

## **NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE MISSION**

---

JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, CMF

SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

First of all, dear brothers and sisters, receive a very cordial greeting. I thank Fr. Artur Teixeira for his invitation to reflect on an issue that seems to me to be of vital importance in this moment that we are living: How to configure our missionary service in this historical moment that we are living; and based on the signs of God in our time. This is what this reflection that I offer you and that I have entitled "NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE MISSION" wants to respond to.

I am going to divide my presentation into four parts:

- **First: Congregation going out** - in it I wish to explain how our General Chapters have wanted to respond to the signs of the times in each moment of renewal, after the Second Vatican Council, following the directives of the Church.
- **Second: The Sustainable Development Goals -SDGs-** that the United Nations has proposed to achieve in 15 years, from 2015 to 2030. The intention is to consider these objectives as a possible challenge for us.
- **Third: Towards a believing Claretian rereading of the SDGs.** I try to see to what extent these objectives respond to God's plan for human history, to the signs of the Spirit, and to what extent they can also be assumed in our charismatic mission.
- **Fourth: New perspectives of Mission.** In this last part I will try to make explicit how the Sustainable Development Goals can be integrated into our charismatic contribution to the Mission of God and with what consequences.

And after this presentation, I turn to the first topic that contains two subsections: Conciliar steps and Another step, Where to?

## I. CONGREGATION GOING OUT

### 1. *Post-conciliar steps*

Our Congregation has not remained stagnant in a certain historical moment. It has always taken steps forward. Let's recall:

- It reflected on its charismatic identity and its spiritual patrimony after the Second Vatican Council –Chapter of 1968–.
- It rediscovered and enhanced the community dimension: in communities, structures and forms of government –GC 1973–.
- It focused on our missionary options, reflected in the document MCT (Mission of the Claretian Today) –GC 1979–.
- Subsequently, the Congregation thought about the person of the Claretian, but not in an individualistic way, but intercultural, missionary key and it prepared to carry out a great congregational launch especially towards Asia and Africa –GC 1985–.
- Then came other General Chapters that highlighted fundamental aspects of our missionary charism: Servants of the Word (SW), In Prophetic Mission (IPM), That They May Have Life (TMHL), Men on Fire with Love (MFL), Witnesses and Messengers of the Gospel (TM).

### 1. *Another step? Which way?*

Today, we ask ourselves: where to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the second decade of 2000? And there is a proposal that may surprise us. It all started with an initiative to have a representation at the UN, which now challenges us with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): 17 goals, which are then deployed into 169 goals to be achieved before the year 2030.

It may seem strange and even scandalous that some missionaries, servants of the Word, like we are, question how to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2020 of the UN into our ministries.

- *Perhaps not a few Claretians think that this issue has little or nothing to do with our ministry.* For what is specific to us is evangelization, pastoral and sacramental care, the

accompaniment of Christian communities; and not the Sustainable Development Goals. Are we not giving up our spiritual vision in favor of a secular and materialistic vision?

- Others, on the other hand, perhaps think that our greatest concern at this time should be survival in the midst of a dramatic situation: What to do not to disappear as Claretian missionaries, in Europe and in each of its nations, in North America and Canada, and also to some extent in Latin America? Therefore, our main concern should focus on the vocation ministry and the readjustment of our communities to receive new vocations. It would be of little use to consider new horizons of mission, if the number of Claretians decreases and the remaining Claretians are getting older and less prepared to raise the issue of SDGs.
- *There are also those who think that our mission is not and should not be political.* Therefore, it is not the secular and political institutions that tell us what to do. The exhortations of the Church, the exhortations of the ecclesiastical Magisterium, the evangelical proposals, the dreams of the prophets and the apocalyptic, and not the secular objectives for 2030, should suffice for us.
- In any case, it is also true that, in recent times, our General Chapters have tried to develop within the broad panorama of our Claretian charism, all that has to do with the option for the poorest, the marginalized and discarded, the peripheries and the defense of creation. The Sustainable Development Goals are found in that same line, although they are specify and concrete it in multiple areas.

On the occasion of this on-line meeting of prefects of apostolate, the question arises, which will undoubtedly also emerge in the next and upcoming General Chapter:

- Will this be the path that the Spirit offers us and asks us to continue being a “missionary Congregation going forth”?
- And if so, how can we position ourselves as Claretian missionaries before the Sustainable Development Goals?

- Will we have to integrate them into the perspective and orientation of our mission, or will we have to follow our own pace, leaving that challenge to others?

To answer these questions, I want to offer three concatenated reflections:

- Towards a believing reading of the SDGs proposals.
- The SDGs and our Claretian charism.
- Proposals for the missionary reconfiguration of the Congregation.

We now turn to the second topic: which has three sections: the Objectives, their challenges and goals and reasons for hope

## II. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

### 1. *The 17 Sustainable Development Goals*

The Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals) adopted by all Member States in 2015 were and are very ambitious. They intend to mobilize all the peoples, human groups and people of this planet earth towards attitudes that contribute to eradicate poverty and protect the environment of our mother earth, because “another world is possible.”

The 17 objectives –which have a time limit of 2030 (that is, 9 years from the end of the year)– I would express them in seven verbs: finish, reduce, combat, protect, ensure, promote-favor and build:

- *Finish*: with poverty and hunger.
- *Reduce*: inequality.
- *Combat*: climate change and desertification, stop land degradation and loss of biodiversity.
- *Protect*: terrestrial ecosystems and their sustainable use, forests, oceans, seas and marine resources.
- *Ensure*: a healthy life and well-being for all and at all ages, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, quality and equitable inclusive education, and lifelong learning opportunities for all, cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; water and sanitation

for all; reliable, sustainable, modern and accessible energy for all; sustainable production and consumption standards.

- *Promote*: inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all, peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, inclusive industrialization.
- *Strengthen and build*: the means of implementation and revitalize global solidarity for sustainable development, resilient infrastructure, foster innovation and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

## 2. Challenges and Goals

Therefore, here is a universal call towards four great challenges: 1) ending poverty, 2) protecting the planet, 3) ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity in 2030; 4) bringing several life-changing "zeros" to the world: poverty, hunger, AIDS, discrimination against women and girls, leaving no one behind.

And from all this, there are no less than 169 goals to be set in relation to human beings<sup>1</sup>, the environment<sup>2</sup>, the economy<sup>3</sup> and political and social institutions<sup>4</sup>.

The 17 SDGs are integrated: there are three areas that are interconnected: economic, social and environmental; intervention in each of them affects the others; all areas together and harmonize in contributing to the balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: environment, society and economy.

## 2. And why the word "sustainable"?

What "is not sustainable" is what leads to chaos. To destruction. The "unsustainable" prophesies the catastrophe to come. The "sustainable", on the other hand, speaks to us of precaution. And if we were to say it with theological words: what is sustainable speaks to us of "providence", of "precaution", of pre-vision. The capitalist madness, the immoderate desire for wealth will lead us to the destruction of the planet and the impoverishment of humanity.

Sustainability –translated into our religious language– has a lot to do with God's Providence. Providence was understood as

"continuous creation": that is, the care of everything created. God is provident. But He is so, with our collaboration, with our "contest." Providence is based on three elements:

- *Sustentatio*: preserve everything so that it does not fall into nothingness, into annihilation.
- *Governatio*: care in dealing with all created reality.
- *Concursus*: the confluence of various efficient causes or interactions.

Faith in providence began to fade in the 18th century. However, that way of speaking continues and reappears today with the vocabulary of "sustainability" or "sustainable." In theological language, we should say: "Complicity with the creative and provident Spirit."

### **3. Reasons for hope**

God continues to be provident through so many people of good will in our world. Therefore, there are reasons for hope because according to the key data of the SDGs, since 1990:

- More than 1 billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty.
- Infant mortality has been reduced by more than half.
- The number of children not attending school has decreased by more than half.
- HIV/AIDS infections have fallen by almost 40% (since 2000).

To achieve these objectives, **everyone's** contribution is needed: creativity, knowledge, technology, financial resources. And in those "all" the Church and of course **our Congregation of Missionaries** must be found.

After the previous reflections, it is necessary to take one more step –the third part–, which I title: Towards a believing and Claretian reading of the "SDGs". And in this reflection, I include three subsections: Attention to the signs of the times, We disciples-missionaries in this context and a rereading of the constitutional text. Thus:

### III. TOWARDS A BELIEVING AND CLARETIAN READING OF THE "SDGs"

Now we can ask ourselves the question: can the SDGs be integrated into the mission of the Church and in the Mission of our Congregation of Claretian Missionaries?

#### 1. *Attention to the signs of the times*

Jesus directs us to the Pharisees and Sadducees to discern the signs, when they asked Jesus for a sign (Mt 16:1-4) of the times. Pope Saint John XXIII –when convening the Second Vatican Council--said:

*"We make Jesus' recommendation on the need to recognize our own signs of the times"*<sup>5</sup>

And, in continuity, the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" of the Second Vatican Council invited us to "scrutinize the signs of the times, to interpret them in the light of the Gospel and to recognize and understand the world in which we live –their desires and dreams in the context of their dramatic characteristics– to respond with an intelligible language to each generation"<sup>6</sup>; and in n. 11, the Constitution added that the Holy Spirit fills the universe and also impels the people of God to discern in events the true signs of the presence of God's plans.<sup>7</sup>

If now we look at the social Magisterium of the Church, and especially Pope Francis (the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" and the encyclical "Laudato Sì" and I am sure that also the next document –already prepared– "We are all brothers" we see that there is an admirable harmony between the SDGs and the contemporary ecclesial magisterium.

#### 2. *We, Claretian missionary-disciples in this context*

We, as missionary disciples, are nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit<sup>8</sup>; and thanks to the Spirit, we can distinguish what is the fruit of the Kingdom of God and what contradicts the contemporary plans of God. Therefore, we want to let ourselves be carried away by the movement of the Spirit for good and reject the spirits of evil.<sup>9</sup>

With the passage of the post-conciliar years, we have understood that the signs of the times are not only the signs of God in our time, but also and above all "the signs of the Spirit." And everything is born, from the conviction that the Holy Spirit is the great protagonist of the Mission of God, after the Mission of Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus and the Father speaks all languages, is present in all human beings, "speaks through the prophets," also of prophetic human groups that proclaim that another world is possible.

This is the prophecy of the Spirit that now challenges us from a place as qualified as the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goals. They enable us to dream of a humanity without hunger, without poverty, without discrimination against women, without deterioration of the environment (seas, rivers, waters, air). Are not these the new signs of the Spirit that guides us towards the plans of God the Creator? Is it not a sign of the Spirit that instead of making proposals for world war, the world proposal –endorsed by so many nations– is a proposal not only for peace, but also for the emergence of a "new" world, without poverty, without hunger, without discrimination, with an increasingly beautiful, clean and a caring planet?

It says that "dreaming the impossible" comes from the unforeseeable. And in this horizon, we Claretian missionaries ask ourselves –already on the threshold of a new General Chapter– can we reinterpret our charismatic mission in the light of contemporary ecclesial Magisterium and the sustainable development goals? How to configure our missionary service as Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel in this new context?

### **3. Rereading of the constitutional text**

Our renewed Constitutions marks the way for us:

*"We readily offer to join efforts with all who are striving to transform the world according to God's plan. Nevertheless, we must faithfully and boldly proclaim the Good News of the kingdom, especially since there are many, led astray by the lure of power, wealth and lust, who oppose it" (CC, 46).*



The objective of our charismatic ministry of the Word is "the transformation of the world according to the design of God." To make the world assume the "form" of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus. We are aware that we have a small place within so many people committed to it. It is clear that the great agent of the Kingdom remains the Risen Lord who acts through his Holy Spirit. We have also been granted to participate in the transformative task as "heralds", "prophets", "witnesses" of the Word that explains and offers the meaning of history. We are agents of transformation through the service of the Word. Others are also so in multiple ways: journalists, artists, reporters, film or theater actors and actresses through symbolic representation, thinkers, philosophers. We want to find our place within the processes of transformation! And we are aware that Jesus exercised the ministry of the Word through speeches, parables, miracles and lifestyle.<sup>10</sup>

We have to trust in the impressive power of the Word, which has been communicated to us, which is a "demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). The words that we are to pronounce are words "learned from the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13), and "such an extraordinary force is from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:1.7). Therefore, we have to be strong, and overcome shyness, fears, our complexes (insecurities). An example of this is our brother Pedro Casaldàliga, who has remained faithful to the Word in all circumstances. He was never carried away by cowardice. Cowardice prevents the Word from being proclaimed where it is most needed. It covers God's mouth. Jesus, John the Baptist, Stephen and Paul were "the martyrs of the Word," because they announced it without fear (Phil 1:13-14). And so, to a son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, "nothing daunts him."

We are asked to put the ministry of the word wherever the Kingdom emerges, in the springs of the new world. We must not live as Claretians, strangers to this historic moment, which some describe as the third industrial revolution or the marginal society of zero price (Jeremy Rifkin), or as the surprising and decisive history of the next twenty years and, therefore, moment of transcendental decisions for the future of humanity (Jacques Attali).

And from this penultimate section, I pass on to the consequences, which I title "New Mission perspectives." This last part also contains three subsections: The change of perspective in our Constitutions, the change of time and its demands and a last and most important question: if we are prepared and if we will be able to accept the "vision" of the Spirit of the seven eyes.

#### IV. NEW MISSION PERSPECTIVES

If the description we have made so far is appropriate, the truth is that -wherever necessary -we must re-invent ourselves as missionaries, servants of the Word.

##### *1. The change of perspective in our Constitutions*

The Constitutions of 1857 spoke of "the means - - - that missionaries have to use for the salvation of souls" (Chapter 10). In the Constitutions of 1865 it was said that the object of our Congregation is "the salvation of the souls of the whole world through the ministry of the Word." The last text of the Constitutions no longer speaks of the "salvation of souls," but of "seeking -in all things- the salvation of people throughout the world, in keeping with our missionary charism in the Church" (CC, 2), or to "communicate to people the total mystery of Christ" (CC, 46).

Today we hear repeated slogans: "Save the Children", "Save the world", "Save the planet", "Save hospitality" .... The word "salvation" is being recovered. For us, Claretian missionaries, it is an opportunity that the Spirit is granting us.

To measure up to the signs of the Spirit in our time, I would dare to make the following points:

##### *2. The change of era and its demands*

Today there is talk of a change of time that entails a new awareness of the human being, a new ethos for a more human future and the necessary new vision in the mission.

- *A new consciousness:* A growing awareness that we are "human species" is being imposed on humanity. The pandemic that we are suffering shows us that we are "human species." Human

consciousness is expanding. Today we speak of the four expansions of consciousness: from tribal consciousness, to national consciousness, through trans-national consciousness, and reaching planetary consciousness. We are increasingly aware of our planetary citizenship. And, as a result, we promote the SDGs.

- *Towards a new ethos:* How to build a more humane and less hominid future? All the information of the different societies, ethnicities and cultures that have survived must be put at the service of society as a whole to focus critically on our planet. We need to implement the ethical practice of the human species. The 21st century has arrived with great possibilities for planetary transformation. Ethics not only encompasses the purely human realm. Our ethical obligations are much broader: they must reach the environment of the biosphere: land-option. The SDGs show us that our ethics have to do with the social field, the field of biology and genetics, the ecological field. Our ethical responsibility now extends not only to the contemporary human generation, but above all, to future generations and to the future of our planet.
- *The space of global education:* it becomes for us a great mission laboratory, where we experiment and verify the validity of our pastoral and missionary actions. We must acknowledge our failure to transform the life and worldview of many members of the Church. And yet, we now recognize that it is up to us, in this new phase of human history, to be a relevant and necessary vehicle for a "transformative discipleship that responds to the new phase of human consciousness." The Church has been given the mandate to "make disciples" (Mt 28:18-20).
- *At the service of a new citizenship:* talking about "planetization" is also about world citizenship. The dream of the "global village" of the "common house" can become true. We use more and more terms that remind us of it: ecology, economy, ecumenism, and also city, politics, civilization. The Encyclicals *Lumen Fidei* and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* speak of a new citizenship, a new model of society. We also feel called to

raise the mission in a context of respect for and dialogue with secular institutions and to renounce dogmatic or presumptuous attitudes.

### *3. Are we ready? The vision: with the "seven eyes of the Spirit"*

It is not easy to exercise the art of proclaiming the Gospel in a changing world for which we do not yet feel prepared. We evangelize by being ourselves evangelized through the Spirit who acts in others and through others. This means our protagonist exclusivity is over. The mission is no longer so much "ad gentes" as "inter gentes," it is not intransitive, but transitive.

The mission in this new context requires us to go back to the origins of the Church, the New Testament, and to recover: the apocalyptic vision of the Spirit, the theology of creation, and a new ritual or cosmic liturgy.

- *The apocalyptic vision of the Spirit:* Revelation 5:6 tells us about the seven eyes of the Lamb which are the seven spirits of God sent to all the earth.<sup>11</sup> The Holy Spirit is here seen as the "perfect vision." It is the Spirit among us, on earth on mission. And to participate in it we also need the "total," "perfect" vision: nobody has it. We have to share –and the more the better– our limited visions. Without vision, mission is blind and the leaders also blind! What is the use of striving, if we do not know why, or what for, or where? What is the use of a repetitive mission, simply programmed by our short visions, that is exercised in the dark and without transforming capacity? Therefore, our great challenge is how to connect today with the Spirit of God. We need a conversion to Pneumatology. Grace will come to us through visionary people who sometimes don't belong in our circles. Other times they are among us. You have to listen to them and discern the Spirit that encourages. The Spirit has "seven eyes" and acts throughout the earth.
- *The theology of creation:* the theology of redemption has prevailed among us. That is why we have talked a lot about sin, we have talked about salvation and condemnation, and divided

the human community into human beings "in God's grace" and "human beings in sin." The theology of creation opens up new horizons for us and leads us to a much more encompassing ethic. We need to get into eco-theology. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* has shown us the way.

- *The new ritual or the cosmic liturgy*: the liturgy, our liturgy also has to be re-invented in a new era. It is not a question of losing our great tradition, but it is about finding new ways of making the Liturgy a place of encounter, where the theology of creation speaks, where the new consciousness is expressed more vigorously, where a community is created not only local, or individualistic, but creative communities. We already know that rituals generate communities. We need liturgies where the "great spiritual connection" and cosmic take place.

And this concludes my reflection. I believe that the SDGs offer us a great opportunity to better reconfigure that missionary process that has been shaping our mission in the world. We need a "pastoral and missionary conversion" that *Evangelii Gaudium* asks of us, but also "paths" and "processes" to reach it. The SDGs offer us the opportunity to re-think and re-invent ourselves in this new era that is launching us towards the year 2030.

---

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> It is about the urgent improvement in health, education, justice, quality of life.

<sup>2</sup> It is about its preservation and conservation, protection of forests and biodiversity, sustainable use of environmental resources and creation of effective action projects against climate change.

<sup>3</sup> It is about how to use natural resources so that they are not depleted: how to act on the production and management of waste, energy consumption, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The SDGs call for your serious commitment to implement this project.

<sup>5</sup> *Humanae salutis*, Apostolic Constitution of Saint John XXIII convening the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>6</sup> GS, 4.

<sup>7</sup> “The People of God, moved by faith, which prompts them to believe that the one who guides them is the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the universe, tries to discern the events, demands, desires, in which they participate, together with their contemporaries, the true signs of God's presence or plans...” GS, 11. The Spirit reminds us today of the teachings of Jesus (Jn 14:26), gives witness with us about Jesus (Jn 15:26), will lead the disciples towards the full truth and will show them what is to come (Jn 16:13). When Jesus sends the disciples on mission, he does so by communicating the Spirit to them (Jn 20:21-22).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 50.

<sup>9</sup>10 Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C.M.F. *Our Project of Missionary Life. Commentary on the Constitutions. II. Fundamental Constitution and first part*, Claretian Missionaries, Rome, 1991, pp. 663-667.

<sup>11</sup> ““Then I saw standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb that seemed to have been slain. He had seven horns and seven eyes (ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ,); these are the seven] spirits of God (ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ) sent out into the whole world. (ἀπεσταλμένα εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν)”.