

# THE CHARISMA OF SAINT MICHAEL AND LAY SPIRITUALITY

## **The life, the charisma and the spirituality of Saint Michael Garicoits in a path of Kerigmatic reading, in view of the New Evangelisation**

### **I. SPIRITUAL PORTRAIT OF SAINT MICHAEL**

#### **1. Michael Garicoits, the pioneer**

Our period is characterised by massive generalisation which makes everything banal. Nothing and no one is exempt from this. Violence and doubt reign on a planetary level. Scepticism and fear take hold of the individual and the community. Great men that incarnate liberating truth are rare. Even the Church begs this great figure that resides within her, the **Saint**, the man of the **Gospel**, concrete presence of Jesus the Liberator.

Saint Michael Garicoits is a pioneer of his times, the period of the French Revolution. His life, his doctrine and his work, still today, maintain a contemporary force. Michael is an avant-garde, frontier, shock, path-opening man... His successors cannot be less than this; according to his explicit will, they are a mobile camp, a 'commando' trained for high risk missions, one could say today.

Michael is an intuitive man, a man of the Spirit which goes beyond the co-ordinates of his times and beyond his environment; he knows how to discover and live the substance of the Gospel, the Sensational News of liberation brought by the God-Love.

One of his distinctive traits is that of being, during his times, a **kerigmatic person**, that is the herald of the Incarnate Word, Jesus, the Lord, epiphany of GOD-LOVE. This is his great validity today while the **Church**, through his magisterium, on the eve of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, tries to be more **kerigmatic**, in view of the **New Evangelisation**.

Also, Michael is an example of discernment of reality through the Gospel, in an era of deep structural changes, without losing the Spirit. And above all, in a tormented era, he manages to give impulse to life in Christ Jesus according to the Spirit.

Kerigmatic Michael, witness of the face of Jesus Christ for his contemporaries, transforms himself into a **charismatic** man.

#### **2. Michael, the tireless explorer**

Michael the child, that climbs mountains to touch heaven with his hands, is already an anticipation of the difficult path of a life which will fade on the dawn of the Ascension, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863. He is a tireless explorer, not casually, but with precise objectives. He will know no rest until he achieves them. He is always more interested in the quality than in the quantity. Living "the walker has no path, he traces it himself while walking, step after step...", his ends and his efforts will be united in a single objective: the will of God, always looked for and always loved. With a sole model: Jesus, the annihilated and obedient Word, Adorer of the Father, Servant of man.

### 3. The Manifesto as Kerigma.

The text called: **The manifesto of the Founder**, which he himself wrote as a synthesis of his spiritual ideal, is the kerigmatic announcement of the **gratuity** of God-Love.

KERIGMATIC ANNOUNCEMENT	MANIFESTO
- God loves you loved	- It has pleased God to make Himself
- Even if you do not love him	- We were still his enemies
- God is made man, Jesus	- The Son of God became man
- For you, he gave his life on the cross obedient	- He humbled Himself and became
	unto death, even death on a cross
- Abandon yourself to Jesus and you will be saved	- This is how God loves us. Jesus Christ converted himself into sovereign help
- You shall be anointed by the Spirit said:	- Animated by the Spirit of the Father, he
you shall be a New man	“Here I am, I have come to do your will, O
my	God”
- You shall be another Christ another apostle spectacle,...	- At the sight of this marvellous
Jesus	drawn to dedicate themselves to imitating
	and to bring the same happiness to others

### 4. Working plan.

Through the Church, Michael, the shrewd explorer, goes through the one thousand and one paths of the History of salvation, found in the Ancient and New Alliance Books. From the written word, he immerses himself in the Incarnate Word “that planted his tent among us”. All his writings reflect the assiduous and contemplative reading of the Holy Scriptures; in fact, nobody loves what one does not know; nobody lives what one does not love; nobody identifies with what one does not live.

Through the Church, in the person of every Saint, living witness in time and space of the Good News of the always new Gospel, Michael is enthusiastic and launches himself “with great heart and decisive soul” into the adventure of holiness. He will say, along with his Basque compatriot Ignatius of Loyola: “what others have lived, why not I?”.

Through the Church, in the secular tradition of the Church’s Fathers, the masters of spirituality, of preachers and theologians, inspired by the interior master, by the Holy Spirit, Michael knows how to choose and cast off, take and minimise, assimilate and refuse, discern and excommunicate doctrines, ideologies, people, events, passed history as well as present, including the history of daily life.

### 5. Human qualities.

His acute spirit of observation and evaluation of every reality attract attention. He always achieves the harmony of balance through the synthesis of antitheses, thus avoiding falling into extreme positions. He has great good sense, which is the least of the senses, along with an acute “good humour”.

By nature and by particular grace, since his childhood, he discovers the need to keep his head on his shoulders: he wants clear ideas and rooted convictions. He also discovers, as opposed to his environment, that these are of no use if they do not come from the heart, from sentiments, from the motor of motivations, as stated today. This is when the cold ideas, enflamed by the heart, will become spreading fire in one’s hands.

Daily studies, till late at night. Daily prayer, from the first hours of the morning. Undisrupted apostolic action, for hours and hours. Three words, three realities which synthesise the ordinary life lived in an extraordinary way by a priest who sanctifies himself, in an out of the way place in the Low Pyrenees called Betharram. He lived what he taught: “to exercise the immensity of charity - love of God and one’s neighbour - within one’s own state”. He exerted himself to communicate this, against all odds, to a handful of men: the emerging Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart; to a handful of women: the Daughters of the Cross. And he achieved this.

## **6. Expert guide in spiritual climbs.**

Just like any good mountaineer, he is a man with vast views, he contemplates from the top. He never loses himself in the meanders of the paths.

A man of the truth where extremes touch, he is convinced that the frontiers between better and worse touch upon each other. Due to this, the continuous warnings to his followers and to those going towards awaiting dangers. At any moment, one can fall down, precipitate into an abyss. Audacity, yes; pusillanimity no; presumption never.

Like the apostle Peter to the first Christians, Michael feels that Satan, the opponent, is present like a roaring lion searching for its prey. Wisdom and uncertainty of oneself, because the enemy masks himself as an angel of light (II Cor. 11,24), more often than one may believe, even in the exercise of the ministry and spiritual direction.

The battle is neither occasional nor spectacular. It is simply daily and discrete, in the vulgar ring of daily affairs. For this reason, this guide, expert in climbs, never tires not only of warning but above all of showing the infallible ways: **identification with the heart of Jesus, the Incarnate Word**. Then, he adds the various ways to maintain the soldier of Christ on the war path, ready to engage in battle and win it. At any price, Michael wants a warlike “Mobile Camp”. It must be so.

Therefore, one can understand that the in vogue theme in contemporary ecclesiology of “listening to the signs of the times” or of the “discernment of life and works”, is one of the key points of evangelical spirituality, in consequence also in the Betharramite spirituality, a spirituality **of life and for life** (DS 241-256). Discernment cannot be absent in Betharram. It cannot be only stylish. It is a matter of life or death, which comes from faithfulness to one’s vocation, one’s own charisma, of the individual or of the community.

## **7. Conquering the highest peak.**

An adventurer, explorer of mountains, of deserts or of forests, he must limit himself to what is indispensable and to what is efficient. This is how it is in the adventure of life. This is how it is in the adventure of holiness.

Even if the circumstances that divine Providence placed him in, helped the young Michael in his search for the indispensable and the efficient, he will not achieve this too easily. He will have to pass stages, in a process of progress and regress.

God does not use the hagiography of a Saint, but he uses a Saint in flesh and bones, Jeanne Elisabeth Bichier des Ages. The female intuition of this mother of consecrated ones, illuminated by the Spirit, discovers, in the virile times of Michael, the call to a paternity of consecrated persons and binds it to this with great forcefulness.

In the face to face encounter of the Creator with his creature, in the Sinai of Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, **illumination is realised**, the full manifestation of God-Love, in the Incarnate Word, Jesus, the Lord. Then, in the devote chapel, at the foot of the Madonna of Betharram, mother of the Supreme and Eternal Priest of the New Alliance, **he receives confirmation of his vocation** as founder.

From here on in, Michael throws himself into the 'forge' inflamed by the Heart of Jesus which, like an expert forger forges his followers, forging himself, on the anvil of God's will, under the hammering of disowning one's own will.

## **8. Charisma, gift of the Spirit to a person for the good of an ecclesial community.**

Again, Michael reaches the top. In contemplation, the ardent desires of his restless heart have been granted by the God of the Heart. He found the moving idea of his spirituality. He found the indispensable and the useful.

The indispensable and the useful, **since they attack the root** of man's destructive folly: **the proud self-sufficiency of one's own will**. Faced with the inveterate megalomania of man, wanting "to be God", to be the absolute master of oneself, to live life according to his desires, Michael **opposes the annihilation, the disowning of the Word** "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. II, 6-8). Saint Michael's intuition to rediscover was great: the glory of God, made our flesh.

Michael is stupefied by the spectacle of unheard-of ingratitude of the creature: "as ice before God" and by the unpronounceable love of the Creator and Redeemer: "it has pleased God to make Himself loved!". This double expression emerges from his pen and his lips like a refrain. Passionately seduced by Love, he never ceases to call to filial replies.

Therefore, his spirituality, founded on the quintessential of the Gospel of Jesus, nourished by Saint Vincent de Paoli - one of his models of life -, by Bossuet that he follows for the good ideas and abandons in the erroneous ones, by his Basque compatriot Saint Ignatius of Loyola and by yet others, he gains, through progressive maturity, a **personal imprint**. In his nuptial faithfulness to God-Love, **charisma will acquire all its splendour and all its vigour**.

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### Explanatory Note

Today, one considers the term **liberation** as the most suggestive one to designate the objective of the work of Christ, which, according to tradition, one used to define ordinarily with the term **Salvation** or **Redemption**.

The concepts of salvation and liberation are very close to each other. Like distinctive shadings, one may observe that **salvation** evokes a menace from which to flee, while **liberation** more exactly refers to an evil of today from which one cannot subtract oneself. To save someone means to take him out of the danger; to liberate someone means to distance him from a situation that oppresses him and subjugates him.

Jean Galot - Jesus Liberador  
Ed.: Cete Madrir, p. 22 ss.

## II. DYNAMIC INTUITION

**Jesus - Manifestation of God-Love**  
**- Incarnate Word, annihilated and obedient**  
**- Adorer of the Father**  
**- Servant of Man**

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Michael during his times, man of the Gospel

The Bible shows us how God, in the **history of Salvation**, chooses prophets among his people to activate his saving presence.

During the French Revolution, realised for the defence of the rights of man and the citizen, an evil endemic to nature came out, pride and revolt. Michael made again actual what to him was the divine panacea in the person of Jesus, annihilated and obedient. There he finds the lever and the focal point of his thoughts and actions. There he finds the indispensable and the useful for his liberating adventure. Michael is simply the “**scribe** who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt. 13,52).

Michael is the “**servant of Jesus Christ**, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations... to all God’s beloved... who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”.** (Rom. 1,1-8,16)

### 2. The Gospel, divine power for the salvation of man.

Jesus is the Gospel of God, because he is the manifestation of the Love of the Father.

The Gospel tells me that where I believe life is, death is. And where death is, life is.

The Gospel of Jesus - name that means God liberates - is the liberation of all kinds of security, to place our security in the hands of the Father, in his **power**. To recognise **the power of the Gospel** means to recognise one's own fall, one's own weakness and then **to confess and profess the gratuity** of salvation offered by the Gospel. It means to accept to live the folly of the cross, to live the wisdom of the cross (I Cor. 1,17-30).

The Gospel is not something that belongs to us, the mentality of Christ is not a "human work". It is the "work of God" who communicated it to us, sacrificing his Son, **annihilating him, to make us understand** that even being reduced to sin, He lives **through the power of the Father**, and living like this communicates **to those who believe the same power**: to live a New Life.

Jesus Christ is the **kerigma**: the proclamation of the Sensational News of Liberation; he is the Gospel.

## PLAN OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

### 3. The existential situation of man.

Man, faced with the insinuations of the demon - we read in the narrative of Genesis, the prototype of all sins - no longer wishes to be the "image of God", a dependent creature. He wishes to be "God himself". Master of himself, to live life according to his whims; to make his life his very own life.

Like this, he condemns himself to the limits of being a creature, **to the fear of losing life**. He condemns himself to open and at the same time sly battle for the survival of "his me", of "his choice of life". He condemns himself to an attitude of defence, of attack and of accusation towards everything that opposes him. He condemns himself to building a stockade to defend his vital space. He lives in fear of losing, of dying.

God uses as primary resources for Redemption all that corrupt human nature casts aside. On purpose, he chooses a **diametrically opposed path**. A path of unimaginable, disconcerting folly judged impossible for man to follow with his forces alone.

The demon always tempts man masked as the good and tells him: you must live, defend your concept of life, or else you will die.

Jesus says: Do not fear to lose your life, free yourself of yourself and of things and you shall live.

Faced with man's thirst for pleasure, Jesus is born in the austerity of the grotto of Bethlehem, of the Virgin Mary. He dies nailed to the cross, in complete solitude.

Faced with man's thirst for power and prestige, Jesus is born disinherited and ignored. He lives thirty years of anonymity in Nazareth. He dies like one damned, giving his life for others.

Jesus begins with living, then teaches...**annihilation!**

### 4. God's answer to the situation

Thus, faced with man's thirst for possession which makes one a slave, the **annihilation of Jesus**, the Incarnate Word, comes forth and liberates.

Man's thirst for appropriation comes from a unique and multiform spirit - of hedonism - of possession - of power - of prestige. This closes man into himself. It is egoism, a cult of oneself.

The annihilation of Jesus comes from a unique and multiform spirit - of moderation - of poverty - of service - of anonymity. It opens man to one another and to God. It is **love**.

Can man free himself of himself? Can he go from death to life through his own force?  
**No.**

Man must accept **being liberated by God**. Here lies the **existential problem of the man** of yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever. Therefore man is **obstinate** to be :

- the absolute master of himself,
- capable of liberating himself by himself.

## **5. Christ, the announcement of the Father's love.**

The solution to the existential problem comes from here, the Sensational News: **the Gospel, Jesus**.

In effect, God, in the person of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, **makes possible all that is impossible**. What **the creature** doesn't do, **the Creator** does.

**God bares himself, empties himself, annihilates himself, abases himself again and again**. Something impossible for human reason which, by overcoming it, makes it impotent. **A folly! The folly of incarnation!** The Bible says, it is "the work of God".

The folly of infinite Love, however, will go ever further, will be less comprehensible to the sinner. Jesus, not being able to share the reality of sin, accepts, according to the plan of the Father's liberating love, the sharing of the negative fruits of sin to its roots, in the passion and death on the cross.

Man's winner on the tree of life, Satan, is conquered by Jesus, the man-God, on the tree of the cross. Jesus, the Son of God, **immerses himself into the limited situation of pain and death, a worse folly... the folly of Redemption, of liberation**.

**It is the work of God**. God's work, only God knows it. God's work - this is how he wanted it in his Providence - bears within itself the mystery of pain, crisis, sufferance. It always goes through the night of annihilation: incarnation, daily existence, the cross. Never as in the Garden of Olives, in the "Ecce Homo" of Pilate, in the cross on the Calvary, this Jesus, so destroyed by others, so limited, so impotent, is the best expression of the image of God. Image of God as is even the man destroyed by sin. "Visible image of an invisible God" (Col. 1,15 and 19-20), **the God of the Gospel**, not the God of philosophy or of religion.

## **6. Christ, the achiever of the Father's will.**

The Word of Jesus, which became prayer during the Last Dinner, says: "I glorified thee on earth, **having accomplished** the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 17,4). Jesus took on the human condition condemned to defend his life - his whimsical interests - as if he himself had to defend it like all the others, but he did exactly the opposite: he did not defend his life, he gave it up to the power of the Father and thus won over this regime of death (Heb 2,10-18).

Jesus glorifies the Father, accomplishes his will, realises the plan traced by the Father for Him, remaining faithful to his personal vocation, to its extreme consequence. In his faithfulness to the Father, Jesus manifested his love, his belonging, his being-for-God. On the cross, Jesus made manifest the fact that the Father's interests came before his. The cross

reveals that the life of Jesus has value inasmuch as it is consigned to the Father, happen what may happen. Nailed to the wood, because he fell into the Father's will. Jesus is the man who is forgetful of himself, he is the man "made man". Jesus is.

His word during the agony is clear, it comes from a heart full of peace: Father, all is accomplished! To the Father, he said: see, Abba, here I am, broken by pain, but here I am.

Abandoned and humiliated, Abba, but I am here because you wanted it so. Here I am, Abba, because I always tried to glorify you, I always wanted to make you content and never did I search for myself. Here I am and I am happy because I have reached the end of my journey, without ever seeing it clearly. Here I am because I love you, because you are the passion of my life. I have accomplished your word.

## **7. Christ, achiever of the justice of God.**

From the top of the Cross, lost in his abandon and pain, Jesus proclaims "the work of God", **the justice of God** which is **mercy** for all men, he proclaims the Father's compassion for the man with a broken heart (Rom. 3,21-26).

This is how he glorified the Father: dying on the cross. Starting from the absurd, from the incomprehensible, from nonsense, from the extreme limit, Jesus was faithful to the Father's call. He overcame the trial. He overcame temptation. He reached the end: now yes; now salvation has entered the heart of man starting from the pain of one Man, starting from the uselessness of one Man, starting from the lack of reason of a Man. It is hard. It escapes human reason. It does not fit our calculations. It is a mystery. It is a path which is not our path. It is the path of God.

God the Father, **sole Lord of history and of man**, let him die and took him back at dawn of the third day, resurrected, the **New Adam**. The Father, happy because his Son accomplished his project of man's salvation, proclaimed him **blessed**, he gave him the **Kingdom** as inheritance.

## **8. Christ on the cross, wisdom of God.**

In his pain and death on the cross, Jesus reveals the new meaning of suffering. On the cross Jesus manifests the glory of God, the love and loyalty of God, God's passion for man, God's life given without measure. On the cross, Jesus makes man discover that there is no possible salvation, that there is no possible liberation without the experience of his cross. In his blood - the symbol of life and love - man is redeemed and finds an answer to his existence.

Here man's pride faces the Mystery of the cross. Here man's arrogance rises, his domineering faced with the new attitude of the cross: sweetness and humility. Here man, intelligent and free being, rises against this Path without a path, against this answer without an answer, against this way of being which disconcerts, confounds and undermines. Man refuses to bend before a God requiring simplicity, humility, goodness, tenderness. Where, where is "human dignity"? Oh God, only bare and obscure faith make one comprehend without understanding, make one see without seeing!

**The Wisdom of God is manifested** on the crucifix. It is like a large book, it is like a great Epiphany, the Revelation of God to man. On the cross, the believer learns what being a **New Man** means, a man according to the **life-style of Jesus of Nazareth, a man of the Gospel**. The Crucified Christ is nailed on the cross for having lived the evangelical beatitudes. From the top of the cross **he proclaimed the Kerigma**, he gave the **Magna Carta of the Kingdom**.



## 9. Christ on the cross, New Adam.

The people of God, the Church, come from the cross. It comes from the soldier's lance that entered the flank of Jesus.

From the water and blood that flow from the opened flank comes the new humanity, the New Man, come the people of the heredity, the new son of God in the Son.

Christ crucified is the new paradise, the new Eden where the New Adam, born of man, born of Mary the Virgin, new history, new heavens and new world were created. God concluded in his Crucified Son the Work of Creation. His project has been realised. His Son accomplished it through his effort of love. It is the mystery of God. It is the mystery of man. Since then, the Father can finally rest. This is truly the seventh day, because Creation has reached its fullness in the Son. God created man to be a being centred on the Centre: Jesus.

## 10. Saint Michael's Manifesto, Kerigma of salvation.

The kerigma of the Gospel of liberation proclaimed by Saint Michael in his Manifesto come to mind and attain full force:

**“Here I am, I have come to do your will, O my God!**

Jesus began His life's work by this great act which he never discontinued. From this moment onward he remained always in a state of victim, annihilated before God. He did nothing on His own; His actions were always directed by the Spirit of God; His disposition was one of constant abandonment to the orders of God, to suffer and do whatever He wanted: He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. This is why God exalted Him and gave Him a Name above all other names... and every language proclaims for the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ is the Lord.

**This is how God loved us!”**

## 11. Sad acknowledgement.

In the Church today, one gives little relevance to the mystagogy, the introduction to the mystery of Christ the Saviour.

In fact, the truths of Faith, moral laws, techniques for prayer, etc. are taught, but man is not brought to the encounter and to the following personal duty with Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. For the majority, Jesus Christ is a God to adore, to fear; he does not enter the heart of life. It is easier to make sacrifices with promises, rites.. than to offer to God the sacrifice of one's own life.

Catechism is taught, that is how to grow in faith to those baptised, barely born, but never “evangelised”. He never heard the announcement of the **evangelical kerigma of salvation** nor **has he ever experienced it**, so that, through **EXPLICIT FAITH** - and not through a faith of familial use and environmental tradition - he gives his life to Jesus Christ in the Community-Church; that he renounce explicitly the mentality of the world and adopt the novelty of the Gospel; to live as a New Man animated by the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

In fact, the mystery of Christ the Saviour, New Life in Christ according to the Spirit, is lost to the greater part of the people of God, the ones who practice still ignore it.

**New Evangelisation**, as insistently repeated by John Paul II is **KERIGMATIC PREACHING**: “God loves you, Christ came for you; for you Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life! Do not fear! Open the doors to Christ!” (CFL 34).

## 12. Two opposite ways.

Adam = the Ancient Man  
Sin  
Death  
Enmity  
Egoism  
Pride  
Hate  
Independence  
Rebellion  
Oppression  
Injustice  
Lie  
Use  
Vice  
Worldly mentality  
Hedonism  
Possession  
Spirit of dominion  
Prestige

### **Appropriation**

God of the self-sufficient  
God of the “saints”  
God of the “perfect”  
God the Master  
“Religious” man = spirituality of power service  
Terror of God  
External law  
Pharisaic spirit  
Worry for one’s own salvation  
Contempt of sinners - superiority -  
Rebellion and refusal  
Hardness with oneself and with others  
others  
Runs from sacrifice  
Looks for joy, falls into sadness  
Led by the spirit of Satan

1. A taking to the letter that kills - Judaic spirit  
Self assurance  
Shadowing of the intellect and the heart  
the heart  
Illusion fed by the demon  
Spirit
2. Pelagic presumption
3. Protestant pessimism  
and

Christ = the New Man  
Grace  
Life  
Reconciliation  
Gift  
Humility  
Love  
Obedience  
Submission  
Service  
Justice  
Truth  
Gratuity  
Virtue  
Evangelical mentality  
Temperance  
Poverty  
Service  
Anonymity - persecution (Mt. V)

### **Annihilation**

God of the impotent  
God of the sinners  
God of the weak  
God the Father  
Evangelical man = spirituality of  
  
Biblical fear of God  
Internal law  
Christian spirit  
Worry for other’s salvation  
Solidarity for the sinner - equality  
Obedience and filial acceptance  
Comprehension for oneself and  
  
Takes on sacrifice  
Lives the joy of love  
Led by the Holy Spirit

Spirit that enlivens  
Self-unsureness  
Discernment of the intellect and  
  
Reality illuminated by the Holy  
  
Precariousness cured by gratuity  
Certitude that God inspires the will  
the actions (Phil. 2,13)

Unhealable ruined nature

4. Jansenism = grace and gospel as recompense for the “good” (160)

Modern misbelief, does not believe in the grace of so God, nor in the freedom of man  
faith

Nature healed from within

Grace and gospel as remedy for all, especially for sinners (D.S. 158-160)

Believes in Jesus, God made man, that man lives in freedom. Unites and works; grace and freedom.

## JESUS THE GOSPEL OF GOD, THE KEY OF LIFE

### 13. Liberation, the work of God or man?

One day the Pharisees asked Jesus: what must we do to accomplish the works of God? He replied: This is **the work of God**: to believe in the one He sent. They would ask him again: but what sign do you make that we can see to believe in you? What work do you accomplish? (Jn. 6,28-30).

Note the attitude of the Pharisees: what must we **do** to achieve God’s work? Because we, the Pharisees, with our forces can do God’s will, achieve the law. We feel self-sufficient, we are capable of realising in depth, when we know it, we are our own masters.

The strong answer of Jesus: “believe in the one sent by Him”. Salvation, the value and meaning of life, cannot be found in man; it comes from another, from the exterior. The God of the Gospel is the God of the sinner, who only asks for an open heart to receive, like a gift from above, the gift of love.

Jesus is even more precise: “All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me... For this is the will of my Father, that every one sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life... (37-40). Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life” (46-47).

### 14. Double dynamics of love.

**One must learn to let oneself be loved by God!** In fact, man loves to conjugate in the active tense: I love means I am the agent. It is true that authentic love is oblate, offered by the being to a “You”. But this is still done with a feeling of superiority: beware, it is my riches that make you grow. Man does not like to conjugate in the passive tense: I am loved. I am the passive subject. Being the protagonist has been taken away from me. Because of this, **it is more difficult to allow oneself to be loved, to allow oneself to be completed by another.**

To loose **self-sufficiency** empties **above all** to become able to receive, to allow oneself to be completed. Some stages of the process: 1. The ability to live in ecstasy - outside of intimacy, wholly in the other, in an encounter of dialogue. 2. The ability to welcome with joyous gratitude the fullness of the other - fusion of two beings without losing one’s own identity. 3. The ability to disappear within the loved one - identification of the two persons.

Love in man is impetus and fullness of life. Love in Jesus Christ is like this. For Michael, the indispensable and the useful is love, with two aspects:

- impetus = renouncing one’s own will
- fullness = to make one’s own the loving will of God (MS 187).

**The heart of Jesus** is the magnet and the model to live these two aspects. Jesus, in fact, the Gospel of God, incarnate expression of the fullness of God-Love, **bare himself, fuses himself with man to identify himself with the ‘nothing’, in total gratuity.** Then, already at his level, he will invite **the nothing of man to allow itself to be filled and completed by the fullness of the God-Love.**

“At the sight of this marvellous spectacle” Michael exclaims, astonished: “let us be conquered by this God who loves us, let us love like this God full of love, let us love in this God and through this God-Love!” (MS. 190).

This attitude of allowing oneself to be filled, to correspond to God-Love is of the greatest importance in the Betharramite spirituality, it is the consequence of the fullness of self-annihilation, a theme that interests us. It is for this reason that I have mentioned it, even if summarily.

## **15. Shadings to be considered.**

It has been seen how Jesus, the Gospel of God, lives and teaches **a new style of life**, which makes man happy, freeing him from the fear of defending life like a property, to enjoy it in the freedom of a love of oblation. However, this solution to the existential problem, offered by Jesus, is not, at first sight, fascinating. Man continues to be the eternal child who for one shiny penny puts aside the less attractive blank check, guaranteed by the riches of a God.

Michael asserts that “Christianity is not a child’s toy. It is a difficult enterprise, requiring a virile heart, a magnanimous heart, a decisive soul” (MS. 236). Michael, after having made the choice of Jesus’ path, **makes his the radicality of the Gospel:** “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God” (Lk. 9,62 and Mt. 12,30).

In imitating Christ “who began his story with the magnificent gesture of the Here I am, that will be **definitive**”, Michael incarnates and proclaims without stopping “**ahead, always ahead without ever stopping**, neither in the religion of the senses, nor in that of the intellect, not even in God” (MS. 234 and 259).

Michael denounces endlessly the Christian drama which is the **Pharisee’s spirit:** a spirit of truth apparently masked behind self-sufficient achievement of law, and of the rule... “The truth is hateful to man, they cannot suffer its lights. We love it if it shows **itself**, but not if it shows itself **to us**. What an error! The seducer knows how to gain from **apparent virtues** what he cannot obtain from worldly passions (M. 157).

Also, Michael has a clear consciousness of another Christian drama, his “**endangered existence**”, his precariousness. An unstable being, a mixture of angel and beast, capable of the sublime and the abject, at the same time (DS 74,77).

Therefore, his spirituality is full of **evangelical realism**. From here, in the same way, his constant recalling to a very evangelical attitude, **vigilance** (Mt. 24,42-51;25,1-13; 26,38-41). In other words, his spirituality is founded on the eschatological **hope** of the “already... but not yet...”, everything is already achieved in Christ Jesus, but is yet to be achieved in us.

## **16. A synthesis of the Betharramite spirituality in the light of the kerigma.**

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>a) JESUS</b> | * expression of God-Love                   |
|                 | * Incarnate Word, annihilated and obedient |
| <b>model of</b> | * renunciation of one’s own will           |
|                 | * assumption of the liberating Will of God |

b) **HEART OF JESUS**, manifestation of the love of the Father and the Spirit  
**model of** \*the process to achieve being **son in the Son**

First step *Become disciples*, becoming **an adorer of the Father**  
like the Incarnate Word, whose life is in total  
**reference to the Father:**  
“my food is to do the will of him  
who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (Jn. 4,34).

Second step  
Incarnate *To become apostles*, being **servant** “in a state of oblate”, like the  
Word, whose life is complete  
**reference to man:**  
“the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life  
as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10,45; Mt. 20,28).

Third step  
Word,  
whose life is total  
**reference to the mission:**  
“This is the bread which came down from heaven. As the living Father  
**sent**  
**me**, and **I live because of the Father**, so he who eats me **will live**  
**because of**  
**me**” (Jn. 6,57) cf. 17.

c) **The Betharramite** calls out together with the Incarnate Word:  
**Here I am, Father, I have come to do your will of salvation!**  
**Instantly, unreservedly, irrevocably,**  
**for love, only for love!**

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THE PATH OF CHRIST - THE CHRISTIAN'S PATH.

### 17. The Christian, he who knows “the giver of life”.

In the light of what has been said, one needs to define how the **Christian**, the baptised, another Christ, will make **the new mentality of the Gospel** his, lived and taught by Jesus (see n° 12. Two opposite paths).

The Christian is he who descends into his own weakness to know the saving power of God. Convinced of his own weakness, he feels strong in Jesus Christ.

The Christian never feels like he has “arrived”. When he discovers that he is a sinner, he affirms: Yes, I am, but I have experienced being found and loved nonetheless.

The Christian is he who believes that the only way to cure one's humanity, condemned to defending one's own life, is that of giving it like Jesus.

The Christian does not try to own life and enjoy it - “do not worry about your life” - but is he who makes the joyous experience of knowing the giver of life, Jesus, the Lord.

The Christian, faced with the Good News, has experienced that achievement in life is found only in the hands of Jesus. He lives free of worries.

The Christian is he who lives the experience of the hidden treasure, of the precious pearl (Mt. 13,44-45). He plays everything for everything.

The Christian - like Jesus - lives committing his life in the Father’s hands, he consecrates himself. “He does not make sacrifices”, but “transforms himself in sacrifice”, in total oblation.

## **18. The Christian, weak and strong with the power of Jesus.**

The Christian is he who, moment after moment, lives **continuous conversion**, always unbalanced by life, a life lived in the light and with the strength of the Gospel. The test of conversion to the Gospel is to lose with joy all one has and all one is.

The Christian, due to continuous conversion, recognises that he is not the master of his own history, he recognises God as the Lord of his history. Therefore, he need not hide his sin, he feels like the chosen one and the sinner at the same time.

The Christian is he who is not embarrassed by his inability, but rather underlines it, not as an exhibitionist, but to make known the work of that God achieves through the Gospel. Also, for the Christian, to feel like a sinner means to detach oneself from oneself, to solely confide in the gratuity of God.

“To do good” is not that important to the Christian as is the **witnessing** that God does things **for the good** and, even if everything seems to lead one to death, he always believes that all things converge toward his own good.

The Christian knows that the logic of the Gospel is not evasion. It is the realism of life through death, it is the realism of love (Jn. 16,21). Luke states: “for whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it” (9,24). That is to say, do not be presumptuous in accomplishing God’s Works, but let God achieve his Work in you.

The Christian accepts the fact that Salvation comes to him from **his own weakness**, from **his defeat**, from **his sin**.

The Christian accepts the fact that **his liberation cannot come about by his strength alone**, but will be given to him by another, by Jesus Christ who took it upon himself and experienced it himself, who won and who gave man his strength, his **victorious power**.

When the Christian realises that he doesn’t-work-well, **he gives grace to God and praises** his mercy, because he let him experience his weakness and because, through it, he has seen how God works in him, making him a New Man (sanctifying him).

The Christian is he who begins **to glorify himself, to use his own weaknesses** because he has known **He** who is the **Lord of everything**, but who became weak, servant of all, so that we could live as **free** men. (Serious problem: man is afraid of having his weakness discovered, he doesn’t accept being sick, and therefore to be cured. Less does he understand the starting point of evangelical liberation which consists in accepting, as one’s own good, being unjustly treated, being poor, being cast aside, being considered useless, being the last, being looked upon badly, being mis-judged, being slandered, etc. It is comprehensible only if taken with the power of the Spirit of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit).

## **19. The Christian, he who is freed and announces Jesus the Liberator.**

The Christian is not **the saved one**, but is the **instrument of salvation** of others. He has recognised the fact of being a sinner, he has met **the one who** stopped him from sinning, he has met **the one who, even while being innocent**, tasted the bitterness of sin and did not judge or condemn, but who, in sin, saved him. Because of all this, the Christian is willing to take on the evil of others upon himself.

Therefore, the Christian is the one who possesses the **power** of Jesus, and because of this submits himself and gives life to others, says that even the one who is wrong is right, he gives with joy to those who hurt him, he pardons those who destroy him, etc., he converts himself into an instrument of salvation for others: **into living kerigma, into the living Gospel of the violence of love.**

The Christian converts to becoming “the lord of all things”, not because he is lord, but because he has experienced the “Lord and giver of life”. Due to this, like Jesus, he is everybody’s servant and does this freely.

The Christian knows that the Gospel is not a human proposition, and therefore cannot be realised alone. He also needs the light and the strength of God, **the help of others**, whoever they may be, whatever they may do.

The Christian learns, day after day, **to thank others, that help him**, to enter where he does not want to enter, to convert himself, to detach himself from himself, to know who he is... to identify himself with the Gospel’s mentality, to be happy.

The Christian learns from Jesus how to be a man-for-others, to be everything-for-everybody, to be free while being submissive to all. Like Jesus, he is free to give his freedom to others so that others do their will with him.

The Christian knows that he can announce the Gospel to others only if he makes the effort to experience it every day.

The Christian experiences that a community is truly evangelical when all, from the greatest to the smallest, have the courage to show themselves and accept themselves as they really are, to tell each other the crude reality for reciprocal edification and to grow “living the truth of love” (Eph. 4,15).

## **20. The Christian experiences and lives the presence of the Risen Jesus in the Church.**

The Christian experiences the **gratuity of God’s justice**, his merciful love, and lives **in praise and thanks.**

The Christian recognises that the Father, instead of being angered because of the rebellion of sin, **sent his justice in his Son Jesus to us**, making him ‘sin’ for us. Jesus took upon himself not only our limitation, but also the fruit of our rebellion, and, innocent, offered in death his pain and fear. This is how he freed us and made us experience the merciful pardon that opens us to the love of God, of ourselves and of others.

The Christian recognises the proof of God’s solidarity with Man in the crucified Jesus.

The Christian experiences, day after day, in the following situations, that to **operate as a new man** in the style of life of Jesus realises him, thanks to the **power of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, of the Holy Spirit.**

The Christian is the man-path towards the Father, that follows the steps of Jesus Christ, animated by the Spirit, to a People-on-the-way, the Church.

The Christian experiences that the **Gospel** is not something of the past. It is a **present reality**. It is not something, but someone: **Jesus Christ**. Even more: **We are all ONE in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.**

The Christian **lives the Church**, not as an institution, but as a mystery: the living and operating presence of Jesus resurrected, the Lord, among men, to make men new in today's history.

The Christian discovers that the **sacraments** are not cold ceremonies, but encounters, fusion, and identifying with Jesus, **to be able to live giving life and to be living Gospel**.

## 21. Briefly.

**With Saint Michael** one learns from Jesus, the annihilated and obedient Word, how to renounce one's own will to then be filled with the fullness of the God-Love.

**With Saint Michael**, one is called to being **living kerigma of God-Love**, through the **Gospel, the power of God for the salvation of all**.

The author of this paper believes that this kerigmatic reading of life, of charisma and of the spirituality of Saint Michael, in the light of New Evangelisation, apart from its ecclesial contemporaneity, can be of great advantage for the blossoming of the Betharramite spirituality in the **religious person** as well as for "a new blossoming" in the **lay person**, according to his vocation and mission in the Church and in the world (CFL). **This is of great importance** because it gives us the essence of the Gospel as well as that of the Betharramite Charisma.

The author did not want to overly weigh down the text, already long and full enough, with citations from the Holy Scriptures and from Saint Michael, in the light of New evangelisation, which could be many and meaningful. This is a work that leaves the reader with a touch of curiosity: to enjoy looking for the fonts of these masters of life. Thanks to this **key of Kerigmatic Reading**, the author hopes that a **contemporary, new and attractive Saint Michael** appears. A Saint Michael who efficiently helps **in the setting of one's heart to the same rhythm as the Heart of Jesus**.

"He may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit **in the inner man**, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.**" (Eph. 3,14-21).

Saint Michael's clarifying text:

**"Just listening to the Gospel is not sufficient**, even if done with docility; one must practice what it commands. Prayer, devotion that does not make us more faithful to our duties, more submissive to God's will, is pure illusion and does not open the heavens to us. Even miracles cannot stop us from condemning ourselves.

**To listen and to act means to build on stone, overcoming any obstacle.** To believe in salvation solely through faith means to fall in error. To teach that faith is enough to save ourselves is to make others fall in error. To listen without practising means to abuse, making one guilty, to add to the other sins contempt for this means of salvation.

**The Gospel is a faithful mirror**, that reflects ourselves, that shows us our sins and our weaknesses. Christian law is perfect because it provides us with all the necessities for our illumination, to allow us to understand, to correct our weaknesses, to make better what is most praiseworthy in ourselves". (MS 238).



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### **III. VOCATION AND THE MISSION OF THE LAY PERSON IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD**

**Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christi Fideles Laici***

(Rome, December 30, 1988)

**“The lay person is the man of the Church in the heart of the world**

**The lay person is the man of the world in the heart of the Church”**

(Puebla 786)

#### **1. Presentation.**

CFL is a very rich text. It is a synthesis of the letter and of the spirit of Vatican Council II and of the post-conciliar synods. It is a resume where many themes come out. In it one could discover **meditation** founded on three words: **vocation, communion, mission**. This meditation develops the biblical images of life, of the vineyards, of the vineyard workers. Each of these words: vocation, communion, mission reflects, in turn, the presence and action of God, in the history and in the life of each Christian.

For a first look at the whole, we list five (main) themes shown as stages to become true “sons of the Son” presented in the Betharramite Kerigma (II - n° 16):

- **To be a disciple;** chap. I - I am the Vine, you are the branches.
- **To be a witness;** chap. II - All branches of the Sole Vine.
- **To be a community of witnesses;** chap. III - I have destined them to be sent to bring fruit.
- **To be the leaven;** in the different states of life and particular vocation; chap. IV - The workers of the Vineyards of the Lord.
- **To be faithful to the vocation received;** chap. V - That they may bear more fruit.

#### **2. The nature of the document.**

First of all, the document presents itself as a **written text**. But one must immediately note that the written text refers to **something else** which is, precisely, what is revealed and defined by the quality of the text of the document and, as a consequence, its true nature.

The quality and the nature of the document come from the answers given to four questions: who wrote the document? Why was it written? What is written in it? How is it written?

- a) **Who wrote the document?** The bishops of the synod and the Pope. The bishops of the synod and the Pope, deeply united. Through these so simple words, and beyond words, we will find concrete exercise, the realisation of the magisterial and pastoral mission in the Church and at the service of the same Church; more so, at the service of the entire humanity.

Therefore, **Christi Fideles Laici** is a written text. But, at the same time, a **living reality**, since its authors are Bishops who represent all the Churches of the world with Peter and under the authority of Peter.

b) **Why was this document written?** Its objective is eminently pastoral or practical. The same exhortation says this at the end of n° 2: *“The objective that the exhortation wants to reach is to incite and feed a stronger consciousness of the gift and responsibility that all faithful lay persons - and each one in particular - have in the communion and the mission of the Church”*.

The “why” the document was written is therefore and eminently alive thing: **Christi Fideles Laici** proposes to penetrate the heart of each faithful to develop, in them, a more attentive and fruitful consciousness regarding the place and the role that the laity has in the Church and in the world.

c) **What is written in the document?** It is true that its finality is eminently pastoral, but an authentic pastoral is not achieved if it is not constantly founded, motivated and enriched by doctrine. In this sense, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation contains its own ample and profound doctrine, which makes up the root and the force of the aspects relative to the action and the practice which integrate this document.

The term “doctrine” has been wilfully used. In fact, the properly theological questions, especially those debated upon with greater interest, are not absent in the document, but these are mentioned only for the implications that they may have in relationship to the doctrine.

The Apostolic Exhortation is a document of ecclesiology, its typical configuration is an ecclesiological configuration. N° 8 is very clear and unequivocal on this point: **“Only within the Church as mystery of communion is the ‘identity’ of the faithful laity revealed, their original dignity. And it is only within this dignity that their vocation and their mission in the Church and in the world can be defined”**.

An inevitable question arises here: **which is the ecclesiology intended in the document?** Which is the ecclesiology that gives life to the structure of the same document? The most common and usual answer, from the first comments on the Exhortation, is the following: the ecclesiology of communion.

d) **How was the document written?** How does it achieve a pastoral objective based on the doctrine? It would seem to me that the terms “Apostolic Exhortation” are meaningful, since they help to easily define the character of the document to define its style. It is an “exhortation”; therefore an appeal, an invitation, an incitement, almost a mobilisation, towards the whole Church and in particular to the laity, so that this pastoral objective can be found based on the doctrine.

The words of the Gospel that are cited in the document: “You go into the vineyard too” (Mt. 20,3-4), are full of extraordinary richness from a purely theological point of view, since they show the living and personal aspect of the document. The voice of Jesus Christ echoes truly in them, a voice turned to, through the Synod of Bishops, the entire Church. The document underlines how the voice of the Lord echoes indivisibly in the innermost part of each Christian and in the historical events of the Church and of humanity (cf. n°3).

We think that, to be able to trace the directive lines of the document and discover its interior and profound unity, to comprehend its characteristic according to these living and personal terms is fundamental.

**The biblical foundation of Christi Fideles Laici**, new for this type of document, gives unity to the exhortation around the image of the vineyard as the expression of the mystery of Christ and also the mystery of the Church, considering it “communion” and “mission”. **The biblical dimension** gives the document the characterisation of meditation that contributes to the discovery of the **Word of God as a gift and as the responsibility entrusted to the laity**.

The imperative of the synoptic Gospels: “go into my vineyards”, placed at the beginning of the **Christi Fideles Laici**, must not make one forget what the image of the vines and the branches symbolises in the Gospel of John: **the fact of living in Christ** is what allows one to bear fruit. It is an attitude that opposes, in a critical manner, the current mentality according to which the lay person is called upon to act.

**The gift of the communion with Christ** is founded on the mission. The initiative of love comes from God. The Christian action is therefore fertility that emerges from life in Christ and not in work or production.

One can assert that the happy choice of the term “Christi fideles” proposes definition and a program of spirituality to the laity. The reference to Christ, in fact, indicates the evangelical meaning of the lay vocation, with precise appeals to being disciple and to the following, to the profession of faith and to apostolic mission; but all rests on the **insertion in Christ through baptism** and through the other sacraments of Christian initiation.

Through this double reference to faithfulness to Christ and to intimate communion with the Lord, **lay spirituality** acquires richness of meaning as **life in Christ**, the most expressive synonym with relationship to Christian life, and as **life in the Spirit** meaningful variation of the expression: spiritual life. The two dimensions, Christological and pneumatological, find their own vocational characteristic in the lay reality, in the Church and in the world.

### 3. Catechesis essential to the “Life in Christ”.

The intention of this presentation of the CFL, as before, is to re-awaken the curiosity, the appetite... to point out “the launching ramps”. Leave the rest to the reader... reading, assimilation...experience...

The kerigma allowed us to know Christ, to accept him and to give him life. Catechesis makes us consolidate life in Christ, deepening it in all ways.

Once more we insist:

- as Christians we cannot be like eternal children, happy with the leftovers and that DIMINISH the CAPITAL of Jesus Christ, in the not very attractive blank check, in the “small signs” of daily life and of the sacraments..
- nobody loves what one DOES NOT KNOW. Nobody lives what one DOES NOT LOVE. No one identifies with what one DOES NOT LIVE. For this reason, the words of Jesus in John 15,5 are very meaningful : “for apart from me you can do nothing”, which can be turned around into: “without You I can do nothing”.

**May we be allowed to present these two panoramic views of a catechistical nature:**

A) DIGNITY of the Christian, another Christ.

\* **Incarnation**, Luke I,26-39

God the Father sends

The Word

through the Holy Spirit

upon Mary.

BIRTH of JESUS

\* **Pentecost** The Acts of the Apostles II,1-48

God the Father and the Resurrected Jesus send

the Holy Spirit

upon Mary and upon the twelve Apostles

BIRTH OF JESUS PRESENT IN TIME.  
THE CHURCH

- \* **Baptism - Confirmation** Jn. III,3-20; Rom. VI; Eph. (the entire reading)  
God the Father and the Resurrected Jesus send  
the Holy Spirit  
upon a man and a woman  
BIRTH OF A CHRISTIAN, another CHRIST,  
liberating and livening presence of Jesus the Saviour, in  
the People of God = the Church, in today's history

B) The RESPONSIBILITY of the Christian CFL (11 - 13)

- \* **Vocation** (11)
  - to be son in the Son = another Jesus
  - a branch of the Vine (to remain) chap. I
- \* **Communion** (12)
  - one sole body in Christ = the CHURCH
  - branches - ALL OF THE SOLE VINE chap. II
- \* **Mission** (13)
  - enlivened by the same LYMPH = Holy Spirit (20)
  - branches that radiate a NEW LIFE chap. III

**4. Elements of lay spirituality.**

The lay people define themselves as those who follow Jesus. This brings them to founding their spirituality on the real “following” of Jesus, common to all the baptised. To reserve the dynamics proper to the “following” only to some would mean the devaluation of Baptism itself. However, one must speak about the specificity of the laity, distinct from the one that characterises priests or those who have chosen religious life in its various forms.

\* **Listening to the Word and to life.**

As one cannot comprehend Jesus making an abstraction from God the Father, basic structure and final horizon of his message and of his whole life, in the same way one cannot speak about Christian life without basing it on the trusting filial relationship in God, under any circumstances. The believer identifies himself through careful listening and loyal obedience to God's Will, expressed by his Word and through the events of daily life. The contemplation of Jesus' God is also the starting point for all styles of Christian life, including the lay one.

\* **Evangelical 'Radicality'.**

The “following” of Christ brings with it, in front of a conventional or “light” Christian, the need for radicality. The pressing appeal of Jesus to follow him requires total availability. It is not an appeal among others, but the one that gives the final meaning to life. Taking the Gospel seriously, being honest in the answer, must be the permanent duty of every believer.

The spirituality of the “following” requires, also, effective solidarity with the poor, the privileged receivers of Jesus' message. This option for the unfavoured is polemic, it includes a battle against poverty and its causes and leads, sooner or later, to conflict. This also manifests the central dimension of the cross in the “following” of Jesus. To follow Jesus means “to complicate one's life” in the battle against evil and injustice.

\* **Spirit of beatitudes.**

The “following” of Jesus is impregnated with the spirit of beatitudes, an element of permanent contrast with the dominating values of our society. In a world where competition, aggression, appearances, consumerism have the priority, Christians are called upon to incarnate such deep evangelical values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty and the transparency of the heart, patience in difficult situations and even in persecution.

To follow Jesus requires uniting mystic and duty, contemplation and action. Faith in the Resurrected One must incite us to opt, under all circumstances, for the God of Life, following the path of the Lord who came to donate life in abundance going through the gift of himself and the cross (Jn. 10,10). A faith that must feed itself on prayer and contemplation of the God present in history, and always greater and freer faith, given freely.

**\* Bearer of Good News.**

Beyond all this, Christian spirituality must assert and allow to transpire the love of God towards the world: “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn. 3,17). A decisively lay spirituality, that discovers the traces of God’s love in the world and opens to transcendence, cannot present a menacing or condemning aspect, but must be the bearer of Good News for humanity.

**\* To evangelise “through contagion”.**

The lay persons, members of a Church sent to the world as the useful sign of salvation and animated by the Spirit, are called to discover and listen to God’s Will and to bear witness of their faith under any of life’s circumstances. They can and must evangelise, so to speak, through contagion (LG. 33; CFL 15). Through them, faith becomes witness and this, in time, calls upon faith. The words and the doctrine are not the essential elements of evangelisation, but gestures and works that tell of a life according to the Gospel (EN. 21).

**\* Presence in secular life.**

The true field, if not exclusive one, for the evangelising action of the laity includes the different places of secular life: “the vast and complex world of politics, of the social, of economy, like culture, science and art, of international life, of the mass media, and still of the realities open to evangelisation, like love, the family, the education of children and youths, professional life, suffering” (EN 70).

In all these aspects of life, the laity of our churches must make itself present. It is the duty of the laity, whose apostolate is “participation in the same mission of salvation of the Church” (LG. 33), to make the Gospel present to you, without omitting anyone. But not of lesser importance is the fact that they themselves must bring the dreams, the joys, the hopes and the worries of the people in the Christian communities and to their own Church. **This coming and going** is one of the characteristics of lay Christian existence. In the final summation, this means living in the world with Christian responsibility, thus enriching the life of the Church.

Above and beyond the tastes and the personal desires, each baptised person should question himself, in the various circumstances of life, about the will of God upon him.

**\* At the service of common good.**

The public presence of the Church is a necessity of its evangelising dimension; it expresses an inevitable secular dimension and can be realised in different ways. Believers “cannot, in any way, abdicate their participation in ‘politics’; that is in the various forms of economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural actions, destined to organically promote and in an institutionalised way common good” (CFL 42). This is how they also make

the Church present in the world and try to transform society according to the spirit of the Gospel.

The public presence of the Church and of believers must be guided by duty towards the right autonomy of the secular realities and through a preferential option for the poor and the needy of our society.

**\* The way to be in the world.**

A first element must be the search and the realisation of a synthesis between faith and life. This is a problem which involves not only the laity, but in its case presents different characteristics. The fact that the lay man and woman live immersed in secular realities, increases in them the risk of acting in civil life relegating on a secondary level all the evangelical criteria that should inspire them. They must remember, every once in a while, that “they must not wrongly place professional and social activities on one hand, and religious life on another” (GS 43), making them parallel.

On the other hand, the believer should not be present in the secular life in no matter what way. To make his presence truly evangelical, it must be impregnated, unequivocally, with an active effort in favour of justice and equality (EN 18 and 30-31). This bears with it a type of preferential option for the poor and the needy as an “evangelising sign par excellence”.

**\* Animated by the Spirit, full members of the Church.**

Baptism makes us members with full rights of the community of the disciples of Jesus, therefore of the Church, People of God on the path of history. In it, we receive and develop our personal vocation of unconditional service in the Kingdom of God which is ours. In this community, each of us is the object of the action of the Spirit, which inspires different vocations and charisma and concedes to every baptised person, man or woman, his gifts according to his will (1 Cor. 12,11 in LG 12).

Each member of the People of God is animated by the Spirit which makes him a sign and a living instrument at the service of the Gospel. Through Baptism, in the Spirit, each Christian acquires the right to participate in the evangelising mission of the Church. Using this as a starting point, he contributes to evangelisation, to the building of the Church and for the good of humanity.

**\* Difference of vocations, charisma and gifts.**

The different vocations, charisma and gifts of the Spirit constitute an inexhaustible fount for enrichment and renewal for the world and for the Church (1 Cor. 12,7). The father and mother, responsible for the human and Christian education of their children, the person who tries to welcome and to listen, he who knows how to incite dialogue and be a mediator in conflicts by making the sides closer, he who recognises his weakness and therefore takes care of his neighbour’s health, the worker that renounces to part of his salary and fights for dignified working conditions for all, the employer who makes an effort to create jobs taking on risks and renouncing other benefits, the sick who lives and transmits his faith in difficult situations, to mention some examples, all these people are placing the gifts received from the Spirit at the service of others and of the Kingdom of God.

In particular, it is up to the ones with responsibility in the Church, at the different levels, to discern and articulate the diverse gifts and charisma of the Spirit for the good of the community and for evangelising action. Without suffocating the voices of the Spirit (I Thes. 5,19), it is up to them to make it so that each baptised person can be faithful to his vocation and be what the Spirit calls him to being: daughter or son of God with full rights. The

realisation of this discernment makes up one of the more delicate aspects of the ministry of the bishops and priests in our churches and in our communities.

**\* Associated apostolate.**

Even if each baptised person takes part individually in the evangelising mission of the Church and his apostolic work is completely necessary and unsubstitutable, the different forms of associated and organised apostolate constitute the expression and forefront witness of the community experience of faith and of its evangelical dimension. This type of apostolate “answers the human and Christian needs in an adequate manner and is, at the same time, a sign of communion and unity of the Church in Christ (AA 18).

The multiplication of initiatives of lay apostolate of different sorts is a great gift of the Spirit to the particular Churches, for a better service of evangelisation. At the same time, the organisation presents itself as an answer to the need for a missionary presence in society, towards greater efficacy.

**5. Comparative table, general lay spirituality and Betharramite spirituality.**

LAY CHARISMA	BETHARRAMITE CHARISMA
- of incarnation	- essentially incarnation
- Christocentric	- Christocentric
- Trinitarian	- Trinitarian
- son in the Son of the Father	- devotion to divine fatherhood
- living and holy temples of the Holy Spirit	- the Holy Spirit, interior master, operates in us like constant interior leaven
- ecclesiological	- ecclesiological
- one sole body in Christ	- this concept is implicit here, nothing stops its actuation
- founded on baptismal insertion made	- founded on the attitudes of Christ the Word
- holiness in Christ of	Flesh
- make oneself holy in the world position”	- holiness in Christ, adorer of the Father, servant of men
- prayer incarnate in life	- “make oneself holy with the limit of one’s
- mediation between God and man mediation	- “not prayer, but men of prayer”
- biblical	- in Jesus, the Word made Flesh, exemplary
- evangelical	- idem, in Jesus, the eternal Word made Flesh
- community	- idem, in Jesus, Gospel of the Father
- existential	- “how great a community would be...!”
- increased value of charisma	- “immensity of charity within the limits of one’s position”
- increased value of service	- idem, through the discernment of God’s Will
- discernment of the signs of God in the every temporal reality	- idem, in the availability of obedience
	- discernment of God’s Will in every moment and action

- “sacramental”, discover God in events, in persons, in things
  - universal = Catholic, even in a particular Church
  - prophetic
  - priestly
  - pastoral solidarity
  - renounces worldly values
  - experiencing the evangelical values: temperance, poverty, service...
- everything is sacrament of God-Love
  - idem, devotion to the Pope and the bishop
  - in Jesus, expression of God-Love
  - in Jesus, total oblate for the brothers
  - in Jesus, who gives himself in docility and
  - in Jesus, model of total renunciation from incarnation to the cross
  - in the virtues of the “Betharramite Heart of Jesus: charity, humility and tenderness, obedience and total gift”

## CONCLUSION

Saint Michael Garicoits, a pioneer of his times, strong in his **kerigmatic charisma**, **continues to be very contemporary during the time when the Church**, preparing itself for the Third Millennium, tries to be **kerigmatic**, wants to cry out the **Gospel** with a creative force, the Sensational News of God-Love in Jesus Christ, eternal Word made Flesh.

**Betharramites**, religious or lay persons, we cannot avoid being avant-garde like available “Mobile Camps”, in the hands of John Paul II, the Vicar of Christ, and the bishops, successors of the Apostles.

**It is our hour!**  
**Go forth, always go forth!**

Fr. Daniel Ramon MARTIN, s.c.j.