

Christmas Viator Web

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*With the shepherds and the wise men,
the entire world comes toward him
to see the face of the living Love
who, for us, became a child.
(Christmas Matins Hymn)*



***The General Council and the General House Personnel
wish you a Christmas filled with the great mystery
of the Son of God become one of us
and a New Year of 2013
lived out in hope!***



A Word from the Superior General

Christmas is a celebration of faith, of humanity, and of meaningfulness. A sense of marvel touches our hearts as our commitment is burned into our hands and feet. Celebrating the coming of the Savior among us means once again understanding the promise that God makes in the deepest silence of our lives. And that silence comes into our beings through no one else except through all those persons who help us to grow.

Christmas calls for us to have faith in the simple things of life. Nothing grandiose or spectacular, but only a promise that has been kept and that surprises us by the humble way that it appears. That is why the Feast of Christmas speaks so well to the hearts of those people who, in the presence of the crib, put aside the “why’s” and the “because’s” of faith in order to once again become like little children. The understanding of the mystery is mediated through the heart, the birthplace of a faith that knows how to welcome Emmanuel and to keep alive the images of all those persons for whose benefit he returns time after time.

To all of you, Viatorian brothers and sisters in those fifteen countries where we live and work, I wish a Christmas celebration that will open wide the doors of your interior silence. Gilles Vigneault, a Québec poet, used to say: *People spend a good half of their lives fleeing from silence. To those who are able to use it, I offer my silence.*

And God has been born again!

A Happy New Year of 2013!

For the Viatorian Community, a year filled with challenges to be met!



Twelve Years of Greatly Appreciated Service!

On the occasion of his recent visit to the General House, the twelve years that Brother Gilles Gagné devoted to his duties as the personal secretary of the Superior General were celebrated with joyful and grateful recognition. Last June, Gilles had departed the Eternal City in order to care for his health.

Brother Gagné left imprinted upon the General House the mark of a joyous and affable man, a confrere inspired by beauty, a devoted and reliable co-worker.

Thank you, Gilles! Rome will miss you as surely as your distance from here will make you nostalgic from time to time.

Aparecida: A Missionary Spirituality



On May 13, 2007, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of CELAM (The Latin American Episcopal Conference), the Shrine of Aparecida (Brazil) was the site of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopacy. That conference followed those that had been held in Rio de Janeiro (1955), Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), and Santo Domingo (1992). Since the 18th century, Aparecida has been a renowned Marian shrine.

The **central theme** of the general conference was: *“being disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that people might have life in him.”* The challenge of that Fifth General Conference consisted in *“watching over and nourishing the faith of the People of God, as well as reminding all the faithful on that continent that, by virtue of their baptism, they are called to be **disciples and missionaries** of Jesus Christ.”*

Fundamental Orientation: The call *“to start over again in Jesus Christ”* in order to follow after him and to accord primacy to his mission consisted in facilitating *“an encounter with Jesus Christ”* and in working to build up his Kingdom of life.

A Missionary Spirituality

In spite of its limitations (repetitions, orientations that were excessively moralistic and abstract, an ecclesiology that was not inclusive of the laity, a certain lack of a spirit of self-criticism), the text accentuates the principal orientation of Aparecida: a **missionary spirituality**.

- It is fundamentally a spirituality of an **encounter with Christ**. And for us, that priority takes on a Viatorian accentuation: *“that Jesus Christ be encountered, followed, loved, adored, proclaimed, and communicated to all people.”* A person becomes a Christian thanks to the experience of an event or

of a person who gives a new horizon to life. Being missionary disciples means that people identify with Jesus and live as he did.

- From the very beginning, a genuine spirit of **unity and participation** facilitated the work of the Local Churches. Thus it was that the document, which at first reflected a pre-conciliar mentality, was changed. That participative methodology (small groups and commissions) made it possible to move forward and to help the assembly get through some moments of crisis. Unity is for the mission and the mission is for unity.

- The belief that “**all are called to be disciples and missionaries**” provided the theme of the meeting. The idea of “missionary disciple” has deep spiritual roots in the Trinity and is directed toward the world with the full strength of the love of God. Aparecida interweaves spirituality and commitment. Trying to separate them would only lead a person to fall into spiritualism.
- **A preferential option for the poor** makes it possible to discover the poor in their Gospel reality. Conservative sectors were greatly disconcerted by the discourse of the Holy Father, who opened the doors to evangelization in close conjunction with the cause of the poor.

The document speaks of popular piety, spirituality, and mysticism. The Church must be converted in order to discover that her poor sons and daughters possess *“a Christian spirituality that, while being a personal encounter with the Lord, rather thoroughly integrates the corporal reality, the symbolic aspects, and the most concrete needs of the people. It is a spirituality that is incarnated in the culture of simple people, which does not make it any less spiritual. It is spiritual in another way.*

Simple people are not only the objects of evangelization; they are even more so the creative subjects of evangelization. *“Christian people evangelize themselves.”* Popular piety is *“a legitimate way of living one’s faith, a means by which people can feel that they are an integral part of the Church, and a manner of being missionaries who embody the deepest aspirations of Latin America.”*

The setting of the Aparecida pilgrimage center, where the bishops lived out the expressions of faith of the people, greatly influenced that evaluation. Interaction with factors from outside (pilgrims, contacts with popular religiosity, and so forth) made it possible to speak more about the growth, rather than the purification, of popular religiosity.

- **At the service of life and of a full life.** “Life” is the word that the Aparecida document uses most often (531 times). Nothing that is human can be foreign to the Kingdom. Being disciples and missionaries leads us to assume tasks that give value to every human being and that try to give us structures that are more just. The word “life,” much more than “Kingdom,” makes it possible to dialogue with the world. *“What Jesus Christ is offering to our people, the fundamental content of that mission, is life to the fullest for everyone.”*

We are obviously talking about new life in Christ, but also about human life in all of its dimensions: spiritual and physical, full life for everyone, love that gives life. *“The life of Christ includes the joy of eating together, enthusiasm for making progress, a desire to work and to learn, the joy of serving those who are in need, contact with nature, enthusiasm for community projects, the pleasure of a sexuality lived out according to the Gospel, and all of those things that the Father gives to us as gifts as signs of his sincere love.”*

There is a growing awareness of the dangers to which are exposed the lives of human beings and people, such as the acts of aggression that are committed against the environment and the life of the planet. Ecology is appearing as a major theme in the meetings of the CELAM. The protection of creation invites communities to be attentive to the undue exploitation of natural resources, especially the forests of the Amazon and the water reserves of Antarctica.

We must learn to contemplate and to take care of creation as the home of all living beings, as the womb of the life of the planet and of nature, as the freely given heritage that we receive and that we must protect.

- **Grass-roots Church Communities.** At the beginning of the Conference, out of pure stubbornness, several participants wanted to simply suppress any mention

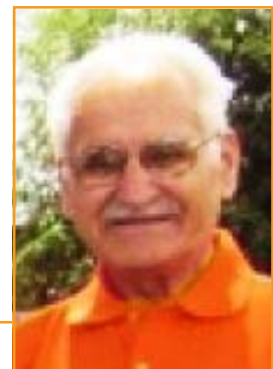
of such communities. But, Grass-roots Church Communities were finally accepted in the document.

- Also mentioned were several **new subjects**: native peoples, Afro-Americans, women, migrants. There was a re-affirmation of the options that previous Conferences had made for the young, the family, the primary role of the laity, attentiveness to modern culture, and so forth. It was asked *“that support be given to women’s associations that are struggling to get beyond difficult situations of vulnerability and of exclusion.”* *“It is necessary to provide comprehensive formation that prepares women to accomplish their mission in the family and in society.”* It was acknowledged that women still suffer from being excluded. The **identity** of women and their value in the Church must be restored.
- **The Bible is given its proper importance** by placing it in the hands of the people. Searching for a full life also means emphasizing the kerygma, which is *“the first thing that we must announce and also hear.”* Thus, we must not get lost in the maze of a multitude of doctrines and norms. *“That is an indispensable condition for a deep and lived knowledge of the*

Word of God. To accomplish that, we must educate people to read, to meditate upon, and to be nourished by the Word, so that they can see that the words of Jesus are spirit and life (cf. John 6:63). If not, how are people going to announce a message the content and the spirit of which they do not know in great depth? We must base our missionary commitment and the entirety of our lives upon the rock of the Word of God.”

Insistence is placed on the importance of the Word of God and the reading thereof as the source of the spirituality and discernment that must enliven the entire Church.

- Aparecida presents a type of Marian reflection that is more daring than traditional models, beginning on the grass-roots level and starting with the humanity of **Mary**. Mary is seen as the perfect missionary disciple, bringing life for all people.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the Aparecida document is eminently pastoral. By proposing substantial orientations of pastoral methodology for the poor of Latin America, it goes to the core of the Christian identity, to its vocation and its mission, and to the means to be used to live it out and to develop it to the fullest.

The Aparecida document represents a significant step forward and beyond the value that, in the past, the Magisterium has given to the way that the poor of Latin America have expressed their faith. The document recognizes in those expressions of faith a *genuine spirituality*, a specific – and valid – means of living the Christian faith, through which the Holy Spirit guides an immense number of Latin Americans. It teaches that that piety *“can be deepened”* and that such deepening can take place, not so much based upon corrections or rectifications, but especially by searching for *“growth based upon the special richness of the people.”* That becomes very clear when the document states definitively that, *“in that manner, even more profit can be drawn from the rich potential of holiness and social justice that is englobed in the mysticism of the people.”*

Pedro Laur, c.s.v.