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FROM DEVOTION TO EVANGELIZATION

by Jesús Rodríguez Rico, C.M.

National Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Spain

The Miraculous Medal Association has been marked principally by a pious and devotional attitude toward the Mother of God and, frequently, reduced to this area without much ecclesiastical or even social projection.

The month of May and the Triduums and novenas which precede the liturgical feast of the 27th of November are strong moments of prayer in relation to the Miraculous Medal. In many of the more than 400 current centers in all of Spain, the Eucharist is celebrated the 27th of each month for the deceased members and for the families who receive the Home Visit of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal in their homes.

After Vatican Council II and the Apostolic Exhortation "Marialis Cultis" there has been a shift in the direction of our Association. We could not continue doing what we always did. Actually, John Paul II calls us to a new Evangelization at the dawn of the third millennium.

In Spain the bishops have a great concern for the Evangelization of diverse sectors such as the intellectuals, the workers, the youth and persons who have strayed from the life of the Church and live an ever growing agnosticism with terrible personal and social consequences. In order to respond to these calls, what we did first was to organize the catechetics of adults in our Association's centers. In this manner we offer Christian formation in a systematic way for those who have no other method of cultivating their baptismal faith

Currently there exist more than 200 groups of adult catechism even though not all the centers have decided to implement the program. There is a lack of catechists with experience and preparation.

In order to have a more wide range effect, a priest or Daughter of Charity explains to the persons who will direct the adults in their faith formation. The catechists exercise their ministry in private homes, not in churches, in order to reach those who would not approach a church.

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, *Robert Maloney*, in his message directed to the participants of the *Marian Congress* in *El Escorial*, commemorating *the One Hundredth Anniversary of the liturgical feast of the Miraculous Medal*, invited us to make each center of the Association a place of prayer, formation in the faith and charity toward the needy.(1)

The starting point for creating these groups of believers was to unite the Marian trend of the Little Company with the Vincentian charism of evangelizing the poor. We tried to prepare the believers so that they might give reason for hope, in these moments when the sects cause havoc among the simple and humble, the poor and less cultured. Now we are promoting the life of prayer in the centers. For this we depend on the spiritual experience of the Daughters of Charity and the courses on prayer which are offered in different cities in the nation.

Our hope is that the lay person recuperate the meaning of prayer as a means of increasing and strengthening one's faith in the midst of daily activities. These Christian formation groups meet once a month; various groups meet every two weeks. They pray with the Psalms, meditate some bible passage, share their prayer with simplicity, listen to the explanation that the catechist offers them and actively participate in the dialogue, finishing with a prayer of petition in litany form or a hymn.

The goal of these groups, which meet around the statue of the Virgin Mary of the Miraculous Medal, is a catechumenate of adults. Nonetheless we should proceed at their pace, conscious of their age, culture and possibilities. All catechism ends with a commitment.

587 members of the Miraculous Medal Association from all of Spain participated in the Congress in El Escorial. The conclusions mark the patterns of joint conduct and promotion of people; trying to unite prayer and action: devotion and commitment of life for the poor and humble of our society, piety and the use of the goods of the Miraculous Medal Association on behalf of the less fortunate; of those for whom we wish to be a voice and of those whom we wish to defend before the situation of injustice caused by a divided and selfish society.

HOME VISIT OF THE VIRGIN

This practice began in Barcelona some 80 years ago. Our Confreres observed that every month an urn or shrine box with a statue of the Holy Family would be passed from home to home if the family so asked. They thought about substituting the statue of Mary of the Miraculous Medal for that of the Holy Family.

In groups of approximately 30 families, the statue of the Virgin Mary passes from house to house a certain day each month. Each group has someone responsible to coordinate the presence of the statue in each home on the corresponding day of the month. This same individual repairs any damage, receives the offerings and hands them over to the treasurer of the Association. This person serves as a link between the Center and the families who receive the Virgin.

This devotional practice aids the sanctification of the family. It attempts to bring the religious symbol into the home so that children from their earliest years might see it. This practice encourages all to pray to the Mother, an occasion to remember the religious aspect, the remembrance of their baptismal faith and the world beyond, in the midst of difficulties or life's duties.

It is the day to honor Mary and, through her, to honor her Son, the Lord. For this reason we insist on reception of the sacraments on this day. Often we observe that the shrine box of the home visit of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal is the only religious sign in many homes and the humble bond that unites these families with the ecclesiastical community.

In 1916 *Father Hilario Orzanco*, the great *apostle of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal*, began to *extend this practice through all of Spain*. The Missionaries would encourage the devotion as a means of perseverance in the fruits of the Mission.(2) The Daughters of Charity would promote the visits where they held State benefices and many other houses located in towns and cities through all of Spain.

Since 1916 the Association of the Miraculous Medal is intimately united to the home visit of the Virgin and has become an established practice through all the nation. Later the Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity took the practice to the nations of Latin America and observed the great value for convocation which it had among the simple, the humble, the poor and those who had strayed from the Church.

The offerings received in the collection box connected to the shrine box are channeled by the central committee of each local center toward the celebrations, the apostolate, charity toward the needy (3), formation of the members (4), contribution towards the five campaigns organized by the Church: *Mission Sunday, Catholic Charities Fight Against Hunger, Day of the Diocesan Church, Day of the Seminary*. We also contribute toward our Missions "Ad Gentes" and with the Volunteers of Charity (5).

It is not the intention to accumulate offerings but rather to use them as the needs arise, so that at year's end there is a small amount remaining. In this way it is not necessary to deposit it in banks or credit associations. Bank accounts can have grave risks with the Public Treasury, especially if someone, using our fiscal identification code under the guardianship of an Association of the Catholic Church, commits fiscal fraud or money laundering. This would involve us in a serious problem and stain the good name of the Association, the Little Company and the Church, a scandal which the media could divulge, calling attention to our good faith and our ignorance of the fraudulent use of our fiscal identification code. For this reason no notary powers are given to open bank accounts, only to persons strictly necessary according to the judicial and commercial laws of each nation.

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, *Richard McCullen*, gave me authorization to dispose of the funds of the Miraculous Medal Association in Spain (6). Later he also did so on behalf of another confrere (7) in order to have things well ordered, in case of accident or sudden death. In this way we would not lose the money should the person die who has the first signature on the bank account.

PRESENCE IN THE PARISHES AND IN THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL WORK

Since the Association of the Miraculous Medal is a Public Association in the Church (8), it could not remain enclosed in itself. If it acts in the name of the Church (9) and receives from the hierarchy the duty to be present in the world and sanctify the temporal order (10), it should be in communion with the local Church and its pastors where it exists (11). Currently it is canonically established in 62 of the 67 existing dioceses in Spain, including the Military Ordinariate.

We begin by offering the associates to the pastors as catechists, animators of devotional practice and promoters of charitable and social pastoral work, participating in Catholic Charities on the parish level and in visits to the sick. In 1992 we developed *the first pastoral plan* of our Miraculous Medal Association for the *years 1993-1994*. We focused on rediscovering and living baptismal faith and service in thanksgiving toward the poor. This pastoral plan should be adapted to the pastoral lines of each diocese and to the parochial projects where we are integrated and where we want to serve the Church with our own charism

The reception of the pastors was encouraging. They perceived that we desired only to involve ourselves in the general pastoral attention of the local Church and serve its faithful without expecting anything in return. The pastors also discovered that in our Association one could find people for the prophetic ministry (catechetics, above all with adults and estranged Catholics), liturgical ministry (animators of the Eucharistic liturgy) and ministry of deacons (visits to the sick and help to the needy). Since the offerings of the Miraculous Medal Association serve the good of the same parish or town where it is established, there was little resistance from the pastors although, unfortunately, we experience some still.

Some months ago we elaborated *the second Pastoral Plan* of the Association for the *years 1995 and 1996*. Together with the last plan, it supposes a step ahead in the commitment toward the promotion of people, help toward the needy and solidarity in the struggle against injustice. It is nothing more than a systematic exposition of the conclusions of our Marian Congress en El Escorial in 1994.

The 15th of August 1994, *100th Anniversary Commemoration of the Liturgical Feast of the Miraculous Medal*, we organized a *pilgrimage* of the associates to Lourdes and Paris, to the Chapel of the Apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830. *It was an historic day in which more than 700 pilgrims participated*. We were received and greeted by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and by the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, who celebrated her feast day that day.

JURIDICAL ASPECTS

Although it might seem strange, the base that ought to assure the future of an Association of faithful is not only the charism which drives it. An Association also needs a juridical support in order that the Diocesan Bishop approve it, so that it might function adequately and that it might continue.

The charism of the Miraculous Medal Association is to honor Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception (12). This will be the soul and life which vitalizes its members. The juridical structure will help to perpetuate the charism, to make it concrete in diverse occasions and circumstances of the Christian life of the associates. The juridical structure will also help to adapt the Association to new times.

The one who creates the Miraculous Medal Association is the *Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission in its nature as an Association of Apostolic Privilege* (13), that is, entrusted by the Pope to the Superior General of a Religious Order or Congregation. Nonetheless there were times in which, by disposition of the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, the Superior General delegated this faculty to the Visitors for their respective Provincial canons and to the local superior for his house. The Visitor could sub-delegate to a Missionary for his Province (14).

Currently, in order to obtain greater working flexibility, Father Richard McCullen, C.M., as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, gave me a written power in order to create Centers and sign patents of creation of the Miraculous Medal Association in all Spanish territory (15).

Nonetheless the written authorization of the Diocesan Bishop is necessary in order to proceed to erect canonically a new center of the Association (16). Invoking paragraph 2 of Canon 312, some bishops said that it was sufficient to have a house of the Congregation of the Mission or of the Daughters of Charity in one's dioceses in order that the Association begin to exist as an appropriate work of these congregations. In this respect I want to recall the pontifical mandate, "Dialectus Filius" of Saint Pius X directed to Father Antoine Fiat, C.M. and his successors in the Generalate of the Company in which he makes a recommendation to him personally, not to the whole Congregation of the Mission (17). In summary we can say that this commission makes the Association a field of work for the Missionaries and, confided to the Superior General of the Mission, we ought to give it a Vincentian color. What can be said about erecting it in parishes staffed by secular priests or in churches served by religious? Written authorization of the diocesan bishop is necessary (18)).

It is important to keep the authenticated or legalized photocopies which have been presented before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary in the archives of the Provincial and General Curia. This includes both the decree by which the Diocesan Bishop authorizes the creation of the Miraculous Medal Association in his diocese as well as the various decrees of establishment signed by the same prelate, relative to each one of the existing centers in his diocese.

By juridical analogy one proceeds to the canonical establishment of the Association on the part of the Episcopal Conference. It is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission who establishes the Association, but this requires the consent of the Episcopal Conference of a particular nation. In Spain they required me to present the approbation on the part of twelve bishops in order to proceed to give us the decree by which the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission is authorized to establish the Miraculous Medal Association within the national territory (19).

With these approbations in the ecclesiastical circuit we now have juridical canonical person of the Association (20). Also it is convenient to make two photocopies of these decrees once they have been authenticated or legalized before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary in order to keep them in the archives of the General and Provincial Curiae.

It is convenient to obtain juridical civil person. In order to do this one inscribes the Association in the Register of Religious Associations of the Ministry of Justice, if it so exists in the State legislation, or in the Register of Civil Associations of the Interior Ministry or Governor's office (21). With civil juridical person the Association is subject to rights and duties before the State. Therefore it can acquire, possess, administer and dispose of goods.

Perhaps most importantly is that with this civil juridical step we have the basis to seek from the public Treasury a Fiscal Identification Code. We can also enter the social security system of the nation as a small business so that our employees might obtain social coverage: sanitary assistance, pharmaceutical assistance, sick pay, accident coverage and retirement benefits when necessary (22).

I REPEAT ONCE AGAIN: of all the documents it is prudent to have 2 authenticated or legalized photocopies which have been presented before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary for the archives of the Provincial and General Curiae. History is made with written documents.

It should be well understood that for all these procedures some statutes are necessary, both in the ecclesiastical as well as the civil sphere (23)

We wrote some which Father McCullen approved on January 31, 1986. These were the beginning of some opportune steps. In this year, 1995, we plan to write some new statutes, revise the Association's bulletin and prepare catechism of adults in a systematic manner.

(John Carney, translator)

(1) Rome, April 7, 1994

(2) XXVI General Assembly C.M. 1902, Decree 553. Secundum Supplementum, Page 3.

XXIX General Assembly C.M. 1931, Decree 630. Cuartum Supplementum, Page 4.

(3) Canons 1254 paragraph 2 and 114 paragraph 2.

(4) Canon 329.

(5) Canon 328.

(6) Rome, March 15, 1986.

(7) Rome, October 29, 1988.

(8) Canon 301 paragraph 3.

(9) Canon 313.

(10) Canon 298 paragraph 1.

(11) Canon 311.

- (12) Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Tome I, number 17, pages 669-671 art. 1 Rescripto Dilectus Filius.
- (13) Canon 312, paragraph 1, number 3.
- (14) Decree 38 of the XXXII General Assembly, C.M., 1955. Nova Series Post Approbatas Constituciones; page 10.
- (15) Rome, March 15, 1986.
- (16) Canon 312, paragraph 2.
- (17) Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Tome I, number 17, pages 669-671, dispositive part after article 7.
- (18) Canon 312 paragraph 2.
- (19) Decree of Establishment of the Superior General of the C.M., signed in Rome on December 19, 1986. The decree of the Spanish Episcopal Conference was signed in Madrid on February 23, 1987.
- (20) Canon 114 paragraph 1 and 313.
- (21) Our Association obtained it May 8, 1987.
- (22) Canon 1286 paragraph 1.
- (23) Canon 304.