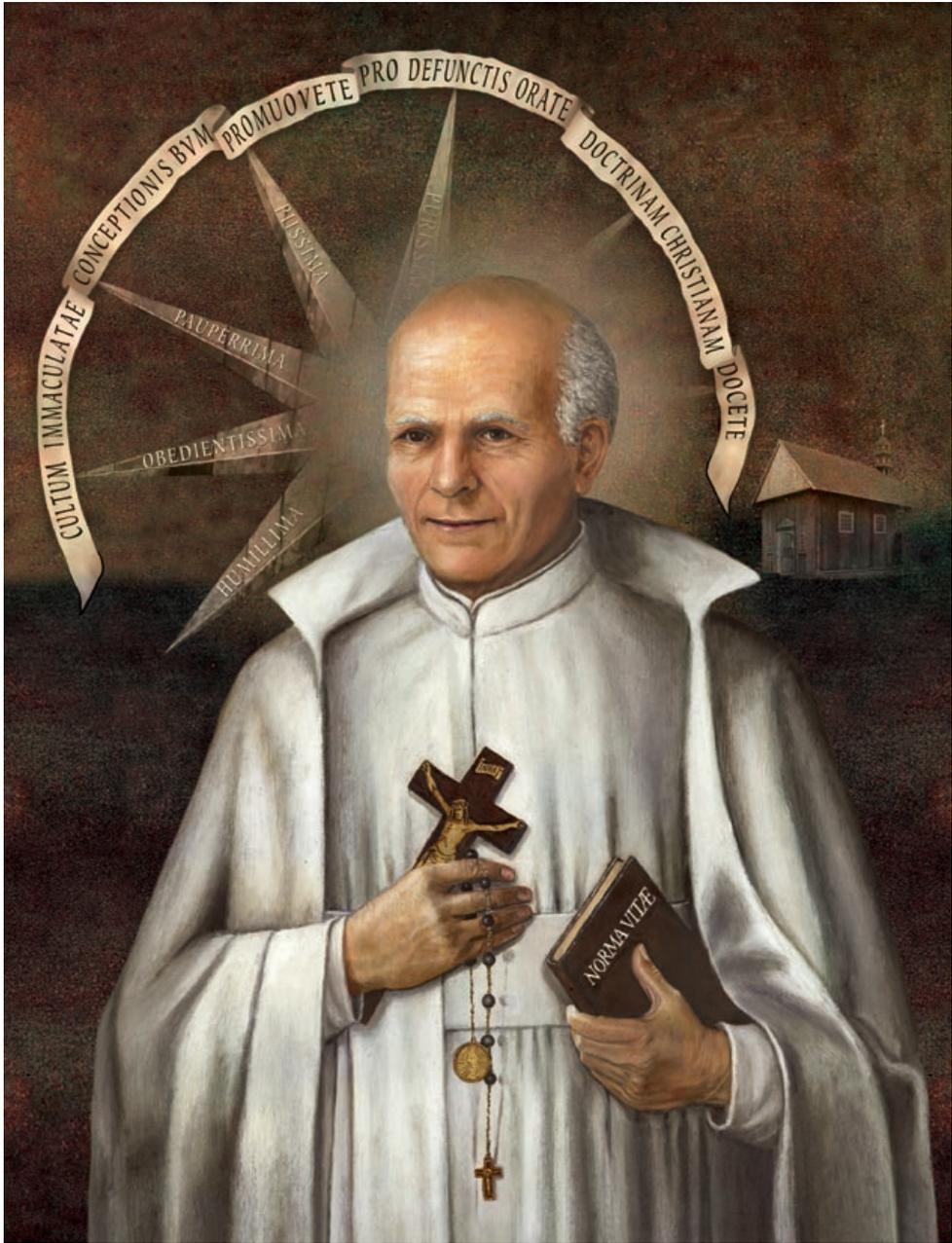
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Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński
– Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.



The ceremony of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński's beatification at the Shrine of Our Lady of Licheni (Poland), Sept. 16, 2007.



His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the papal legate, proclaims Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński a Blessed.



The image of the new Blessed displayed on the facade of the Basilica of Our Lady of Lichen.



The square in front of the Licheń Basilica during the beatification ceremony (right side).



The square in front of the Licheń Basilica during the beatification ceremony (left side).



His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State, praying before the tomb of the new Blessed, Sept. 16, 2007.



Thanksgiving for the beatification at the tomb of the new Blessed (from left to right): Archbishop H. Hoser, Archbishop K. Nycz, Cardinal Franc Rodé, Archbishop E. Nowak, Fr. M. Zachara, MIC, Fr. J. Rokosz, MIC and Fr. A. Lach, MIC. Sept. 17, 2007.



His Eminence Cardinal Franc Rodé, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, praying at the tomb of the new Blessed, Sept. 17, 2007.



Participants of the General Convention gathered in the chapel of the General House in Rome at the conclusion of the Year of Thanksgiving for the beatification of Fr. Stanislaus and opening of the Jubilee of the 100th Anniversary of Renewal of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, Dec. 8, 2008.



We have waited a long time for the joy of today's thanksgiving. For you, beloved Marians, these were three centuries of prayers and efforts, so that the glow of your Founder's sanctity, which you were so convinced of, could shine through to the whole world. In this time of expectation, you were accompanied by the Marian spiritual family and many devotees of Blessed Stanislaus. In many hearts a question may arise, why so long? Let's keep in mind that God's Providence does not follow a path of human longings, and the gifts of His grace often come not when we call, but when the time is most appropriate. If now we rejoice at the beatification of Father Papczyński, we can most forcefully claim that today is the day when the testimony of his life is needed most for the Church and the world.

Beatification marks the end of the road, but more than that, it is a call to get on the road again. Dear Marians, never in the over three hundred year history of your Congregation, has the necessity to reconsider the life and charism of Your Founder been more burning. Return to the spring from which flowed each of your own vocations. Get back to living your religious consecration to the full, with hearts undivided. With confidence, entrust your entire life, your strengths and weaknesses, to the One, who for your sakes died and was raised up (c.f. 2 Cor. 5:15).

Dear Marians! Rejoicing in the gift of the beatification, choose again the path on which the Gospel calls you and which your Founder showed to you. Only the one who fulfills the testimony of the Father is worthy of being called His son.

*From the homily of Cardinal Franc Rodé, CM,
during the thanksgiving liturgy at the tomb of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński
in Góra Kalwaria, September 17, 2007.*