

# **An SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary**

Rome, June 2010



*Table of contents*

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	9
<b>STAGES OF THE SS.CC. SPIRITUAL ITINERARY</b> .....	19
Seeing in a new way.....	21
Hearing the call and the first response .....	29
Intimacy and seduction .....	39
Identity and belonging .....	49
Crisis and conversion .....	63
Obedience to God's love.....	77
Putting a gift into words.....	87
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>94</b>



# Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori

Casa Generalizia  
delle Suore dei Sacri Cuori  
Via Aurelia, 145 Scala C-Int. 10/14  
00165 Roma



Casa Generalizia  
dei Sacri Cuori  
Via Rivarone, 85  
00166 Roma

Tel. + 39 - 06 638 11 40  
Fax. + 39 - 06 638 10 13

Tel. + 39 - 06 66 17 931  
Fax. + 39 - 06 66 17 93 55

*June 2010*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“*Savor God along the path of life,*” the Good Father encouraged the sisters of the community in Le Mans (letter of July 8, 1828). In this beautiful image from our founder, life is seen as a path, a journey, an itinerary. Along the way, we can recognize and enjoy the presence of God. The charism which gave birth and continues to give life to the Congregation opens a whole range of possibilities for discovering and enjoying this “taste” of God. The Congregation offers a way of experiencing God, of following Jesus and of living his Gospel. It is a way of journeying through life. As the Spirit breathes within us, the different aspects of our life find a common direction. In other words, it is a “spiritual itinerary.”

This document responds to an explicit request of the General Chapters of brothers and sisters, “*The 2006 Chapters, in their joint session, request that the General Governments initiate a process for developing the Spiritual Itinerary.*” That process was carried out by an ad hoc team of brothers and sisters, with the participation of many members of the Congregation who were asked to collaborate in different ways.

The document itself is not “the itinerary.” The itinerary is the journey that takes place in the actual lives of those called to incarnate the SS.CC. spirit. What the text offers is a collection of

reflections, references and suggestions for setting out and finding direction along the way. We have no doubt that it can be an excellent resource for formation (initial and ongoing) in the Congregation’s charism for the brothers and sisters as well as laity.

The itinerary can inspire us in our following of Jesus as SS.CC., realizing that we are on the same journey as our founders. They invite all the members of their family to journey in the present moment enlightened by the vision that they had in their time and that gave origin to who we are. Signposts along the way will be the events of life – both ordinary and extraordinary – as well those inner movements that mold our perceptions and our desires. Our destination will always be growth into “the full stature of Christ”, as we learn to love more deeply and more effectively.

In the name of the whole Congregation we want to thank those who played a direct role in the development of this document: the commission (Cristina Naranjo, Aurora Laguarda, Evelyne Royer, Richard McNally, Camille Sapu and Carlos Armijo), the editors (Paloma Eiriz, Hortense-Marie Bouquet and Martin O’Loughlen) and all the brothers and sisters who read the different drafts and offered their suggestions for improving the text.

*“You will show me the path to life”* says the Psalmist. This is a good guide for making a journey. In the final analysis, what is most important is to set out.



Rosa Mª Ferreiro sccc  
*Superior General*



Javier Álvarez-Ossorio sccc  
*Superior General*

## Acknowledgement

When the previous General Governments proposed developing an SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary to the joint session of the General Chapters of Brothers and Sisters in 2006, a clear suggestion from the assembly was to take advantage of the work that had already been done to develop such an itinerary. The final decision of the General Chapters reads, *“The 2006 Chapters, in their joint session, request that the General Governments initiate a process for developing the Spiritual Itinerary, keeping in mind the efforts that have already been made in this area.”*

From the beginning of its work, the commission was conscious of these efforts and, following the decision of the Chapter, they became resources for us. In a particular way, we would like to recognize the itinerary created by the sisters of the Spanish province and materials developed during the course for formators organized by the brothers’ Generalate during the term of the last General Government. These have served as an inspiration for the commission and we are grateful.

We want to also thank our brother Michiaki Chihara of the Province of Japan-Philippine for allowing us to use his photography as a visual mediation. We are so grateful that he has shared his eye for beauty with the whole Congregation in this way.



## INTRODUCTION

Many of the great religions of the world speak of the spiritual life as a path, a way or a journey. A spiritual path can be documented and a disciple can learn something of the way from the document but the spiritual journey is meant to be taken. Documentation only exists because someone, a founder or master, experienced the journey. One can only be a disciple when one is willing to follow along the way. As the poem of Antonio Machado says, "*The path is only made by walking.*"

In the Judeo-Christian tradition the life of a believer is seen as a journey. At the center of the spiritual life of Israel is the Exodus. God calls a people out of slavery in a foreign land to freedom in the Promised Land. This experience becomes fundamental to Israel's identity. It is the foundation of their existence as a people. Nothing is ever the same. The God who calls them makes a covenant with them and twelve tribes are transformed into a chosen people. The life of Israel down through the centuries is understood in continuous reference to that journey. Consequently the exile in Babylon and the return to Jerusalem are interpreted as a new Exodus. Every year when Jewish folk gather for Passover and the youngest child asks, "*Why is this night not like other nights?*" (Cf. Deut. 6: 20) the chosen people continue to experience their journey today in the light of the paradigmatic journey in response to the call of the saving God.

In the Gospels, Jesus, master and Lord, is continually in movement. He calls disciples, "*Come after me...*" (Mk 1: 17). Jesus' earthly life culminates in the journey to Jerusalem where he will be rejected, put to death and rise again. The journey of the disciple is a response to Jesus' call to accompany him and to take up the cross daily, "*to know him and the power of his resurrection and (the) sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death...*" (Phil. 3: 10). Going down to

death with Jesus the disciple rises up reborn as a member of his body. The church goes forth from Jerusalem to “*the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). Sharing Jesus journey through death to new life in his body is fundamental to the Christian life. It is an experience which we come back to over and over again at different points on our human and Christian journey. The paschal mystery is always life-changing. It never leaves us the same. This is the mystery we sacramentalize in Christian initiation and we renew each time we celebrate the Eucharist.

The charism of our community is a gift of the Spirit which includes a particular way of making the Gospel journey. It began with God’s call to the Good Father and the Good Mother to set out. They trusted in the One they experienced as “the Good God.” They depended on his providential care. The experience of sacrifice and suffering would only lead them closer to his Son Jesus and Jesus’ mother, Mary. Their love, “*expressed in the union of the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary*” (Constitutions, Art. 2), would become the foundation, the sustenance and the goal of our founders’ lives.

The Good Father and Good Mother opened the way before us. No sooner had they set out than the same Good God called the first sisters and brothers to join them. The journey of our religious family, of more than two hundred years, has been enriched by sharing the lives of different peoples and churches, by the apostolic generosity of generations, by their suffering for the sake of the Kingdom and by the holiness of our saints known and unknown. In our own place and time we answer God’s call; we add to the story and continue the journey.

One way of embracing the charism more deeply is to study the story and words of the Good Father and Good Mother. Another way is to discern our experience by rereading our journey in the light of the founders’. We look at their journey as though looking in a mirror and we see our own journey reflected back to us in a new

light. In that way we open ourselves to the Spirit's action for we have received the same charism as our founders and we are called to live the same spirituality, but in our place and in our time, along our journey of faith. And so, the itinerary of the founders becomes the basis for a spiritual exercise or experience meant to enrich our life of faith.

The SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary is an experience of the grace that inspires us to live more deeply a particularly SS.CC. spiritual life. As we make the journey there are twists and turns, pauses and obstacles. We move forward and perhaps even back. With the Spirit's light we see more clearly where we are today and we can gaze contemplatively on the contours of the path that has brought us to the present.

It could be said that following the SS.CC. spiritual itinerary is an experience of "vocation discernment" in the broad sense. We are not speaking simply of the initial discernment of a vocation to the Congregation. As the General Chapter of 2006 said, "*It is a path that begins when we answer God's call to 'leave everything' and continues throughout our Religious lives...*"

To facilitate the process we offer this text, *An SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary*. It is meant as an aid when we take time to reflect on our journey in light of the founders' itinerary.

The process that we propose:

- Is not a text to be read or studied but a **journey** to be taken. It will call for openness and creativity.

- Has a certain order. Classic spiritual itineraries speak of **stages** or levels of the spiritual life. Such schema often offer psychological insight given that human experiences, including spiritual ones, are always lived within the life cycles, that everyone experiences, regardless of faith or spirituality.

These stages have symbolic meaning. They are times when we enter into dialogue with ourselves and with God, according to certain themes that we can go back to repeatedly on our journey.

As the Good Father and Good Mother did not leave us a programmatic description of their journey we have chosen a schema of six stages suggested by spiritual theology. Certainly, other schema could be applied as keys to interpreting the founders' experience. We have taken these six. They describe phases of the journey in which significant experiences take place that can bring about growth as a disciple of Jesus and thereby lead to other stages.

Only God can bring about growth at any point on the journey. It is up to us to welcome his grace and allow ourselves, our person, our history, our gifts, our present circumstances and future possibilities to be transformed by him.

Given God's loving action in our life and our freedom, it is impossible to program the journey in a mechanical way. The passage to another stage does not take place at one determined moment. The next stage begins to appear little by little and even when we move on, the one we have moved from is not totally behind us.

- Can be seen as a **spiral**. Human and spiritual growth is neither linear nor cyclic. We do not just simply move forward. There are advances and reverses. At different points it seems that we come back to the same questions and the same challenges but because we have had different experiences we can meet the questions and challenges in a way that leads to new growth. We do not only move forward but hopefully we also move deeper toward greater authenticity. The same is true of the spiritual journey. The Lord is the same and his grace is the same but because of our many-faceted human experience we can grow more deeply in Him. At different points in our life as SS.CC. we follow the journey of the Good Father and Good Mother and go back to certain key moments in their lives (e.g. the Motte d'Usseau).

We can experience similar situations but with greater depth and maturity. We do not only grow in our perception, but we go deeper in our appropriation of the charism, what it means to be consecrated to the Sacred Hearts. With our awareness enriched by life experience we can draw forth deeper meaning. We experience the same elements of the charism but in a deeper way. We can grow in our SS.CC. vocation becoming more deeply rooted in the consecration to the Sacred Hearts, “the foundation of the institute.” This is what we mean when we say that following the SS.CC. itinerary can be seen as a spiral.

- The journey is marked by **“foundational experiences.”** Those of the Good Father/Mother can help us get in touch with ours. A foundational experience is one that reveals something of us and of the deep mystery of God and his love. They are experiences of encounter with God that are so strong that they move us and change us interiorly. They leave a mark within in such a way that when we remember them we are once more moved, astonished, inspired, renewed. They are experiences that mark a before and after in our lives. They root us, define us, sustain us, give meaning to our lives and allow us to continue experiencing the transforming love of God so as to center our lives only in Him.

- The stages of the founders’ journey and especially their foundational experiences are seen in **symbols** that are evocative. This is true of every spiritual journey. For the Good Father the experience in the Motte d’Usseau and the Good Mother’s in the prison of the Hospitalieres, revealed to them so much of God and the path to which he was calling them. Both would later recount “revelations” from God that, with symbolic power, spoke of the community and its mission. The symbol that became so important and that captured the essence of their vocation was that of the Sacred Hearts. Prayerful consideration of such primordial SS.CC. symbols can enlighten our SS.CC. journey and help us become aware of other images that capture its meaning.

- In the course of their journey the Good Father and Good Mother gave expression to the **charism** they had received from God. As any gift of the Holy Spirit it is not neatly packaged. For them it was as a light that gradually dawned and illumined the way. As we reflect on our journey in the light of theirs, we come to a deeper appreciation of the facets of the charism.

The text you have in your hands is meant as a tool or perhaps a road map as you take time to walk the path, reflecting on your SS.CC. journey in light of the Good Father and Good Mother's. It is not enough to simply read the document for it is an invitation to set out on a journey, something which requires time and effort.

It also calls for a companion or companions along the way. We live our religious life in community and even though the journey is one we must make personally, it is deeply influenced by our experience of community. The community leaves its mark on us, it enriches us, and it leads us to experience things differently. The same experience can be had differently depending on our experience of community. And so the community plays an important role in our journey and a decisive one in our spiritual path. Because the spiritual itinerary is the journey of the Sacred Hearts family, it is best done when shared with a group.

On the journey the role of guide is crucial. Without someone to accompany us, who has already made the journey, we run the risk of getting lost along the way or of deceiving ourselves and of not really being open to what the Spirit wants to do with us.

The text can be a valuable resource for both initial and ongoing formation. To initial formation it offers an overall vision of our SS.CC. spirituality and can help in the personal appropriation of what it means to be consecrated to the Sacred Hearts. As such it can help give unity to the initial formation process, based in the charism. In ongoing formation it could help members move beyond the

overly individual to open themselves to wider horizons, ones hardly imagined. That can bring about growth. It can be used by individuals but also by communities to help them reflect together and deepen their response, as a group, to our vocation and to the challenges coming to us from the world in which we are in mission.

As already indicated, the itinerary document is a “road map” for the journey. It is tool meant to facilitate times of spiritual exercise/experience. As such it is limited and can be enriched by other readings, questionnaires, prayers, images etc. Those working in initial and ongoing formation will have the task of developing pedagogical tools that are more adapted to the situations of different individuals and groups. One necessary consideration will be the variety of cultures, ages and outlooks embraced by our SS.CC. family.

We make the journey in freedom. The process is offered as a way of exposing ourselves to the action of the Spirit that comes to us through common symbols and experiences. This is not an effort at automatism or an attempt to force growth. The gift of God is uncontrollable. This is but a way of discerning how God’s Spirit is acting in the real life of those called to live discipleship as part of the SS.CC. family.

The journey is that of our founders and the community to which they gave birth. Sisters and brothers have walked this path for over two hundred years. As we set out we walk in their footsteps and we open the way for those who will come after us.

We make the journey not just for ourselves but for the Church and all those in the human family that we are called to serve. The more deeply we live the SS.CC. charism the more we are assured that our service to the Church and the world will be imbued with the conviction of God’s merciful freeing love.

Whatever your age and however you live our SS.CC. vocation - as brother, sister or lay person - we invite you to contemplatively consider God's action in your life. Let our founders' spiritual itinerary illumine your own path. Everyone who is SS.CC. can make the journey. Each person who enters into this process enriches our SS.CC. "tradition" with a new reading of the charism.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this process: the members of the joint commission of brothers and sisters; those, like our Spanish sisters who had already opened the way for us and whose work offered us inspiration. Thanks in advance to all who will make the journey.

We offer this SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary as a document but let us remember: "*The path is only made by walking.*"

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOUNDERS' JOURNEY**

We join Pierre Coudrin and Henriette Aymer as they journey with the Lord toward abundant life. As important as the destination are the stages along the way and the events and people that are the manifestations of God's grace at each stage. One way of appreciating the journey of the Good Mother and Good Father is according to the following schema.

- **Seeing in a New Way**

The French Revolution shakes the founders' world. France and the Church will never be the same again. All aspects of life are affected. The Good Father and Good Mother are awakened to God's presence in the midst of life's upheavals.

- **Hearing the Call and the First Response**

So much seems uncertain. So many things have changed seemingly overnight. Yet Pierre and Henriette hear God calling. They are aware that responding will entail sacrifice. They say their first "yes".

- **Intimacy and Seduction**

The Good God, who is present in their midst, calls Pierre and Henriette to go apart so he can speak to their hearts. Christ becomes a fire within, a source of strength for the great work to which they are called.

- **Identity and Belonging**

The Good Father and Good Mother find their identity in their response to the call of the loving God. This takes concrete form in the apostolic religious family that God is raising up through them.

- **Crisis and Conversion**

Departures and sickness, conflict within the community and outside challenge the founders' trusting faith and the solidity of their family. Through it all, the Lord purifies and strengthens their love for him and his people.

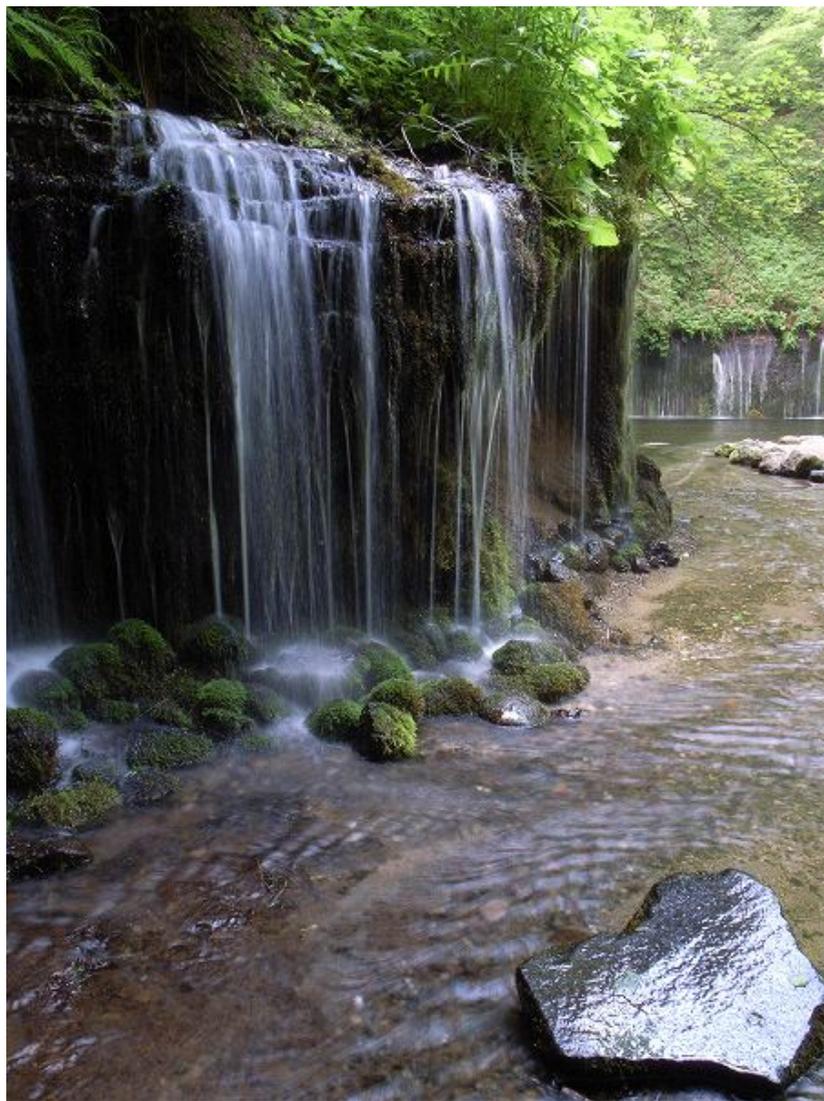
- **Obedience to God's Love**

The Good Father's and Good Mother's love for God and his people finds fruition in profound obedience and abandonment to his designs. The Consecration to the Sacred Hearts made at the beginning of the journey comes to full flower.

**STAGES**

**OF THE**

**SS.CC. SPIRITUAL ITINERARY**



## SEEING IN A NEW WAY

### DESCRIPTION

At this stage of the journey we try to become more deeply aware of our situation and the historical context of our personal, family and communal life. It is a time to discover God working in our world and in other people. We see how this reality affects us and how it often involves ambiguity and conflict in our personal, social and religious lives. We become “*moved*” as was Jesus when he saw the many who were lost and heard the cry of those who were hungry and ill, who continue on their way seeking God but are often overcome by thirst and the long journey. At times it even seems that God has abandoned them to their fate. This is a time to come to greater clarity about our life choices, our family and other important undertakings in life. The experience can make us more human and better witnesses of a faith that includes risk and prepares us for combat. Finally, through the grace of God, we become aware that what we have lived, received and learned has value and meaning.

### FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

#### The French Revolution

This is a key event in history that can be interpreted in many ways. It was the end of one epoch and opened another in Europe and the wider world. It became violent and totalitarian in expression. There were dangers and threats on all sides.

The situation in which our founders lived was marked by the Revolution. It would be difficult to understand the history, spirituality and theology of the Congregation without understanding that event.

**Pierre Coudrin** found himself surrounded by difficulties in his family, society and church. He lost some family members and friends who had been a help to him. He also discovered unfaithfulness and sin in the Church.

**Henriette Aymer** was abruptly taken away from the superficiality and emptiness of her normal everyday life. In prison she experienced an interior transformation and turned her eyes toward God.

## **HOW OUR FOUNDERS EXPERIENCED THIS STAGE**

In order to consider more closely the person of the Good Father and the Good Mother, their journey as believers and their spiritual life we have to take a look at their story and the events that determined and made possible their encounter with God and the development of their vocation.

### **Their Roots**

**Pierre** was born on March 1, 1768, the son of Abraham Coudrin and Marie Rion. The other children were Jean, Charles and Marie. Also living with the family were the paternal grandparents and their Uncles Francois Massoneau and Francois Rion. The Coudrin family lived in Coussay-le-Bois, a small town on the Poitou plateau, whose inhabitants were mostly farmers. The rudimentary technology they used and the hard winters meant poor harvests. High taxes were also a heavy burden. They were very hard and difficult times.

His family was the first place where he received the faith. There was a spiritual climate of simple solid faith. Many times Pierre would go with his father to church where he would spend a good deal of time praying or he would accompany him to help neighbors

in difficulty. He recalled how his mother was an example of faith, as was the rest of the family:

*"One day I was in the field with one of my uncles, I saw him kneel down behind the cart – when the church bell rang (indicating the moment of the consecration of the Mass) He thought I did not notice as I was only five. But I can assure you that made such an impression on me that I have never forgotten it. In the same way the example that my holy and virtuous mother gave me, touched my soul more than all I have seen and heard in the various places that Divine Providence has placed me since."* (HL, Mem. 1, p. 6)

**Henriette** Aymer de la Chevalerie was born August 11, 1767 in the little castle of de la Chevalerie in Poitou. Her parents, Louis René Aymer and Marie Louise belonged to the old nobility and had given various knights to the order of Malta and soldiers to the service of the King.

### **Their Education and the Impact of the Revolution**

**Pierre** was a boy full of life, joy and energy. He was bright and rather intelligent. When he was 11, his uncle François Rion, a priest, took him to live with him so as to prepare for his First Communion and entry into the school in Châtelerault. The dedicated apostolic lifestyle of his uncle and the other priests, with whom he lived in the parish house, was without a doubt the best environment for his vocation to mature. It was probably in this period that he had his first contact with the rich spiritual literature of the church of the time.

When he was 17, he entered the University of Poitiers where he studied Philosophy and Theology. In the seminary he witnessed the departure of some of his teachers, who refused to take the constitutional oath, and their replacement by schismatic priests.

When that occurred he decided to leave the seminary, even though there remained little time before his priestly ordination. Shaken by such events but secure in his faith, he wrote to his father:

*“Here everything is really upset by the convocation of the Estates General. If we are witnessing such calamity it can only be because the sins of men have become as numerous as the sands on the shore of the sea and because God is punishing as he wants. Let us adore his will and we will once more be happy.”*  
(BP 7)

We know little of the early years of **Henriette**. We can assume that like young girls of her class she learned reading, music and feminine crafts. She was sincere, impulsive and spontaneous. She was very gentle and had a great capacity for loving others. Her great affection would lead her even *“to desire to suffer so as to avoid or lessen the suffering”* of others.

Her youth was lived in the midst of the nobility that generally wanted to know nothing of difficulties and to continue enjoying a sort of empty life.

However we also must recognize that Henriette’s native Poitou was a land of great women: Radegonde, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Joan of Arc, Dianne of Poitiers... The history of these women in the society and the church is a story of how they struggled to “be themselves” and to “empty themselves” so as to allow the great richness they had within to shine forth and to let it shine in every circumstance. The same thing would happen in the life of Henriette.

Women acted heroically during the Revolution. They took a stand and sided with the revolution or counter-revolution. No one was indifferent. The Christian woman declared “war” against the revolution taking up the defense of the priests who refused to take the oath.

Henriette's life was turned completely upside down by the situation. She sensed a deep call from God to offer her life. It was a call that would demand a total gift.

## Family Problems

While still a youth, **Pierre** had to confront the financial ruin of his family. It was a rude shock for him and those dear to him. He asked them as he asked himself to endure the disgrace with the trust in God that they had taught him:

*“Oh father, I just heard this instant the news of our destruction. What a disgrace! How come I did not know about this? Your care for me wanted to spare me the suffering. What could be worse but God is the source of all consolation. Let us have confidence in him...let us accept patiently what he orders. I will try to not be a burden from now on. What misfortune has befallen you! Pray to God, pray to God without ceasing. He is the truth and the good and only consoler.”* (BP 8)

During the time of his studies, the financial situation of his family only worsened and he was obliged to find work to support himself. He worked hard at his studies and he found a post as a private tutor for some children. He lived through the financial ruin of his family with a spirit of faith and the problems never led him to doubt his priestly vocation.

At the death of her father, **Henriette**, moved with her mother to Poitiers. France was approaching great political and social upheaval. Gabriel de la Barre, chronicler of the early community, will say *“These are her early years that she (the Good Mother) in the bitterness of her heart refers to as ‘her caprices’.”* (GdB, Mem. I, 4)

In spite of her “worldly” existence, Henriette and her mother agreed to shelter a priest who refused to take the government oath. They and the priest were denounced and taken to prison.

## THE CHARISM UNFOLDS

### Introduction

Both the Good Father and the Good Mother received a solid formation in the faith, especially from their families. Pierre and Henriette contemplate the reality of their lives and their time. This opens their eyes, it unsettles them, it leads them to go out of themselves, to put aside all that is secure and comfortable, to follow the Lord.

#### 1. Adoration:

They discover a God who is above any political regime or societal crisis. This is a God who is consoling and good. The founders know the importance of doing God's will. With this faith they understand and they "contemplate" their challenging times and respond.

#### 2. Communion:

Both live a faith that has been nurtured in the family, a faith connected to the Church and the sacraments. They experience their family and their church as communion.

#### 3. Zeal:

This lived faith leads them to set out and to courageously take risks.

### SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE

**Ex 3: 1-12:** *"I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned."*

*"I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint."*

**1 Kings 19: 10-18:** *“I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts...”*

**Matthew 14: 14-21:** *“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them.”*

**Mark 8: 22-26:** *“Do you see anything?”*

**Mark 10: 17-31:** *“Jesus, looking at him, loved him.”*

**John 20: 24-29:** *“We have seen the Lord.”*

**Acts 9: 10-19:** *“Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes.”*

### **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- What events lead Pierre and Henriette to see things in a new way? What happenings, either recently or some time ago have caused you to see things in a new way?
- Describe in more detail the impact that these events had on you and the call that you heard in them.
- At this stage, what situations, people and/or challenges have helped you to grow and to discern more deeply your vocation?
- Has the experience of the founders and going back over your own vocation awakened something in you?
- What aspects of the charism have you experienced more intensely? How did that happen, what was it like?
- Try to awaken the joy of God “looking upon” you and also the joy of “being able to see” so much now in the light of faith. Let yourself give praise and thanks.



## HEARING THE CALL AND THE FIRST RESPONSE

### DESCRIPTION

We believe that the first call is always from God. He is the one who chooses us for a mission that calls for an appropriate response and a real commitment. We recognize that the first one who pronounces our name and determines our mission in life is the Lord. This call is realized and clarified in our personal and conscious response, made with the Spirit's help, as we agree to participate in the mission of the Son. In giving that response we experience the need for profound personal change. Such change upsets our schedules, our relationships and our priorities in life. It is necessary to be "attentive" in order to hear the call and to be able to determine unmistakably where it is coming from. Being called and responding decisively, we experience the need to understand our relationships with others in a new way and to see ourselves grow in a new understanding of ourselves.

### FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The key moment for **Pierre Coudrin** was refusing to sign the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and agreeing to live his vocation in an atmosphere of continual danger. He has to know where he stands and grow in trust and complete availability to the plans of Providence. He comes to see himself as an instrument of God's work and he decides to be ordained.

For **Henriette Aymer** it is risking her life by hiding non-juring priests. The Terror and suffering will lead her to "act in another manner" when she is in prison. She draws close to the woman rejected by all; she feels the "need" to change; she sets about clarifying the call she has received; she looks for a spiritual director

and she determines “to refuse God nothing.” She asks for admittance to the Association of the Sacred Heart.

## HOW OUR FOUNDERS EXPERIENCED THIS STAGE

### The Call

**Pierre** learned from his family to know a God who is Father, a God who is love, a God who is close and faithful and who becomes human in Jesus. He was attracted by this God with a gentle face.

Little by little he became aware of the reality of the world in which he lived, both its nobility and its contradictions. He had a powerful experience of a God who was calling him to give himself and to proclaim his love. He came to see the love of God as salvation from the evils of the world.

His first sermon, when only a deacon, gives witness to his acceptance of the call he had received:

*“All powerful God, you who choose the weakest instruments to do the greatest wonders, deign to bless these first efforts of my zeal. Deign to strengthen my faltering steps as I enter the work to which you have destined me. What can I do in this formidable ministry without the help of your arm? How can I successfully proclaim your heavenly word, if you do not enlighten me, if you do not strengthen me by your grace and above all if you do not engrave in my heart and express in my conduct the truths which I must teach to your people? Never allow me, O my God, to diverge for an instant from the holy lessons which you place in my mouth. After the example of the shepherd who governs this flock, may I be the first to practice what I teach my brothers.” (BP 2201)*

For Pierre preaching is bearing God's Word in his life, just like Jesus. To preach is to desire to fervently accomplish the Father's will. He asked his listeners: *"I beg you to beseech the Father of lights to pour forth on me his perfect gifts so that I might become a minister according to his heart."* (Ibid.)

Denounced by a neighbor's employee, **Henriette** and her mother were arrested and taken to the prison of the Hospitalaires. There they would remain for almost a year. It was a tense and difficult experience.

Henriette experienced a profound change within and she no longer could waste her time on vanities. The physical and moral misery had reached such a proportion that they impelled her to *"place boundless trust in the mercy of the Lord."* Gabriel de la Barre wrote: *"She spent a large part of her days and nights working with her hands in order to obtain what she needed to provide food for her mother."* (GdB, VBM, p. 2)

Later Gabriel would write: *"In her sad cell, alone with God, she began to reflect on her past; she adored the decrees of Providence; they seemed just to her.* (GdB, VBM, p. 2) While in prison, she celebrated the sacrament of penance with great honesty. She later told Father Regis Rouchouze that she thought at the time, *"If I go to confession, I really want to make a confession of everything"* and she added *"If I had not profited from that grace, my conversion would have come to nothing."* (HL, Mem 1, note to page 303) This was the first important step in her drawing close to God.

## **First Response**

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was approved in August 1790. It was intended to make of the Church just an arm of the State and to separate it from Rome. Schism struck the Church in France. The clergy were confronted with a crisis and they were divided. On one side there were those who decided to accept the conditions laid

down by the government, some out of conviction, some in order to remain with the faithful, some out of fear. On the other side were those who remained faithful to Rome and did not take the oath of the Constitution. They suffered persecution and were even made to leave the country.

For his part, **Pierre** knew that God had not abandoned his people and that he would continue to act mysteriously in the situation, especially among this people that was so in crisis, suffering and disorientated. In such circumstances, he decided to be ordained a priest. In the midst of such insecurity and danger, making such a decision, was not easy. He would later tell the novices: *“For I became a priest with the intention of suffering everything, of sacrificing myself for the Good God and of dying in his service if necessary.”* (HL, QqR, 64)

Once ordained he returned to Coussay le Bois for his first solemn Mass. That very day the Procurator sent a communiqué calling all eligible voters to elect a new pastor on the following Sunday. Pierre responded to that with the firm declaration that *“neither he nor his family will take part in this act of schism.”* (HL, Mem. 1, 11)

The reaction of the revolutionaries was also swift in coming and so Pierre had to flee. Due to the danger hanging over his head, he finally went into hiding. For the near future Pierre would live concealed in a grain loft that had no natural light and a low ceiling.

Returning home from prison **Henriette** was a new person. No longer did she look forward to gatherings of high society. Her time was divided between serving her mother and prayer.

Henriette wanted to channel her energies in terms of her desire to give herself to God. She did not adopt the pious style of the townspeople. She knew of the Association of the Sacred Heart, which was secretly referred to as “The Immensity” and in the early part of 1795 she asked to be admitted. It was an association of

women that arose as a reaction to the suppression of the religious communities. It was founded and led by Miss Suzanne Geoffroy along with a group of friends. At first, they rejected her request as she had a worldly reputation and her conversion had gone unnoticed. Finally, toward the end of March 1795 she was accepted as an extern.

She sought a spiritual director to help in her discernment and she found one in Father Coudrin. When she attended a Mass that he was celebrating and heard him, she, who had previously been worried about her method of prayer, found great peace. She said, “*I am not mistaken, he preaches as I pray.*” (GdB, Mem. 1, 3) From that moment on she would go to confession to him.

Later, in one of her writings, she testified how decisive the moment had been for her when Father Coudrin assigned her an hour of Adoration. “*When you established adoration at Moulin-a-Vent and you assigned me an hour, without a doubt you fixed my destiny.*” (BM 98) And so she completed her first conversion and at the same time found the direction in which her vocation would take her.

## **THE CHARISM UNFOLDS**

### **Introduction**

Little by little our founders become more aware of the call of “the Good God”, a God incarnate in Jesus. Their response is a clear choice in the midst of great difficulty and danger.

#### **1. The Four Ages of Jesus Christ**

At first they do not use this terminology but they experience the reality in their lives. In the Good Father we see *the evangelical life* reflected when, as a young priest, he gives himself to the preaching of God’s Word. In the

Association of the Sacred Heart, the Good Mother experiences *the hidden life* when she discovers adoration and the impact it will have on her life. Both experience *the crucified life*: the Good Mother in prison and the Good Father fleeing from the authorities.

## **2. Adoration**

Both the Good Father and the Good Mother sense the importance of adoration and the transforming effect it can have on their lives. “*When you gave me an hour of adoration you fixed my destiny.*”

## **3. Reparation**

The founders not only experience sin, but also its effects in their lives. (C.f. the crucified life). They respond to the violence around them with love, immersing themselves in Christ and his love.

## **4. Apostolic zeal**

This communion with Christ is the source of the apostolic zeal. The Good Father decides to be ordained in spite of the difficult circumstances. He has a zealous love for the Church. He feels called by God to proclaim the Good News.

## **5. Vocation and Mission in Community**

Both desire to live their vocation and mission in communion. The Good Father remains faithful to the Church despite the persecution. He cannot conceive of being separated from the Church. “*Neither he nor his family will take part in this act of schism.*” The Good Mother seeks a community of faith where she can live and respond to God, at a time when so many have been suppressed. Between the two of them there is a

communion which is being more obvious. *“He preaches as I pray.”*(BM)

### SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE

**Genesis 12: 1-9:** *“Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.”*

**1 Samuel 3: 1-14:** *“Here I am. You called me.”*

**Deuteronomy 6: 4-13:** *“Hear, O Israel.”*

**Deuteronomy 30: 15-16:** *“I have today set before you life and prosperity.”*

**Jeremiah 1: 1-10:** *“Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you.”*

**Matthew 11: 25-30:** *“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.”*

**Matthew 26: 6-13:** *“Why do you make trouble for the woman?”*

**Mark 4: 1-12:** *“Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.”*

**Luke 4: 16-22:** *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”*

**Luke 10: 38-42:** *“Mary has chosen the better part.”*

**John 1: 43-47:** *“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”*

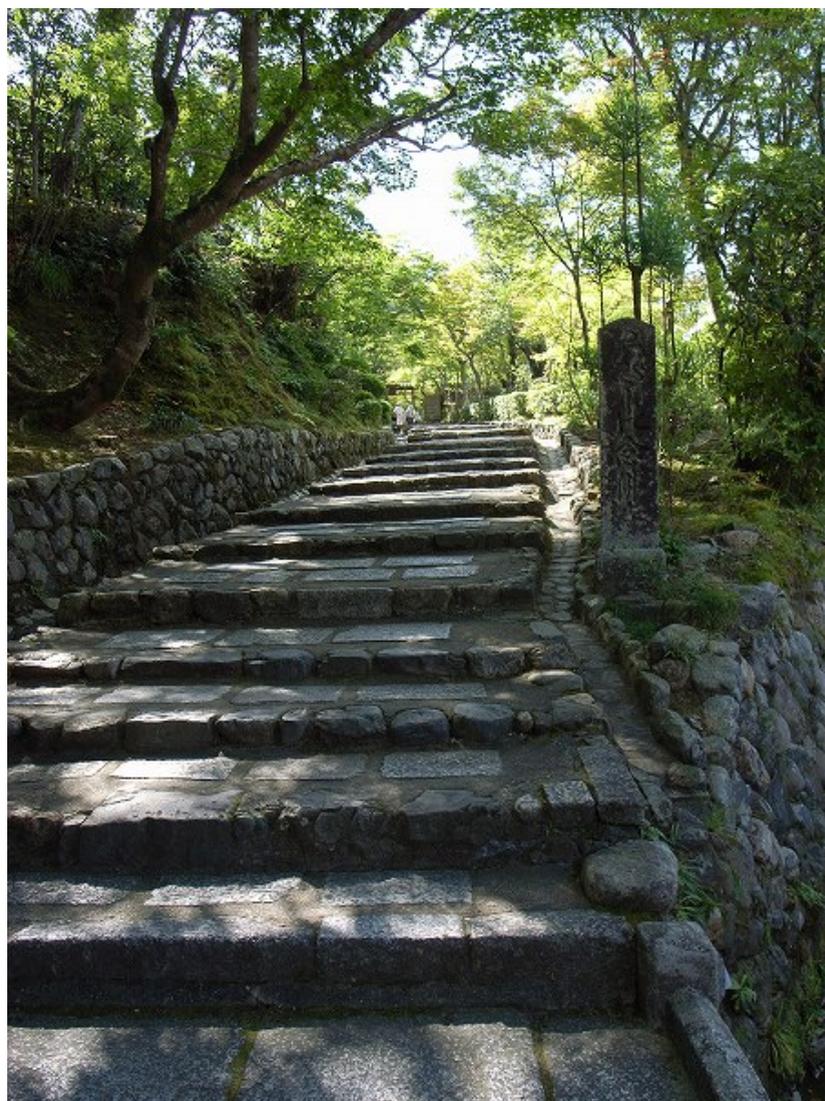
**1 Corinthians 1: 26-29:** *“God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise...”*

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- What events allowed Pierre and Henriette to listen and to accept God's plan for them?
- Take time to remember and then make a list of the events in your own life that you now see were calls from God. How did you respond?

- What has God shown you and how has he helped you listen to his call? What was your first response to God?
- Have you experienced the need to clarify where the call is coming from?
- What aspects of the charism have you experienced most strongly in this stage?
- After reflecting on your vocation and the way you responded, unite your spirit to Jesus so that together with him you can pray, “*I praise you Father of heaven and earth...*”





## INTIMACY AND SEDUCTION

### DESCRIPTION

It is the time when the Lord leads us apart and comes to speak to our heart, the season when little by little we allow ourselves to be transformed by his Love. During this stage Christ becomes the center of our life amid significant times of intimacy. There follows a rereading of our life in the light of his Spirit who leads us to make a free and complete gift.

Silence, recollection and prayer are necessary at this stage.

### FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The time that **Pierre Coudrin** spent in the loft of the Motte d'Usseau allowed him to enter into profound intimacy with God.

**Henriette Aymer** experienced this transformation during long periods that she spent before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration.

### EXPERIENCE OF OUR FOUNDERS

**Pierre** experienced this stage in a particular way in the grain loft of the Motte, where he was shut up for several months. He spent his time in prayer and constant communion with God. That experience would remain decisive for the rest of his life.

*"In my loft, I was situated in such a way that I could not stand up. At times I would go down by a sort of trap door into the office of Maumain (that was the name of the man in whose house he was hidden) where I had at the most a three feet width where I walked. The lack of exercise caused me to become extremely fatigued. What I ate was almost always cold as it was*

*difficult to bring it to me in my hiding place. Then that bothered my respiration. I was all dry, thin to the point that my skin clung to my bones and my body gave forth such an odor that I was poisoning myself. However, during those five months that I had to stay there, I was not bored for a single moment. Every day I would say Mass at midnight and even though I took great care in purifying the corporal, I always believed that I had left some particles of the sacred species and thus I had the Good God with me. After saying my Mass, I would go up to my loft where I spent the whole day reading Church history and praying.” (HL, QqR, 60)*

For this young enthusiastic priest, to be forced to lead the life of a recluse, after just having been ordained, must have been difficult to accept, but at the same time it was for him the opportunity to have an intense spiritual experience. With everything outside in chaos, God came and spoke to his heart.

*“I was shut up there for five whole months, without being able to go out or go to confession. But the Lord gave me to grace not to experience any anxiety, and I enjoyed great peace of conscience. It is certain that at that time God was giving me great graces. (HL, QqR, 61)*

However the situation in the country was deteriorating all the more. Christians were being persecuted everywhere and priests were being deported. In those circumstances Pierre experienced a God who loved him as a father and who would say to him as he did to Moses, *“I have seen the misery of my people and I am sending you.”* (Ex. 3:7,10)

During prayer one day he had an intuition:

*“It was there that one day having gone up to my loft after saying Mass, I knelt down before the corporal where I always believed that I had the Blessed Sacrament. I saw then what we are now.*

*It seemed to me that we were several come together; that we formed a troop of missionaries that was to spread the Gospel everywhere. As I was thinking of that society of missionaries, the idea also came to me of a society of women, but not a community as it exists, for I had never seen religious women. I said to myself, "we will have neither money nor income. We will be eaten by lice and as much as I can remember, for I cannot say it with certainty, for fear of lying, I said to myself then: there will be a society of pious women who will care for our affairs when we are out on mission... That desire to form a society that would carry the faith everywhere never left me." (HL, QqR, 62, 63)*

He had this vision when the whole world seemed to be falling apart around the Christians. In the back of his loft, in the darkness, a light inundated his heart and a mission began to take shape. Pierre found his strength in the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist. It was there that he discovered the God, who in Jesus Christ becomes the companion of humanity on its journey. This God actually experiences humanity's suffering and misery. Pierre is deeply moved within by the goodness of this God "*who is rich in mercy.*" (Eph. 2:4) Only the proclamation of the Gospel, in word and act, can heal and rebuild a broken world.

After reading the account of the martyrdom of Saint Caprasius on October 20, 1792, he resolved to leave his hiding place. He did not have a plan worked out. He had nowhere to lay down his head but he was certain that God had chosen him to carry the Gospel everywhere. God would take care of him.

*"When I finally left Maumain's, I prostrated myself at the foot of an oak tree that was not far from the house and I consecrated myself to the point of death. For I became a priest with the intention of suffering everything, even of sacrificing myself for the Good God and to die if necessary in his service. However I*

*always had a certain premonition that I would be alright. Sometimes Maumain would say to me, 'But how will you get away? And I would answer him, 'Come on, the Good God will watch over me well.' ” (HL, QqR, 64)*

Strengthened by trust in providence and missionary zeal, he set out on the roads of Poitou. The intimacy he had experienced with Christ in his hiding place would continue while he walked the streets of Poitiers ministering to God’s people.

For **Henriette**, it was the times of prolonged adoration in the house on rue du Moulin à Vent that would be decisive for her vocation.

Henriette would be faithful to that daily rendezvous. She would spend long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Adoration would give meaning to her life. The most outstanding aspect of the spiritual personality of Henriette Aymer is her vocation as a perpetual adorer. Little by little she became totally available to God and would always repeat:

*“My God, here I am. Do with me what pleases you.”<sup>1</sup> “All for God, all in God, all to God. He is the only true consoler. Abandon yourself always to him and only there will you find peace, strength to suffer and the joy that follows.” (BM 1016)*

Trust and abandonment became two key words for Henriette:

*“Place all your difficulties at the foot of the cross. Have trust that you will succeed in what you undertake for his glory.”<sup>2</sup> “In everything, have courage and hope for all from the mercy of God.” (BM 462)*

---

<sup>1</sup> in : *Dépositions et témoignages des Sœurs au sujet de la Bonne Mère*, polycopie ArchSSCC/S., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 68.

The more she contemplated the pierced heart of Christ the more her love of the cross and her desire to be in communion with Christ crucified grew:

*“Plunge yourself forever into the sorrowful and loving wound of the divine heart of Christ and you will be sheltered from all storms...love more and you will fear less.”* (BM 199)

*“May God be blessed in everything. Let us love the cross or at least bear it courageously. ...Place everything at the feet of the Good God and have no concern.”* (BM 1045)

Little by little this contemplation became essential to her life:

*“I experience an unspeakable need to be before the Blessed Sacrament, but I dare not give in to it or remain there too long. It seems to shorten my days.”* (BM 32)

*“No one will ever know what went on at that time between her and God, but the radical nature of that experience would change her forever. The irruption of God in her soul from that point on will have a force that will create a spiritual dynamism: supernatural energy, a capacity for self-denial and sacrifice, the very stuff that foundresses and saints are made of.”*<sup>3</sup>

However she teaches her daughters a familiar and simple kind of prayer, a heart to heart conversation with the Lord.

*“Try to recollect yourselves a bit and to place all your difficulties at the feet of the Good God. From there you will draw the strength to bear them well.”* (BM 159) *“You should get used to drawing God closer to yourself, if we can speak in such a way. That kind of familiarity in no way displeases the divinity and is not harmful to humility. We are never smaller in our own eyes*

---

<sup>3</sup> Thérèse TREMBLAY ssc, *Henriette Aymer, une femme enracinée, une femme de Dieu*, in: *Horizons Blancs*, n° 101 (october 1984) p. 530.

*than when we look at God up close. This way of acting makes prayer much easier.”<sup>4</sup>*

The Good Mother would usually remain in prayer for hours, especially at night where she would keep vigil for her community, allowing the others to sleep while at the same time not breaking the “perpetuity” of adoration.

It is interesting that she would later tell the Good Father:

*“The Good God has given you the precious gift of his constant presence, in other words when you are speaking, walking or doing something else, without thinking, you are thinking of him. Finally, he is more in you than you are in yourself, if we can speak that way. He would desire that in order to respond to such a singular grace, that several times a day you enter into the depth your heart to adore him there, even if it is only for a moment. For he has made his dwelling there and he delights to be there and so the faults that you might commit are never with complete deliberation. The Good God desires that even on the days when you are the busiest, that you take time to make your little half-hour, and the other days an hour broken into two periods. In return for your fidelity in entering into the depth of your heart with the Good God, you will find it easy to remain at his feet. There will be no more place for boredom and for the distractions that can so tire you at times, but will be far from you and will no longer annoy you. I can assure you that the Good God has the desire and the plan to give you special graces. I would almost dare to say that his Heart needs to do this...”*  
(BM 23)

The intimacy with the Lord that the Good Mother and Good Father experienced in Adoration went much beyond the time spent

---

<sup>4</sup> Hilarion LUCAS ss.cc, *Vie de la T.R. Mère Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie*, d.d. 1847, s.l.a. - Tome II, *La Bonne Mère, son esprit*, polycopies Picpus, p. 17.

before the Blessed Sacrament. This made a mark on their lives. They became “*adorers in spirit and in truth.*” (Jn. 4:23). Their intimacy with God leads them to give themselves completely to God and to burn with apostolic zeal.

## **THE CHARISM UNFOLDS**

### **Introduction**

The Good Father and the Good Mother experienced profound intimacy with God in the midst of a society and church that is crumbling apart. Their faith in God’s providential care is deepened. Their experience of God continues and bears fruit in service to God and his People.

#### **1. The Heart of Jesus**

The founders experience Jesus as present and loving (his heart) in the depth of their being (their hearts). The “Good God” takes on the face and the heart of Christ.

#### **2. The Four Ages (though they still do not use this terminology)**

Their contemplative intimacy with God is lived in hiddenness. While hidden with Christ, the Good Father’s evangelical concern for society and the church grows. This leads him to leave the Motte ready to share in Christ’s sufferings.

#### **3. Eucharist and Adoration**

The Eucharist becomes “the source and summit” of the founders’ lives. Jesus is forming them in his love for the Father and for the world. Fed by the Eucharist they

want to give themselves as Jesus did for the salvation of the world. This becomes a source of apostolic **zeal**.

#### **4. The Reality of Sin and Reparation**

The experience of God's love in Jesus Christ is in contrast to the chaos around them. The suffering that they see in the society and the Church is the result of sin and selfishness. They feel called "to repair" it. In communion with Christ they desire to respond and they find the strength to bring his healing love to others.

#### **5. Communion**

The founders are concerned for the suffering Church and they want to be at the service of the Body of Christ. The call is not just to them but to an apostolic community that will bring the faith everywhere.

#### **SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE**

**Psalm 138:** *"You stretch out your hand; your right hand saves me."*

**Psalm 27:** *"The LORD is my light and my salvation."*

**Exodus 3: 1-15:** *"I have witnessed the affliction of my people."*

**1 Kings 19: 1-14:** *"The Lord was in "a tiny whispering sound."*

**Isaiah 43: 1-7:** *"You are precious in my eyes and glorious... and I love you."*

**Hosea 2: 16-25:** *"So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart."*

**John 19: 37:** *"They will look upon him whom they have pierced."*

**Philippians 3: 7-14:** *“I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.”*

#### **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- Have you ever had an experience in which “God calls you apart and speaks to your heart?” What do you feel within you as you remember that experience?
- What is the image of God that speaks to you and attracts you most powerfully at present?
- What are the things that help you to live in intimacy with God?
- What aspects of our SS.CC. charism help you do that?
- As you finish this moment of the journey let your prayer ascend to God.



# IDENTITY AND BELONGING

## DESCRIPTION

This is a long stage where we feel ourselves more and more identified with God's love. The feeling of belonging to this religious family grows and develops. We become co-responsible for the common mission. We participate in seeking God's will for this religious family. It is a time when our call to live in this Congregation through participation in its communal life and apostolate is confirmed.

## FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Lord "consolidates" the community and fills the members with zeal to carry forward the mission.

**Pierre** feels the urgency to do God's will that he intuited in the Motte. He begins his clandestine apostolate in Montbernage and other places in and around Poitiers. The first community takes shape and takes up the mission.

**Henriette** gives herself to this vocation that is now not just her own but shared with others. She is called to lead and animate the community. The first foundations are made and the apostolate with the young is begun.

## EXPERIENCE OF OUR FOUNDERS

### **Pierre: from the Motte d'Usseau to Montbernage**

For Pierre the vision he experienced in the Motte meant discovering the mission that God was entrusting to him. He became aware of the responsibility that this involved: forming a group that

would bring the Gospel everywhere, a community whose whole life and mission would be founded on God's Word of love. From the moment he leaves the Motte this foundation is always in his mind.

Pierre left the Motte just at the time when things were particularly difficult especially for believers and priests. Going out of hiding was risky and dangerous. He left the security of the Motte by back roads and headed for Poitiers. The Vicar of the refractory Church entrusted to his ministry the neighborhood of Montbernage, outside the city walls. He will also worked in the parish of Saint Radegonde, in the city, and went to the areas around Poitiers. His ministry was not limited to the territory assigned him. He went wherever God's people needed him.

Placing himself in great danger and without time to rest, he gave himself to the work of God to which he had been called. He took up his work with burning zeal:

*“During the great Terror, he went, as I was saying, to different houses. He preached morning and evening. Many people came to him. After he had been in one house all day preaching and hearing confessions, he would leave in the evening and go off to another house and do the same.”* (HL, QqR, 73)

In contact with the Daughters of Wisdom and the people evangelized by Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort he discovered the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of his Mother.

At the foot of Jesus' cross, he encountered Jesus' Mother, her heart inseparable from his. She was the first to believe. She kept “in her heart” everything about her Son, to whom she was united from the moment of her first FIAT.

The young priest could see how the poor of Montbernage and of the “Incurables” prison were sensitive to this. He could see that openness of heart to the Gospel, even to the point of having a heart

totally one with Jesus, was the solution to the suffering of the world. The heart of Mary would be the entryway to that path.

His first disciples, attracted by his zeal for the Gospel, joined the Good Father in his clandestine life and ministry. Among them was Hilarion Lucas, who would cause suffering to the Good Father and later leave the community.

### **Henriette: The Solitaries and the Grand Maison**

Within the Association of the Sacred Heart, with which Pierre and a group of priests were associated, along with a group of faith-filled women there arose a very united and fervent group that wanted to give more time to prayer and silence. Within that group one who stood out was Henriette Aymer, with whom Pierre Coudrin had a special relationship and with whom he shared the desire of forming a religious community.

With the formation of this group of “Solitaries”, they saw the possibility of responding to Pierre’s vision in the Motte and the desire to give herself that had been with Henriette since her experience in prison.

They took on a rule of common life in which they expressed their unity of heart. The document, dating from the end of 1796 or, at the very latest, the first months of 1797, states in the first paragraph:

*“God brought us to birth in the bosom of the Christian religion, he called us to holiness. Therefore it is in no way a rash thing to tend toward that. We need a guide, a model, a protector. In Jesus we find everything: his birth, his life and his death. That is our rule. His divine heart will be our refuge and our exile. It will be the solitary place to which we often withdraw so that he might speak to our hearts.”* (BP 2197)

Little by Little the group made the radical choices that characterize religious life. At first they adopted a quasi- monastic regimen of withdrawal, but always clearly aware that they had to be open to how God would manifest his will for the new community. One thing was clear; Jesus was their model and guide. Through devotion to the Heart of Jesus they wanted to be united to the movements of his heart and like him to be meek and humble of heart. This would be a primary characteristic of their community.

In June of 1797 they bought the “Grand Maison” and on August 25 the Solitaries made resolutions of poverty, chastity and obedience. Heading the little group was Henriette, now the superior. When persecution broke out anew in September of that year, Henriette confided to Father Coudrin her worries about threats to the work and Fr. Coudrin decided that the moment had come to move to the “Grand Maison.” They carried the Blessed Sacrament there by night and they hid it behind wooden paneling in one of the rooms. Perpetual adoration began at the Grand Maison with the help of the Solitaires. Among the first sisters was Gabriel de La Barre who would become the Good Mother’s loving friend and confident.

### **Pierre and Henriette: Consecration**

In October of 1800, Mother Henriette and her companions pronounced their first vows. Then on Christmas eve 1800, the Good Father and Good Mother made:

*“the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience, following the lights of the Holy Spirit for the good or the work, as a zealot of the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in whose service I wish to live and die.”* (HL, Mem. 1, 26)

With this act of consecration they professed that God had called them to live for his people. Now they belong to Him, to this little family that is “His work” and they belong to the Church.

### ***Putting the vision into words***

As already indicated, the founders made a first attempt to write the Rule in 1797. A short while later the Good Mother found a pamphlet describing the life of the Trappists and in Advent 1798 the sisters began to follow a good number of their practices.

In 1800 the founders wrote a first draft of a Rule with a view to the official approbation of the Congregation. First they sought the approval of the authorities of the diocese of Poitiers but what they really wanted was to receive the approval of the Pope. Hilarion Lucas was given responsibility for negotiations with the Holy See. He left for Rome in July 1814 and would stay there for almost a year. He was faced with the difficulty of not having a well developed text that could be submitted as Constitutions. He took up the task and wrote a text based on his experience of living with the founders from the very beginning. The text, corrected by the founders, was approved by the Holy See in 1817. Part of that text we have in the present Constitutions as the preliminary chapter. From that we get an idea of the main themes around which the life and charism of the community developed.

Writing Constitutions and seeking ecclesial approval meant that the founders to put their vision into words. The Good Farther wrote a document explaining the title “Zealots” and another on “Adorers.” Together the founders wrote petitions that contain valuable indications of how they saw our Congregation. A study of the texts shows the collaboration between the two, at times the words are those of the Good Mother but the signature is the Good Father’s!

In May 1801 they wrote to the Vicar Capitulars of Poitiers briefly describing their form of life and asking for approval. The title they proposed for their new community captures its spirit. They concluded their request by writing:

*“Such in substance, Sirs, is the general plan of the Society of Zealots of the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary, a plan that given our modest means is rather ambitious, but we dare to hope for all thinking that our Lord did not reject the widow’s mite.”* (BP 25)

Six months later, in October of the same year they wrote to the Pope and they described themselves in these words:

*“For the last eight years in the diocese of Poitiers there have existed two fraternities, free of any Gallican influence, constantly useful and devoted to the divided church. One is made up of priests and clerics and the other of women. Under the title of Zealots of the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, perpetual adorers, going to the Heart of Jesus through the Heart of Mary and under the patronage of Saint Joseph, they desire to reproduce in their life the different ages of the life of Christ, his childhood, his adolescence, his apostolic life and his crucified life according to what is proper to each of the societies. Approved by ordinary authority, following the Rule of Saint Benedict with their own constitutions which encourage adoration, bound by the three simple vows, they strive to increase the faithful’s love for Christ and their devotion to the very loving hearts of Jesus and Mary.”* (BP 2242)

The community grew in number and also identity and purpose. The vision of the Motte begins to take shape, *“a group of missionaries who would spread the Gospel everywhere.”*

## Henriette and the first foundations

After diocesan approbation in 1802, the Good Mother left Poitiers with a group of sisters to make a foundation in Mende. The Good Father had preceded them as Vicar General of Bishop Chabot, the Good Mother's uncle. In 1803 the house in Cahors is opened and in 1804 the house in Paris.

Making new foundations meant establishing young communities with young superiors. Resources were scarce but the founders had great confidence in "the Good God."

Gabriel de la Bare would remember:

*"The means were always less than we needed for what we wanted to do. For example, to buy something, there was no money. There were many youth and children to be taught but few teachers. There were few sisters and a lot of sickness. But perpetual adoration was never interrupted. God wanted to do everything and God did everything and the members of the Congregation who are still alive today and who were witnesses... would be hard pressed to say how they did it. God keeps his secret."* (GdB, Notes, 134)

While the political situation allowed, Henriette was on the road making foundations, visiting and encouraging the new communities as regards their spirit and their apostolate:

*"I only have the time to tell you that I love you all, that I am well and that I would like you all to be happy and really holy."*  
(BM 69) *"Make sure that the class for the poor little girls can continue. It is the blessing of our houses."* (BM 1144)

## Pierre and the first apostolate

The founders described the mission of the Congregation in these words:

*“Some are sent to the countryside to give missions, to instruct the people and to spread devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Others are involved in teaching children with the idea of raising them to be priests or zealots, according to their vocations or their gifts, or even to be good Christians living in the world. Finally, others like new Moses are destined to ceaselessly lift their hands toward heaven to obtain the Lord’s blessing on the work of their brothers and to repair the outrages that the Heart of Jesus has received, receives and unfortunately will receive from bad Christians.” (BP 25)*

Like the sisters, the brothers dedicated themselves to the education of the young and opened schools in Poitiers, Mende, Cahors and Paris. They also responded to the needs of the Church devastated by the Revolution and gave themselves to the formation of seminarians.

The Good Father served the Church as Vicar General of Mende. Members of the community followed his example of being “useful to the Church.” Gabriel de la Barre speaks of Isidore David who became Superior of Poitiers when the Good Father went to Mende:

*“However Brother Isidore rendered great services to the diocese. He was always ready to exercise the holy ministry every time that the diocesan Vicars or the pastors asked him. During the Jubilee he heard the confessions of everyone in one of the city parishes, mostly the uneducated and the poor. The Prisons, beggars, criminals condemned to be executed, unfortunates of every sort were the objects of his zeal.” (GdB, Notes II, 192)*

Later the brothers would begin to preach parish missions in different dioceses of France. In 1826 the first missionaries left for the Sandwich Islands.

## Source of Strength

Our founders' zeal for the reign of God was rooted in the love of the Sacred Hearts.

As the Good Father would say in his petition to the Holy See asking to keep the title of “zealots”:

*“If the tenderness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the salvation of souls really takes root within, how could one not be enflamed by zeal so as to respond to the love of such a good Master? If one thinks of the maternal tenderness of the Heart of Mary for the men who have become her children in the person of Saint John, would it be possible to not feel one’s heart aflame with a holy zeal to honor the Virgin of virgins?”* (BP 519)

It is no wonder that we read in the same document, *“The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our Institute.”*

## THE CHARISM UNFOLDS

The founders begin to give clear expression to what they are called to live. The charism finds its foundation and center in the consecration to the Sacred Hearts.

### 1. The Congregation is “the work” of the Good God

The founders are responding to what God is doing, *“But finally, if the work of the Good God proceeds according to his heart, everything should satisfy us even the greatest privations.”* (BP 124, August 1803)

The “work” is in God’s loving hands. They trust in his Providence.

## **2. Consecration to the Sacred Hearts**

“Consecration” for them means surrender to the Lord and his will, as did Mary. The founders desire to bring this experience of God’s love to others, as a response to suffering and injustice (reparation). Their surrender to God’s love becomes the foundation of the “work”. It is the “center” of their charism. Everything else is understood in relation to it.

## **3. Adoration as an act and an attitude**

Adoration becomes an essential aspect of their lives and a permanent attitude that they take with them as they serve God’s people. An image from this time that speaks to us of what adoration meant is the hidden tabernacle in the Grand Maison. From the Eucharist they acquire a way of looking at the world to which they are sent and seeing God’s presence there.

## **4. Four Ages: childhood and public life**

The language of the “four ages” becomes their way of speaking of how they are conformed to Christ. Childhood: both brothers and sisters incarnate this in their service to the young. Evangelical life: the brothers begin the work of the missions. Both brothers and sisters see themselves as sent by and in the name of the community to do the “work”.

## **5. Apostolic Zeal**

The title “zealot” is seen to express the very identity of the community. “Zealots” are available to the needs of the Church and often at great cost. Their mission expands; they go “everywhere.”

## 6. Communion (the value of relationships)

The founders' first disciples are a diverse group, united by a common desire to respond to God's call. The early community can be seen as a network of relationships (the Good Mother, Good Father, Gabriel de la Barre, Hilarion Lucas and others.) Correspondence goes back and forth. Responsibilities are assumed. Difficulties and tensions arise. The relationship between the Good Father and the Good Mother is a source of strength and inspiration for each other and for the whole religious family.

### SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE

**Isaiah 49: 13-17:** *“See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name.”*

**Ezekiel 36: 23-27:** *“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you.”*

**John 15: 9-17:** *“As the Father has loved me so I have loved you.”*

**John 19: 31-37:** *“But one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.”*

**Philippians 2:5-11:** *“Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.”*

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- *“The devotion to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our institute....”* As you reread and meditate on the experience of our founders can you see why they would say that?
- Can you identify with the experience of a merciful God, a God who welcomes us with open arms?

- In their heart to heart communion with God, our founders heard the call to go to the poor. How is that for you today?
- Brother/sisterhood and the family spirit are important aspects of our life as a Congregation. How do you experience that?
- What aspect of our charism spoke to you most powerfully at this stage?
- As you conclude this part of the journey, lift up your heart in prayer to God.





# CRISIS AND CONVERSION

## DESCRIPTION

This is the stage in our lives when problems can cause our vocation to get shaky. What is not really important becomes an absolute. Despair and lack of meaning are evident. Our life becomes routine and this causes our vocation and mission to lose meaning. This is when we experience a certain “dryness” in our life and our prayer. There are strong temptations: to abandon prayer, to leave God to the side and not let him be at the center of our life. Community is no longer a reference point. We make use of it. It is a time of submission or rebellion but not of acceptance.

This is also the time when we experience our own weakness, failure, limitations, personal and institutional poverty and sin. Spiritual writers speak of the “dark night of the soul.” We come to think there is no way out of the situation.

This is the time to discover that we are not the ones in control of our life. The Lord is with us even in times of crisis. It is an invitation to place everything in God’s hands and to let him make of it what he will, opening ourselves to his action. We are being called to accept God’s mercy. It is a period of humility, of truth, of purifying our expectations and our motives. It is a time to accept the Paschal mystery in our life, in the Congregation and in the world. It is an invitation to accept that without Him we can do nothing.

## FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Crisis

There are departures and illness and the death of young religious. The situation of society forces the community to live clandestinely. There are conflicts with individuals and groups in the

Church. Conflicts within the community cause crises in the life of the community.

### **Conversion/“Purification”**

The founders live the spirituality of the servant of God and they consider themselves children of the Cross. Their complete confidence in the Good God and his Providence makes the conversion they experienced in the Motte (Good Father) and when adoration began (the Good Mother) deeper, purer, more solid and more radical in the later years of their lives.

### **EXPERIENCE OF OUR FOUNDERS**

It is interesting to note that our founders lived almost their whole life in constant tension due to the social and ecclesial situation in which they found themselves. They experienced conflict, tensions in the community and with different people in the Church. It was an experience of weakness, their own and that of others. It was also the experience of sin, failure, disunity, departures, in brief, a crisis. But it was precisely at such moments of crisis that they also experienced deep trust in God and his providential care. That allowed them to emerge from the crisis. They trusted in God...if he wanted the work, he would see it through.

Events and experiences put them to the test. There were moments of uncertainty, anxiety and suffering. But they would go back to their confidence in God, accept the cross of the Servant of the Lord and give themselves with greater zeal to the mission.

### **Crisis at the time of the Foundation**

First there was the separation of the two groups: the Immensity and the Solitaries. This caused much tension in the house. It would lead to the final break in February of 1801.

Then there were the uncertainties of the early years concerning approval and support for the Congregation both on the part of Rome and the French Bishops. This was a source of great concern for the Good Father.

The Good Mother lived through these times of anguish, of not seeing clearly, of not understanding what God wanted of her:

*“Pray that God grant us the grace we need, to you the grace to make a choice, to me the grace of perseverance in a state in which all is death to nature, denial of oneself, desire of suffering or rather the need for suffering; finally in a state where life must be nothing but a perpetual holocaust of all one’s being to God and to God alone.”* (BM 6)

### **Crisis due to departures and deaths**

The departure of some of the first vocations and the deaths of others provoked crisis in the community. The inexperience of the first “classes” and difficulties in forming them had as a consequence numerous defections. No doubt this left a mark on the young community and even more on its founder.

Bernard de Villemort, one of the first brothers, abandoned the community in March 1802. More than a year later, he was still on the Good Father’s mind. *“Oh, how I wish that brother Bernard would reconsider and come back!”* (BP 105)

In October of 1804 the Good Father, speaking of two brothers, who had left the Congregation, accusing him of things and making demands, wrote:

*“I see the finger of God afflicting me sensibly in the measure in which his work extends and is our consolation...because all these desertions help me to really understand that the Good God wants me continually on the cross like Saint Bernard.”* (BP 209)

The Good Mother wrote to Gabriel de la Barre expressing her profound emotion over the loss of several sisters. She tries to accept her pain in obedience to the Lord.

*“A remembrance of Easter could help us to sort out many things. We have just lost Rosine. We have another who has been in a hopeless situation now for two months, Emerence who will be leaving us, who knows when. All of this kills me. I am so upset at the recent accident of Menodore. She is a good person and a great loss for the society. I have to say so “Fiat” so often but I am so upset.”* (BM 1013)

The Good Father was in Rome in 1829 when news of the death of Gabriel de la Barre reached him. He wrote to the Good Mother without a doubt expressing the feeling of both of them:

*“What grief I feel in my heart at the loss of our dear sister Gabriel. Good Mother, she whom you loved so dearly here below, will help you in heaven. She was one of our first daughters; I have confidence that she will also have compassion on her poor spiritual father in the presence of the Good God. She lived so innocently and died such a saintly death...”* (BP 1493)

Humanly speaking, the founders were desolate at the departures and the deaths. They associated their pain with the Suffering Servant on the cross and increased their confidence in the Good God and his providential care.

*“God will not abandon us nor the work in which Providence is using us our meager means, if this work is pleasing to him.”* (BP 628)

## **Crisis due to the political-religious situation and living underground**

The community lived in a continuous state of anxiety, in the midst of persecution, misunderstanding and calumny, even from the very Church they desired to serve. The Congregation lived, grew and extended itself to different parts of France, all the while as an illegal, underground clandestine community. But this was not how they wanted to live. Without financial resources they had to provide for rapid growth in numbers and works. This was an ongoing problem. It was difficult for such a little group, that lacked official sanction and that had decidedly anti-gallican sympathies, to live in the political and ecclesiastical circumstances of the Revolution, Empire and Restoration. Difficulties ran deep and affected all aspects of life. But challenges were met with confidence: *“What the Good God keeps is well kept.”* (BM 673) *“All for God, what else is important; courage, patience and hope.”* (BM 521) were words often on the lips of the Good Mother. *“We are hanging by a hair,”* the Good Father wrote to Henriette. *“That’s true,”* she responded, *“but the hair is supported by a cable. It will not break.”*<sup>5</sup>

However the Lord was using such conflicts to prepare the way for the Congregation to expand.

*“My poor heart is sad. I’m in the midst of a thick fog. Until my ideas are clearer, I am only able to say one “Fiat” and I say it without much feeling. It makes me suffer so and I don’t find much support in it.”* (BM 160)

## **Crisis in the mission**

The Good Father always experienced a tension between his service to the diocesan Church that he loved deeply and his

---

<sup>5</sup> Articles pour la construction du procès informatif ordinaire en la cause de béatification de la Servante de Dieu, la Révérende Mère Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie, § 61.

responsibility as founder. Father Hilarion tells in his Memoires how Pierre was “*calumniated for his intellect, treated like an ignoramus and also attacked as regards his faith. He let himself seem like a heretic and be calumniated for his zeal. He was thought to be hypocritical or reckless and his obedience was thought excessive.*” Such accusations and criticism came mostly from his fellow priests. It is easy to imagine the pain and suffering that brought the Good Father, who so loved the Church and worked to rebuild it. At times it certainly must have caused him to ask himself if he were mistaken, if this was really what God wanted.

A few days later writing to a sister about the rumors going around Paris and the intrigue that was happening in the government of the Diocese of Mende, the Good Father spoke of himself in these terms, “*He is pushed away, often nearly shown the door. Others criticize him strongly. They look at him as some kind of crazy man, who sometimes has something reasonable to say.*” (BP 172)

In Picpus, things are not any better. Difficulties with the pastor of Saint Marguerite caused a crisis that led the Good Father to decide to leave Paris. The departure of the Superior General could only produce serious damage to the growing community. The founder was the first to realize that, but he could see no other solution in the difficult situation. It seemed to him that the local church was rejecting God’s work which had been entrusted to him and which the Holy See had approved.

### **Crisis in personal relationships and in the community**

In the later years of his life, the founder had a somewhat pessimistic view of the future of his Congregation. He thought nostalgically of the early days when everyone was so full of enthusiasm and ideals. Now he saw around him a new generation of brothers and sisters. The intimacy of the first years had given way to the need for a more developed organization. He experienced the

tension between the charismatic and the institutional. He wrote to Gabriel de la Barre:

*“We, poor old folks, are so different from the young people who have entered since the time we made our first sacrifices! I would consider myself well compensated, I confess, if I could as then be with people who think like we think, who live like we live and who die as we would die!!! Finally, I find myself alone in the midst of so many people. I stick to my friends, my brothers. I am still quite alone and often quite sad.”* (BP 1315)

The Good Father certainly experienced suffering, loneliness, resistance and powerlessness in the face of the first conflicts and changes which occurred in the Congregation.

*“Good Mother, I am always so struck by things that are happening. What does the Lord want to do with us? It seems to me that I am still too attached to the earth. If I believed that it would not be against his will, I would get away from here before someone could propose something to me. It will be much more difficult later.”* (BP 1115)

The Good Father suffered greatly because of the difficult character of one of his first and most faithful collaborators, Hilarion Lucas, who caused him much bitterness in his later years. There were all the worries of a rapidly growing congregation, his ongoing concern for the health of the Good Mother, his responsibilities and the intrigue in the diocese of Rouen, his responsibility for the government of his religious community and his own fragile health.

A cause of great suffering for the Good Father was the lack of unity in the communities. Concerning difficulties that had arisen in Picpus between the communities of brothers and sisters, the Good Father wrote to Hilarion asking, *“Don’t we have to suffer something in order to be saved?”*

On August 25, 1832 the founder wrote to Father Césaire, who was having trouble getting along with Sister Françoise de Viart, Superior of the Sisters, “*My dear friend, it would cause me great pain if the spirit of division were to take hold among us...*” (BP 1723)

When suffering occurred, the Good Father encouraged the brothers to accept it, as did Jesus, and he would remind them of the words “*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.*” (Mt. 26:39) God is our only hope in times of affliction. If we know how to suffer, we will find happiness. All these events mentioned above weighed heavily on the Good Father and made him feel the need to go to God with great faith.

The year 1829 was a year of great trials for the Good Mother and her community. Paralysis would cause her to be bedridden from then until her death. She lost thirty daughters, among them her companion from the early days, Gabriel de la Barre, Superior of Poitiers. All those deaths filled the heart of Henriette with such great sorrow.<sup>6</sup> It seemed that interior consolation was refused her. Being completely helpless was a source of incredible suffering for Henriette, which no doubt she thought of as being nailed to the cross as she once had said:

*“There is much sorrow, personal problems, but we must place all at the foot of the cross. Let us say a good “Fiat!” (BM 418)*

In the final years of the founders’ lives the first problems appeared that later would lead to the schism of 1852-1853.

## CONVERSION

The absolute confidence that **Henriette** had in God allowed Him to transform her little by little. The core of her relationship

---

<sup>6</sup> Articles pour la construction du procès informatif ordinaire en la cause de béatification de la Servante de Dieu, la Révérende Mère Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie, § 45.

with God could be summed up as total gift, freely given, without reserve, expecting nothing in return. It translated into short phrases so characteristic of her: “*All for God,*” “*My God, here I am.*” She taught the sisters to live with the same confidence and abandonment, “*He alone can do and wants all for you. It is with all my heart that I desire that you be wholly His.*” (BM, undated, unnumbered 1828?)

The first conversion experience of the Good Mother on being released from prison and giving herself to Adoration deepens over the course of the years “*When you established adoration at Moulin-a-Vent and you assigned me an hour, without a doubt you fixed my destiny.*” (BM 98) She was growing in complete abandonment to the will of the Lord. Her complete gift of self was strengthened and purified as she confronted the crises of life with unshakable faith.

Her conversion was constant, there was no turning back. It was something that had changed her forever. All during the course of her life this conversion was purified and deepened.

Henriette continues her journey to God. He is not a God outside of her, the object only of exterior worship. She seeks a God who is deeply personal, present within her, transforming her life, giving meaning to the seeking of her heart. He is a God more intimate to her than she is to herself.

What the Good Mother would say to the sisters is but the reflection of her own experience of God’s love. To a sister in difficulty she wrote:

*“Try to calm yourself down and believe that your refuge can only be in the Divine Heart of Jesus. You are irrevocably his. He will not allow you to break the chains that his grace alone bound you to bear. Have courage once again. Place yourself in the hands of the Blessed Virgin and you will once again find peace.”* (BM 1151)

The fire of Love transformed her heart and opened it to others in the same attitude of goodness and mercy. She wanted to live what she had contemplated in the Heart of Jesus.

For **Pierre**, the moment of his first conversion was his leaving the Motte d'Usseau. From that time on he gave himself to "God's word" and put in practice what he had seen in the Motte.

From the very first the Good Father placed himself in the hands of God and allowed God to transform him. His conversion was continuous and it lasted his whole life long. He himself said,

*"I am really weak, really miserable...but since God called me to this work I have become completely different. I have had to put up with many struggles. I had to overcome much uncertainty before making my vows...but as long as I was bound to God, I found everything in my spiritual life transformed..."* (HL, Mem. 1, p. 26)

The Good Father had complete confidence that the Good God was working in the midst of adversity and that he was calling him and his community to abandon themselves trustingly to his divine love. In a letter to Gabriel de la Barre he put it the following way:

*"Yes, my dear daughter, I live only to unite at a great price, if need be, the work of the Heart of this loving Master who fills me with his favors. If I am ungrateful, he still loves me and I feel in my heart that he will always love me, yes always.*

*I would not be able to stop if I wrote of the great force of his grace in my soul, the extent of his power in my very depths...Love him completely and I tell you that nothing will separate you from him. Whether they persecute us or leave us alone, let us be children of the cross. May we burn with the desire for sacrifice that he expects and that he permits. In*

*everything, yes everything, do his will, which I believe and I want to believe until death, is always adorable.” (BP 192)*

The Good Father was aware of his own limitations. He and the Good Mother as well as their community had experienced many difficulties and tribulations. At times it seemed that there was more darkness than light but that only served to deepen his faith in the God to whom he had entrusted his life on leaving the Motte.

*“Good bye, Good Mother, it hurts me so when I think that we are getting old so quickly and the only support for our poor undertaking is Providence. So you can see that I have such little faith, however, I trust in God, nevertheless, that he might have mercy on us and keep us in his divine Heart.” (BP 854)*

## **THE CHARISM UNFOLDS**

The faith of the Good Father and Good Mother in the Good God and their consecration to him is put to the test and as a result it is strengthened and purified. This is a time of radical abandonment to the providential love of the “Good God.”

### **1. Consecration to the Sacred Hearts**

They experience deeply what it means to be in communion with the Heart of the Suffering Servant and with Mary at the foot of the cross. They find in the Heart of Jesus their “refuge.”

### **2. Adoration**

They contemplate the crucified one in the Eucharist and in the events of their lives and see themselves as “children of the cross.” The experience of their own limitations and sinfulness leads them to assume the burden of their own sin and the sin of the world.

### 3. The Four Ages

They experience the crucified life and come to a deeper awareness of the “inner sufferings of Christ.

### 4. Communion

They experience infidelity, limitations and loss. They have problems with the Church that they love and for which they want to be “useful.” But their confidence and sense of communion remains in spite of it all. They urge the brothers and sisters to trust that the community is “God’s Work” and that they trust one another.

### 5. Apostolic Zeal

In spite of difficulties within the community and in society and the church they persist in apostolic zeal. They see that the “success” of the apostolate is not a result of their zeal but of God’s faithful love.

## SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE

**Isaiah 52: 13 – 53:12:** *“See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted.”*

**Matthew 4: 1-11:** *“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.”*

**Matthew 11: 28-30:** *“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

**Mark 14: 32-36:** *“My soul is sorrowful even to death... Father, Take this cup away from me.”*

**Mark 14: 66-72:** *The denial of Peter.*

**Luke 2: 35:** *“You yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”*

**Luke 12: 22-31:** *“Do not worry about your life.”*

**John 3: 3-8:**     *“No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”*

**John 19: 31-37:**   *“They will look upon him whom they have pierced.”*

**John 20: 10-18:**   *“Woman, why are you weeping?”*

**Romans 8: 31-39:**   *“What will separate us from the love of Christ?”*

#### **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- The founders had to withstand disappointments, grave illness, lack of understanding between brothers and sisters, the death of members of the new community...What inner resources did they count on to overcome such difficulties?
- Reflect on what have been your times of crisis, fatigue, suffering, temptation, difficulties....
  - What inner resources did you draw on at such times?
  - What aspects of the charism have you experienced most vividly at this stage?
- In your life, what have been moments of “conversion” that have caused your life to change in a radical and definitive way?
- Try to put this experience in words and lift up your heart in prayer to the Lord.



# OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LOVE

## DESCRIPTION

This is the stage when one can internalize the journey taken, to experience oneself as SS.CC., to bring together our desires in the love of God. It is a time of abandonment, of giving oneself with confidence, of availability and of risk in communion with the whole Congregation. It is a time to know that you are cared for and loved by a God who never abandons us. It is a time to affirm with our whole being that the center of our life is the Heart of Jesus.

Now we can conform our will to the will of God and find in that our happiness. “*Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you, only God is enough.*”<sup>7</sup> It is a time to let our Fiat take flesh in our life, to let Christ dwell within and lead us, to come to intimate communion with God and to be one with him. We can accept his will even though that means abandoning the work of a lifetime.

## FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The consecration made on Christmas 1800 and lived faithfully for so many years, culminates in total abandonment to God's love “...as a zealot of the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in whose service I wish to live and die...” (GdB, Mem. 75)

## EXPERIENCE OF OUR FOUNDERS

Our founders' experience is once more the key experience of the beginning: **total availability for God**. It is the experience of the Good Father on October 20, 1792 and the profession on Christmas 1800, the Good Mother's “vow of crucifixion.” “*I vow to be crucified in*

---

<sup>7</sup> Saint Teresa of Jesus

*everything, that is, in heart, in spirit, in will and in action. I must accept all the crosses, all the sufferings, all the annoyances that present themselves and say 'even more, Lord.' ” (BM 11)*

This act of total abandonment at the beginning becomes “incarnate” in her life. The words of the Good Father and the Good Mother when making their vows become reality over the course of their lives. What appears as just a formula at the beginning becomes life.

The absolute confidence of **the Good Mother** sustained not only her but others and impelled her toward that intimate and profound conversion which marked her life with the heroism of the saints. God was her only treasure! That truth was immortalized in the prayer she so loved, “*My God, here I am!*” (HL, Mem. 9, p. 232)

The core of her interior life with God could be summed up as total commitment, generous, without reservation or hope for reward. That was translated into various brief formulas such as “*All for God*” and “*Here I am, my God.*”<sup>8</sup>

That total abandonment to God’s will can be perceived in her vow formula:

*“I Louise Victoire Catherine Henriette Monique Aymer, born the 11<sup>th</sup> of August in the year of grace 1767 in the diocese of Poitiers make the vow of chastity and obedience for one year and I renew with all my heart the firm resolutions that I have already taken and can be for the good. I entrust them into the hands of the Most Blessed Virgin so that she might deign to present them to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, her Divine Son, in the service of whom I wish to be consumed like this candle, in accord with the rule established in this house. In the name of the*

---

<sup>8</sup> *Dépositions et témoignages des Sœurs au sujet de la Bonne Mère*, polycopies ArchSSCC/S, p. 18.

*Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At Poitiers, the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1800.*” (BM 11)

The Good Mother’s work for others was all encompassing because it was a participation in God’s redemptive work. This intense apostolic activity was the fruit of her continuous docility to God’s will, a docility that she called abandonment. Henriette was truly abandoned to the very core of her being. Abandonment is one of the characteristics of her spirituality. For her abandonment meant having absolute trust in God. “*We are living in a very evil time, but if God is with us who can be against us,*” (BM 1249) she writes to Françoise de Viart in 1825, when the future of the Congregation looked very uncertain. For Henriette, this abandonment, such a clear sign of the grace of God, was never renunciation or fatalism. She always had an attitude of confidence and hope, even when humanly speaking she felt discouraged. She was speaking from her experience when she said, “*Absolute abandonment to God is the shortest way to arrive at perfection.*” (HL, Mem. 9, p. 174)

Being “*wholly for God*” became her motto and can also be ours. “*All for God, only for him. Everything so as to please him.*”<sup>9</sup> “*God wants you to be wholly his.*” (BM 608)

Believing in God’s love for each of us, knowing that everything contributes to the good of those God loves, being docile to the will of the one who only wants our good...all of that leads to abandonment into the hands of God who is Love. The secret of Henriette’s peace and happiness is found in abandonment, complete confidence and perpetual commitment to the one to whom we belong. “*I know him in whom I have believed*” (2 Tim. 1:12) “*Abandon yourselves entirely to him and only there will you find peace, strength to suffer and the joy that follows.*” (BM 1016)

---

<sup>9</sup> Hilarion LUCAS ssc, *Vie de la T.R. Mère Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie*, d.d. 1847, s.l.a. Tome II, *La Bonne Mère, son esprit*, polycopies, Picpus, p. 9 et 164.

In her own way, Henriette fought all her life for the “work of God,” the Congregation to which she was joined in the very fiber of her being. We cannot doubt that. Her whole life testifies to it. However, Henriette was ready to abandon the work of her lifetime, if such was the will of God. When the political situation made the life of the community appear unsustainable and the suppression of the Congregation by political powers seemed imminent Henriette suffered, bowed before the Lord and remained firm. A letter to the Good Father dated January 31, 1822 bears witness to this,

*“Our affairs are always more complicated...we fear sinister actions against us...Madame de Vibrayer...is doing all she can to ward off an attack. In the end I told her, ‘Madame what God keeps is well kept, we have lived under all the different governments, the Good God desires us, I have no doubt, if now he no longer wants us, may his will be done...and there I am.’”*  
(BM 885)

Powerless before the impending catastrophe, she abandoned herself to God without recrimination or bitterness and with unwavering faith. In one supreme sacrifice, she offered God her life’s work. Before such a response we can only quietly marvel. In the situation Henriette adored and gave her Fiat.

In her letters she says it over and over again.

*“Lord, here I am, do with me as you please.” “All for God, all in God, all to God, this is the only consoling truth. Abandon yourself always to him and you will find there peace, the strength to suffer and the joy that follows.”* (BM 1016) *“All for God, all according to God. Everything should begin or at least end there.”* (BM 482) *“All for God, the rest is not important, courage, patience and hope.”* (BM 521) *“All for God, may that be our motto.”* (BM 1216)

*“Provided that all is for the greater glory of God, what importance has the rest...All for God, only for Him...Let us do all for God and according to God...All for God, all in God...Let all of us say always, All for God and only to please him.”*<sup>10</sup>

She would always live in docility to the Spirit of God who dwelt within her. During her whole life, especially during the early years after her conversion, she gave herself to extraordinary mortifications that were sanctioned by Father Coudrin, her spiritual director.

Henriette “saw” clearly the path that God was marking out for her Congregation and in spite of the repugnance she had in expressing it, she understood that the Lord wanted her to do it.

Henriette who had come to the fullness of her encounter with God, offered herself to death, which would destroy a part of her being, so that her thirst to give all would be fulfilled in the possession of the God of Love. When they found her on the floor on October 4, 1829, Henriette murmured, *“I want what you want, my God. You know that I love you with all my heart and that I am ready to die if that be your will. Yes, I want to love you always, always, yes always. My God, I give you my heart...”* (HL, Mem. 7, p. 107)

The **Good Father**, following Christ, was a man completely given to God and others. Only one thing counted for him: to do *“the work of God.”* It is the path he follows in response to God’s love. Following Saint Benedict he desired to *“prefer nothing to the love of Christ.”* (Rule of St. Benedict IV, 21)

And so we understand the choice and the scope implied in the vows made on Christmas 1800. It was an expression of what they

---

<sup>10</sup> (publication dite de Mère Jeanne-Micheline Tessier), *La T.R.M. Aymer de la Chevalerie, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des S.S.C.C.*, Paris, 1930, pp. 80-81.

had been living and what they felt called to continue to live. They were to live and die offering themselves to the Good God whom they had encountered: *“To live and die in the service of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary”*, in other words, to offer themselves so that the God’s love might take flesh in life.

The Good Father tried to live in the presence of God, to work for his glory, to adore his designs and to do his will. This was the most important and most decisive thing in his life. He made a clear choice to work in communion with the Church, under the successor of Peter. He took clear positions that caused problems with elements in the Church that had been affected by Gallicanism. He demonstrated this throughout his life, from his ordination by a clandestine bishop to his openness in sending missionaries where the Holy See would ask him.

From his childhood in a very Christian family and afterwards in the seminary, the founder learned to see the hand of God in all events. One could say that for him, God is the Providence that governs people and the world and that guides the history of humanity and the Church. In the midst of the circumstances in which they lived, this concept of God-Providence was not only reinforced but it led him to have continuous recourse to God in everything. *“Let us adore his will and we will be even happier.”* (BP 7) This is the criterion that would guide him throughout his life.

On December 16, 1802 the Good Father wrote to Isidore David:

*“Let everyone console themselves, my dear friends, we have many trials but God desires it and it will be for his glory. Let us submit ourselves to him in everything and he will certainly cause us to triumph...The Good God wants all of it, for that reason we place all our hope in Him and an absolute trust that He will do his holy will.”* (BP 82)

It was especially in the Motte d'Usseau that he came to contemplate the Servant who became obedient unto death, death on a cross, adoring his Father.

He always considered the Congregation as the *"work of God."* The necessity of *"doing the will of God"* kept him always open to its least hints. *"I submit myself immediately to God's will."* (BP 168)

In spite of the inevitable instability of those times, Father Coudrin felt that everyday God was giving him signs of his approval.

*"God will not abandon us to ourselves nor to the Action in which Providence has used our weak efforts, if that Action is pleasing to him. In the name of God we have undertaken it, we entrust its success to him."* (BP 628)

These words of the Good Father sum up what was his life: abandonment and obedience to the God of Love. He saw that as the one thing important and the one thing that can give us real happiness.

*"Enjoy, enjoy the Lord on the journey of this life. He alone is good. His will is the only good. Outside of his heart, all is bitterness. Tell this to all the sisters. Tell this also to my brother and his friends. I feel this for myself. All is nothing except to love God. So let us live for Him alone and let us die from the desire to please him. This is true happiness."* (BP 1386)

## **THE CHARISM UNFOLDS**

### **Introduction**

The Good Father and Good Mother abandon themselves completely to God's love and his will.

### **1. Consecration to the Sacred Hearts**

The Consecration to the Sacred Hearts gives meaning of their whole journey. It is a grace they have accepted in humble service, a grace of God that includes the cross (final sickness, suffering etc.). At the end of their lives they are fully aware that this consecration is the “foundation” of their lives and of their “family.”

### **2. Adoration**

They adore God’s will, wanting what he wants. *“This fills them with zeal for the mission”* right to the very end. Adoration is accepting what God has made of their lives, given completely to his service.

### **3. To live and die**

They place themselves in God’s hands in life and in death. They trust in the care of God, even in the face of uncertainty (e.g. having to leave the family that is threatened by outside forces and inner dissension.)

### **4. Four Ages**

They have a special share in the crucified life as they grow older. Their confidence in God and hope in the Resurrection deepens.

#### **SUGGESTED PASSAGES FROM SCRIPTURE**

**Song of Songs 8: 6-7:** *“For stern as death is love...”*

**Luke 1: 26-38:** *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”*

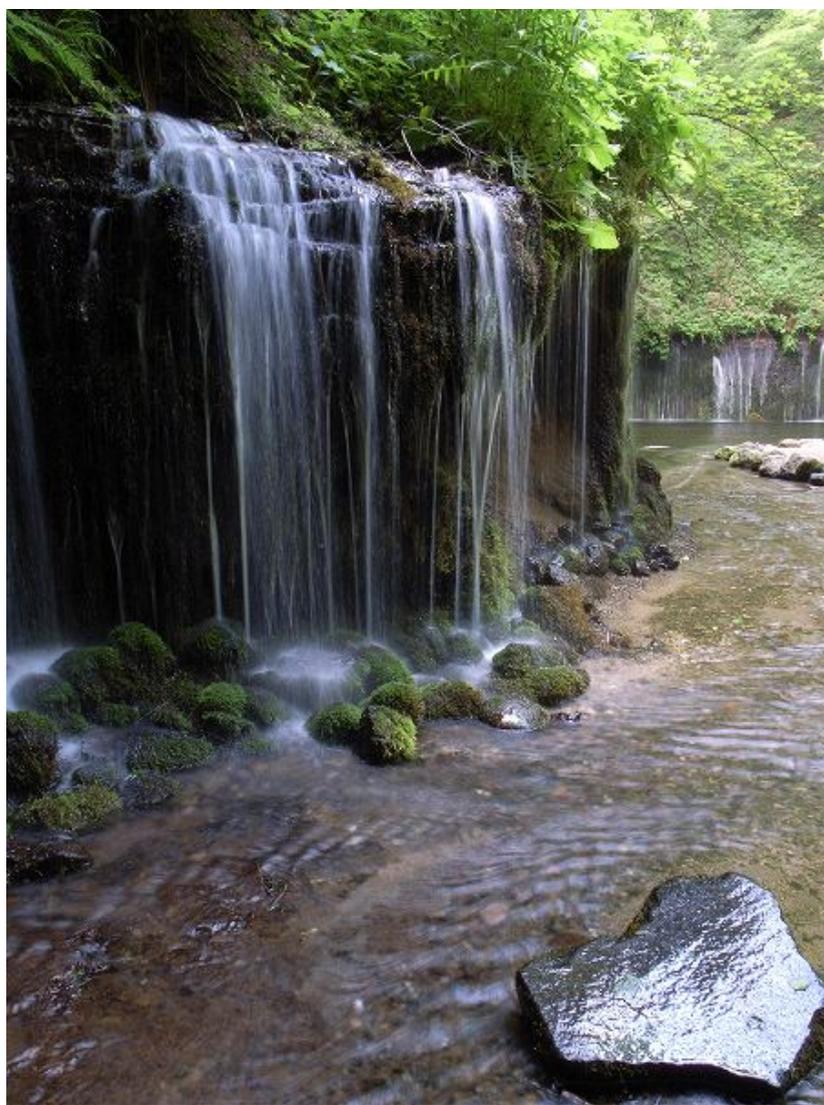
**Luke 10: 25-28:** *“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart.”*

**Luke 22: 42:** *“Father, not my will but yours be done.”*

- John 19: 25-27:** *“Standing by the cross of Jesus (was) his mother...”*
- John 4: 34:** *“My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.”*
- John 13: 1-15:** *“He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.”*
- John 15: 1-17:** *“Remain in my love.”*
- John 21: 15-19:** *“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”*
- Galatians 2: 19-26:** *“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”*
- Ephesians 3: 14-19:** *“Rooted and grounded in love.”*
- Philippians 2: 6-11:** *“He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death.”*
- Philippians 3: 7- 14:** *“Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ.”*
- 2 Timothy 1: 6-12:** *“I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God.”*

#### **FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- In what way are Pierre and Henriette models for you in your living of obedience to the Love of God?
- How has the gift you made of yourself at first profession been made flesh over the course of your life?
- When and in what situations have you said to the Lord “do what you want,” “I abandon myself to your will,” “you can count on me”?
- What aspect of the charism have you experienced with greater intensity at this stage?
- Try to go back over this whole experience, what has it meant to you going from stage to stage...let a prayer go up to the Lord.



## PUTTING A GIFT INTO WORDS

The Spiritual Itinerary is not a document to be read but a journey to be taken, a path to be walked. The charism is not only a written text but a gift to be received and lived. The charism becomes present in us as we live it. At the same time, our living our SS.CC. vocation enriches the charism. What we offer here is an attempt to put the gift we have received into words, with all the limitations that entails.

### INTRODUCTION

#### *What is a charism?*

The founders are inspired to live the Gospel in a certain way. That inspiration is a gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church. (Vita Consecrata 36) The gift that the founders received becomes a living heritage, a gift given the community in each age and enriched by each generation.

#### *Charism in the context of SS.CC. Spiritual Itinerary*

Every charism involves “*a profound desire to be conformed to Christ, to give witness to some aspect of his mystery.*” (Mutuae Relationes 51) The Good Father, in his document explaining title Zealots says clearly that, “*The Consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our institute.*” This consecration is our way of being “*conformed to Christ.*” The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the nucleus, the core of the charism in the sense that all the other elements are related to it and from it draw meaning. Being conformed to Christ takes a lifetime. He is always calling us to journey more deeply into the mystery of his love.

In this sense we can say that the consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the “focus” and “goal” of an SS.CC. spiritual itinerary. For the Good Father and the Good Mother their vocation takes on consistency when they come to realize that “*The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of the institute.*” The goal of our SS.CC. journey is to grow always in a deeper appropriation of our vocation to be consecrated to the Sacred Hearts.

## **THE GOOD GOD**

The God who called the Good Father and the Good Mother and who calls us is “*the Good God.*” How often we find reference to this Good God in their writings. This is the God who loves with predilection and mercy. He chooses us and we are his. This God is gentle and forgiving.

### *God’s Providence*

The faith of the Good Father and Good Mother in God’s providence is a precious heritage. They experienced difficulties in their society, the community and their own lives and in each situation they trusted deeply in God’s providence. The goodness of this “Good God” was manifested in his providential care. He is a God in whom we can always trust.

The Good Father and Good Mother responded to God by adoring him and his will. Theirs was a trusting faith in his providence. It allowed them to set out on the journey trusting in the God who was calling them and who calls us to go forward.

## THE SACRED HEARTS

### *The Good God, the God of goodness*

This Good God, the God of goodness is revealed, operative and encountered in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, who loves us so much that he suffered for us. He also asks us to share his cross. Our founders expressed this telling us, “*Be children of the cross.*”

### *The Heart of Christ*

Our founders chose an image to express this goodness of God: the heart of Jesus. It is a loving and merciful heart. “*The good and always merciful God wishes to open his heart to you...*” (BM 664)

The pierced heart of the suffering servant is at one with the suffering of his people. He is “*the divine Friend who has borne our infirmities, who took our pains unto himself.*” (BP 2202)

### *Consecration*

Consecration has two aspects. A person/community is called and claimed wholly by Christ to belong to him in love and to be sent forth to share his love. A person/community responds with wholehearted dedication to Christ. This is what it means to be consecrated to the heart of Christ. “*In Jesus we find everything...*” (BP) “*...our radical following of Christ.*” (Constitutions, Art. 3)

In this radical following of Christ “*Mary precedes and accompanies us...*” (Constitutions, Art. 3). She is for us a model of faith in the love of Christ (Constitutions, Art. 3) She “*precedes*” us pointing the way. She accompanies us along the way helping us enter more deeply into the life and mission of her Son. (Constitutions, Art. 3)

The hearts of Jesus (God/man) and Mary (a woman’s heart, purely given to Jesus and his loving plan for the world) are always

united. Like Mary our whole being is claimed by Christ and with her we respond.

*To retrace the four Ages of Christ*

The reference to the four ages is a way of understanding the Community's place in the Church as it lives out its Consecration to the Sacred Hearts. With the four ages, the childhood, hidden life, evangelical life and, crucified life, we "evoke" not just one aspect/mystery of Christ but the whole Christ. We "evoke" Christ by our prayer, our life and our apostolate. The Constitutions describe our mission: "to *contemplate, live and announce to the world God's love...*" (Constitutions, Art. 2)

*The reality of sin and reparation*

Given the state of the Church and society, the Good Father and the Good Mother had a vivid sense of sin and its effects, "*the power of evil that opposes the Father's love and disfigures his design for the world...*" (Constitutions, Art. 4) The Congregation's mission then and now is to repair, heal and reconcile. We are called to be in solidarity with those who are "*victims of injustice, hatred and sin...*" (Constitutions, Art. 4) and to collaborate in "*building a world of justice and love, sign of the Kingdom.*" (Constitutions, Art. 4)

*Adoration: adoring the Good God in our adoration of Christ*

For our founders, adoration became an essential aspect of their lives and a constant way of looking at life. They were faithful to adoration and saw it as a way of serving God's people. In Eucharist we encounter and are nourished by the God of goodness and love. Our hearts are one with the heart of Jesus in his love for the Father and the world (Constitutions, Art. 5) We seek the transformation of our heart and we seek to be agents of communion in the world (reparation) (Constitutions, Art. 6)

*The response of the Good Father and Good Mother and our response.*

The Good Father and Good Mother were intensely “devoted” to the Sacred Hearts. For them “devotion” meant giving themselves completely to God and his plan for the salvation of the world. It led them to a great concern for the world in which they lived, with special attention to suffering and injustice. It should lead us to the same, *“aware of the power of evil that opposes the Father’s love.”* (Constitutions, Art. 4) To be “devoted to the Sacred Hearts” is to be a community in mission going “everywhere” to proclaim the redeeming love of God. It means being adorers in spirit and in truth making our own *“the attitudes and sentiments of Jesus before the Father and before the world.”* (Constitutions, Art. 5)

**ZEAL FOR THE MISSION (THE FIRE OF THE SPIRIT)**

*“Our consecration calls us to live the dynamism of saving love and fills us with zeal for our mission.”* (Constitutions, Art. 2)

Living the dynamism of saving love means giving witness that God is present within and among us. The Holy Spirit fills us with the fire of his love and calls us do “his” work. The Congregation is “God’s work” not our own.

In their zeal for the mission the Good Father and the Good Mother saw the brothers and sisters going everywhere. The Congregation *“desire(s) to be open to all people”* (Constitutions, Art. 7) and to be *“useful for the Church.”* (BP)

*Communion*

Communion was a constant concern of the founders and something they always strove for. *“Therefore may all of you be one, in the charity of the Good Master who unites us.”* (BP 82) *“We live our vocation and mission in community.”* (Constitutions, Art. 7) Community life is itself a proclamation of the Good News of God’s love.

*“The brothers and sisters of our religious family constitute one Congregation.”* (Constitutions, Art. 8) We have *“one charism, one mission, one spirituality...”* It is both a *“significant value”* and a *“responsibility.”* (Constitutions, Art. 8)

The Sacred Hearts family is larger than the Congregation. Laity have been members of the family from the beginning. (Constitutions, Art. 9) Laity join the religious in a communion of prayer and embody the SS.CC. vocation in places the religious cannot.

### *The response of the Good Father and Good Mother and our response*

For the BP and BM “everywhere” first meant “everywhere in France.” Then they were called to go beyond France to mission in the far off isles of the Pacific. They always desired To be *“available to the needs and demands of the Church...”* (Constitutions, Art. 6) Today we are called to go to new lands or to attend to new needs/new groups where we have been.

At the end of their lives the founders were concerned that the unity of their family be preserved. We are called to build unity, to be really one, respecting and valuing the richness of our diversity. Our communion is a way of proclaiming the merciful love of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

### *Journey of the SS.CC. family... charism a living heritage*

SS.CC. Brothers and sisters have been making this journey for over two hundred years. The reality of the world in each age and in each place is different. There are different opportunities, different challenges for our SS.CC. religious life. Each generation and each community, each brother and sister, in their concrete circumstances responds in mission from our SS.CC. charism. The charism is

enriched in “creative fidelity”. Our awareness of who we are, our SS.CC. DNA, takes shape.

*The General Chapters of 2006 expressed the desire that this continue.*

The thirty-fourth General Chapter of the sisters:

*“The Chapter has recognized that the Sisters expressed a strong desire to rekindle the SS.CC. charism and to clarify the sense of common mission that derives from our consecration to the Sacred Hearts: to contemplate, to live and to announce to the world God’s love which was made flesh in Jesus.” (Sisters, Common Mission, Introduction)*

The General Chapter of the brothers:

*“The 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter seeks to help the brothers renew their enthusiasm for our vocation and mission, starting from a re-reading of our charism today; and live our communion in a more interdependent way, so that we can better respond to what it is we are called to be in the world.” (Brothers, Our Vocation and Mission, 3)*

## ABBREVIATIONS

BP Good Father

BM Good Mother

GdB Gabriel de la Barre

Mem Memoirs (*Mémoires*)

VBM The Good Mother (*La Bonne Mère*)

Notes Notes on the Congregation (*Notes sur la  
Congrégation*)

HL Hilarion Lucas

QqR Some Remarks on Father Marie-Joseph  
(*Quelques Remarques sur le R. P. Marie Joseph*)

Mem Memoirs (*Mémoires*)