



GOD WORKS LIKE THAT

Origins of the Christian Life Community

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FOREWORD

Without being one of those "historic events", mentioned by the author, the following text should be given special attention in our movement, since it fulfils in a brilliant way a long-cherished and universal desire.

We encounter here the mystery of the transmission of a spirit, still more the mystery of origins and creations, which suddenly appear according to a word of the mystic Angelus Silesius "There is no why for a rose", according also to the word of Jesus "Nobody knows from where the Spirit comes". Since He comes from the depths of God, from the mystery of his Providence and his designs, from the mystery of his choice.

In fact, the movement which inspires us today with its energy, whose breath is spreading over the whole earth, the inscrutable plan to lift up a world, the re-birth of a spirit which was weakened, all this plunges us into stupefaction and surprise.

After all, what are four centuries in the immensity of the future? It was like yesterday, in stormy times of the Church and after many adventures, like Abraham "without knowing where he was going", that a small roasque knight founded the Society of Jesus, dreaming to conquer for Christ the whole world. It was like yesterday that a young Jesuit Leunis, through an original and very modern initiative, associated lay-people to the apostolate of the Church, inviting them to consacrate all that is human and to sanctify all "profane" activities.

To Father Paulussen we owe a deep debt of gratitude for having given us, in a few fascinating pages, the possibility of retracing the flowering of a humble plant of which we are today some branches; the dramatic story of a plant that was pruned and then burst forth into new life. Yes, God does well what He does, for that is how He works, "gently and strongly" always, with power but respecting human freedom and in accordance with the inescapable law that life passes through death.

We are also grateful to the author, that he made his story so alive, especially that he approaches the present time, interspersing his own memories with objective events. One is reminded here a little of the Acts of the Apostles, where Luke suddenly intervenes personally in the epic of Paul, and, for example, recalls the details of the shipwreck of Malta. It could not have been foreseen that a modest chaplain of Holland would be snatched from his tasks and placed on the public scene to leave his mark on the events.

However, this is what happened. But the optimism and even the humour of the story make us guess what is somewhat hidden: the difficulties and struggles, the uncertainties and anxieties, the impatient waiting for the "song of tomorrow"; mystery again of the Spirit who uses human instruments to obtain his aims.

We can also guess that the radical transformations which one day would appear, were the result of intense prayer; prayer of those engaged, prayer of the whole Church and above all the prayer of a Woman often mentioned, the Virgin Mary.

Yes, the value of this story is that it illustrates in a particular line of history, the fidelity of God in accomplishing his work, according to the decisive words of Jesus "It has to be..." It is the mysterious logic of his action which – always Paschal –, in order to succeed, uses problems and pain, errors, even faults and the apathy of people. And still, his action unlocks situations, opens horizons and renews continuously all creation, hiding itself while it has conducted everything.

And here we are now before the beginning of our work, or rather before the ocean of the future, called personally and in fraternal community to the transformation of a world, to the creation of a future which is truly human. We are very small indeed, but we are carried by the breath of the Spirit who fills us with hope.

Thanks to our past, thanks to our dead who live in us, everything is possible and the future will be what we make of it. We are only happy, using our brief life-time, to sow some seed in the furrows of our fathers. Following the word of Isaiah, our movement is still a "frail plant" and it is possible that it may have to face again further storms. As Fr. Paulussen underlines it, it is not so much on the structures that we have to rely – however necessary they be – but on the vitality of the organism and on the liberty of the Spirit.

Beyond the past thresholds, other stages, await us of which we can foresee that they will be like our predecessors experienced: dramatic events and struggles, but also achievements and the fulfilment of God's promises.

For what was, for what is, especially for what will be, may the God of love be praised.

PROGRESSIO

*"I have come to cast fire
on earth..." (Lk 12:49)*

INTRODUCTION

This Supplement is an answer to many requests. Already years ago some friends have asked for it. They especially wanted inside information about the origins of the World Federation (WF). More recently I several times met people who wished to know why and how the Congregatio Mariana (CM)* was changed into the Christian Life Community (CLC). Last year the Executive Council of the WF asked me to write a Supplement on this subject.

Since it is impossible to understand what follows without knowing at least the mainlines of a longer history, we have to go back to the origins of the Society of Jesus. The first chapter deals with some essential information about the CM in the period between the foundation of the Society of Jesus and its suppression in 1773. A second chapter gives as briefly as possible, the most important events of the following years till the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution "Bis Saeculari" (1948). In the light of this nutshell history, all new developments will become meaningful and clear. This is the content of the third chapter. I tell the facts simply as I have lived them.

If a patient reader has finished this modest pamphlet, he will understand why I fully agree with Karl Rahner, where he writes shortly after the last session of Vatican II: *"In christian spirituality one cannot divide the old and the new into various parts. The reason is that what is new is authentic only if it preserves what is old, and what is old retains its vitality only if it is lived in a new way"*. (1)

Also the delegates of the WF, who voted in 1967 for the new name and the new General Principles, apparently agreed with this opinion. For in the letter of confirmation by the Holy See we read: *"In the desire of better service, the participants of the General Council chose to adopt the name of World Federation of Christian Life Communities, being convinced that this title better explained the reality and the internal dynamism of their association, without removing any of its specific elements"*.

Finally, one can question why there are so few names mentioned of persons engaged in the CLC to-day. It is true, a number of priests, men, women, youth and many Jesuits could have been mentioned. But the list would become too long and in such cases there is always the danger of embarrassing omissions. Everybody will understand me if I recall with deep gratitude only five lay people who have given, each of them in a very personal way, an important contribution in preparing the way for the CLC movement, as it is today. They are: José Ignacio Lasaga from Cuba, first president of the WF (1954–1959), his three successors, Antonio Santacruz from Mexico (1959–1964), Eric Mathias from India (1964–1970), Roland Calcat from France (1970–1976) and Edythe Westenhaver from the U.S.A., first executive secretary (1965–1970).

L. P.

Rome, 8 May 1979.

* (In English-speaking countries usually called Sodalties of Our Lady.)

A LAY MOVEMENT INSPIRED BY IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

1540 – 1773

THE FIRE OF IGNATIUS

A diocesan priest, Ferdinand Sassen, was the first who brought me in contact with the fire of Saint Ignatius. He was an expert in history of philosophy and taught international, national and Church history in the high school, where I was a boarder. His way of lecturing was fascinating, because he was highly intelligent, burning with enthusiasm and a real master in the art of educating. The whole school knew his almost exaggerated admiration for the Jesuits. The time he devoted to them in the Church history class seemed beyond all proportion. But all of us found it marvellous and for many boys it became unforgettable. Also on me he made a deep impression. I even made a decision; if ever I were to become a priest, I would become a Jesuit.

Like all decent schools in the Netherlands at that time, we had a "Maria-congregatie". I was very much surprised when, leaving school, I discovered that this association had been founded by the Jesuits. This fact changed my low opinion about it. As prefect of the senior section I had to write a report in the yearbook of the school. It was my first article on the necessity of a renewal.

At the university I again found a CM. This also had nothing to do with the fire of Ignatius. Here I also met my old teacher again, now professor in history of philosophy. We worked together in promoting philosophical formation for all faculties. My interest for the CM, and even for the Jesuits, became marginal, but deep in my heart my secret decision remained intact. At the same time my early conviction became ever stronger: the Jesuit Order is only for exceptional people; impossible for me.

One day in 1932 – I was in my third year – the chaplain of the university asked my help in getting participants for the annual student retreat. I did my best and with fifteen good friends I went to the retreat. All the other universities together, sent about the same number. There it happened. Without having looked for anything, found everything. It came as the purest gift of my whole life. Suddenly an unbelievable surprise. There was so much light, peace, consolation and liberation, that even the slightest doubt disappeared. This certainty about the authenticity of the experience always remained. God had called me to the Society of Jesus. I had been in contact with fire, the fire of Jesus, the fire of Ignatius, now a contact forever.

I tell this little story because my vocation to become a Jesuit meant practically a vocation to the restoration of the CM. This was not the plan of my superiors. At least three times they had different assignments for me. But always circumstances changed it. God works like that.

In the noviciate I learned the truth about the CM. At the origins of this movement, we find Ignatius of Loyola. His secret had always been the infinite love of God: a fire, gently burning, discrete and prudent, but irresistibly conquering. Thus he became the heart of a small community. Thus he tried to form really free men. Free, not only to love and to serve, but free to love and to serve always. Free, because totally poor and pure. Thus he became the founder of the Society of Jesus. Thus he became the man who inspired the lay-groups around his first companions.

PIONEERS

Fire communicates itself spontaneously. What Fr. Villaret describes in Chapter One of his book on the first period of the history of the CM is not surprising. (2) He gives examples how the early Jesuits were surrounded by groups of lay-men. They cooperated with the fathers in the apostolate. These groups had different names but the same spirit. The touch of Ignatius characterised them so clearly, that this is often mentioned in historical sources. A contemporary writer affirms: *"If you see these men, you infallibly recognize that they are imbued by the spirit of the Society of Jesus."* What this means, is mentioned continually: selectivity of members, solid formation, meditation and frequent reception of sacraments, flexibility and adaptation to all kinds of needs.

Already in 1540, the year in which the Society of Jesus was established, Peter Faber led a famous group in Parma, also called Society of Jesus. This group produced the first Jesuit martyr. Another companion of Ignatius, Paschase Broet writes a letter on March 1, 1545 to Francis Xavier, in which he tells him everything about the flourishing group in Faenza. Earlier Francis Xavier had written to Rome about how he was helped in his difficult mission by a chosen group of young men, on fire with love and zeal. In 1547 Ignatius himself started the Society of the Twelve Apostles in Rome and a year later Nadal began a group in Calabria. He reports on it in a letter to Ignatius on April 10, 1548.

It is interesting to note that the Jesuits not only started new groups, but they were also frequently invited to reform confraternities of various inspirations, which had lost their original spirit. Sometimes these groups were transformed into new associations which adopted the spirituality of the Jesuits.

The question has been raised whether the CM in this first period could be considered a Third Order of the Society of Jesus. It is true that at this time there existed an intimate union between the two associations. The CM had the spirit of the Jesuits and only Jesuits could be ecclesiastical assistants. Nevertheless the CM was never a Third Order. This became evident in 1773 when the Society was suppressed and the CM could continue on its own. What Clement XIV did can be criticized but juridically it was completely correct.

FOUNDATION

On May 3, 1556, a young man of 24, dressed as a worker, presented himself in the Jesuit house, near the little church of the Madonna della Strada. He came all the way from Liège in Belgium on foot and wanted to enter the new Society of Jesus. Probably he had already met some Jesuits in his native town. Ignatius himself and Polanco his secretary examined the new candidate and after some days he began his noviciate. Ignatius died three months later. He had received in his Society John Leunis, rightly considered the founder of the CM. (3)

The story is well-known. In the Roman College, the European formation-centre founded by Ignatius in 1551, Leunis gathered a group of students and prepared them to do apostolic work in the city of Rome. He did exactly what other Jesuits did elsewhere. Since 1563 his name is regularly mentioned.

A whole network of correspondence existed among the members of the Society. Sharing and communication are normal characteristics for a community which was meant by Ignatius to be a Society of love. So Leunis knew about the existing lay groups. What he began was certainly not original, but he did it in an original way, thanks to his exceptional educational abilities. From the documents we know that he had a special charism for dealing with young people.

In a few years the Roman College had become famous. It radiated not only solid doctrine and spirituality but also high culture and human sciences. An ideal environment to prepare scholars and artists, saints, martyrs and missionaries. In this environment Leunis, faithful disciple of Ignatius, wanted to do even more.

John Leunis died on the 19th of November 1584. Only a few days later Gregory XIII established canonically the Congregatio of the Roman College. Moreover, he made the group of Leunis "mater et caput" (mother and head) of all similar groups. In canonical terms: it became a Primaria (Primary group), having the right to affiliate other groups of the same nature. Through this affiliation all these groups shared in the indulgences and privileges of the Primaria.

Afterwards the Primaria was divided into three age groups called Prima, Seconda and Terza Primaria. The Prima Primaria represented the three groups together. Since the Prima Primaria stood under the jurisdiction of the Society of Jesus, only the General could grant an affiliation. The intention was not only to communicate spiritual gifts but also to form a kind of unity and to guarantee authenticity.

ORIGINALITY OF LEUNIS

At least in three respects Leunis has been original. First of all, in the remarkable way of formulating the aim of the CM. Secondly in his effort of promoting lay responsibility and lay activity. Thirdly in his practical way of forming community and developing community life.

The Aim

It is clear that Leunis and his workers saw the aim of the CM not as two-fold, but as one. They had not in mind (as has been affirmed) to foster christian life and "also" scientific life. They aimed at unity of life, bringing all aspects of human existence together in one christian way of life. Since we touch here one of the most fundamental elements of the General Principles, I would like to quote from four different sources in the original text.

The members of the CM of the Roman College write in the rules of 1574 (the oldest we know): *"desiderosi di far profitto se nelle lettere come nello spirito..."* (wishing to make progress in both our scientific and our spiritual formation). Further in the same document: *"Essendo il fine de questa nostra Congregazione congiungere le lettere con la pietà cristiana..."* (since it is the aim of our Congregazione to unite scientific formation with christian living). (4)

Still clearer is the French expression in the rules of 1575. Here the members of the group in the college of Clermont (Paris) where Leunis was working, also write like this: *"Pource donné que le fin de notre Congrégation est de conjoindre les lettres à la piété chrétienne"* (same translation as above). (5)

We have another Latin text written in 1582 by the same group in Paris. The Preamble begins as follows: *"Primum unicuique propositum esse debet ut studia litterarum pietatemque couplet"* (First intention of each one should be to make an intimate unity of scientific and christian life). (6)

The first common rules of Fr. Aquaviva, which were valid for almost three centuries (1587–1855), express the same ideal in other words. The original text is Italian: *"Perchè il fine è... l'acquisito delle virtù e della pietà cristiana insieme col profitto delle lettere"* (Since the aim is the growth in virtue and christian life together with progress in science). (7)

It is almost unbelievable that this long tradition of integration simply disappeared totally in the rules of 1855 and also later in the last common rules of 1910. (8) The General Principles of 1967 have re-established the contact with the authentic inspiration of Ignatius: *"Our groups are for those who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fulness of their christian faith"*.

Responsibility of the lay people

It is a striking fact, that the early documents of the 16th century are much more in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II on lay apostolate, than the document of the 20th century, which was responsible for the typical image of the CM: the rules of 1910. For Leunis it was quite natural that the students of his first group should decide on their own rules, making all major decisions themselves, that they should elect not only group-leaders and officers but also the Jesuit in charge and even (in the years that he was in charge) the cardinal protector. In other words: he gave them full responsibility.

The common rules of 1587, prepared by Fr. Aquaviva, are less radical than Leunis, but still enough imbued with the spirit of the founder to inspire a modern reader. In fact, they have been a great help in composing the General Principles.

Aquaviva and his advisers, little preoccupied as they were with juridical considerations, sought above all ways to stimulate young christians, to create a spiritual climate in keeping with the aim of the CM: the formation of laymen, conscious of their personal vocation in the Church of their time. A word like "director" introduced after more than 300 years into the rules of 1910, does not seem to be in harmony with this climate. The conception of director is alien to the thinking of Leunis and Aquaviva and it is a pity that in translations and explications this word is being used. All local rules and the original text of 1587 invariably use the word "father", almost always together with the "prefect" (president), also called 'il capo' (the head) or 'superiore'. The combination of father-prefect appears 40 times and illustrates the awareness of accentuating their common responsibility, rather than their hierarchical difference.

Community life

One of the most used Bible texts in our days is Matt. 18:20 *"Where two or three are together in my Name, I am there in the midst of them"*. It is the best and the most beautiful text on which community life can be founded and justified. Leunis and the first members of the CM not only used the same text, but they incorporated it into their very name. The Latin text says: *"ubi duo vel tres congregatae sunt..."*. Hence the name "congregatio". It is not surprising therefore that this text is printed on the title page of the oldest known copy of CM rules, drawn up by Leunis and the members of the Clermont group in Paris. The booklet is from 1574 and is now in the French National Library of Paris.

The rules of the college of Clermont are similar to those of the Roman College of 1574. For both the Preamble is identical, indicating a strong bond of community: *"In common deliberation among ourselves, we have decided to draw up some rules which could help us integrate our studies with spiritual life, in order to be able to live fully in union with God, peacefully among ourselves, thus giving witness to others and disposing ourselves better to receive from his divine Goodness light, graces and gifts."*

Every day these "brothers" went together for Mass. Every day they had their meditation together. Every day they were together for singing a part of the Office of Our Lady and daily they examined their conscience together and prepared the meditation for the next day. In the weekly meetings the officers had to see to it that all members participated in sharing their opinions. In a special rule, mutual love and union are recommended: "*All are members of one family and brothers in Christ*". The words "*each brother*" are often used. In a real community everything is done so that all persons are given equal value.

INSPIRING FRESCO

Was Leunis also the originator of the Marian character of the CM? We have some facts: many of the early lay groups around the Jesuits did not have explicitly a Marian character. Of course, as faithful Catholics formed in the school of the Exercises, the members of these groups had a great love for Our Lady, but not always a particular devotion like the group of Leunis had. It is also true that Leunis, before he entered the Society, was already known for his intense love for the Mother of God.

Another answer is given in the above mentioned Preamble of the first rules: "Since it is a custom that such Congregation recommend themselves to a patron in heaven for protection and guidance, from whom they take the name, and since we have a particular devotion to the most Holy Virgin of the Annunciation, Mother of God, we, in all humility dedicate ourselves to her, praying that she may help us in all our actions, especially in the ordination and observation of the rules of our group, which are the following"...

The Preamble mentions the Annunciation twice which is the name of the Church of the Roman College. Above the main altar was a large and beautiful fresco. It showed not the usual representation of the Annunciation, only Mary and the angel, but it depicted the whole inspiring panorama of the contemplation on the Incarnation in the Exercises: the Holy Trinity, all of creation and mankind, with Our Lady and her fiat in the centre. In this setting Jesus began his life on earth. This fresco was a continual reminder of the highlight of the Exercises. Fathers and students liked this wonderful painting. It became the permanent inspiration not only for one group but progressively for a whole world movement.

Today the fresco does not exist any more. The church of the Annunciation was demolished in 1626 to make room for the larger church of St. Ignatius. Only the detail of Our Lady was conserved. Isolated and taken out of its context of the wider perspective of salvation history, it is now known as the Madonna of the Prima Primaria.

A black and white reproduction of the old fresco was published in the program for the first meeting of the world federation (Rome 1954). The mystery of the Annunciation–Incarnation, not mentioned in the rules of 1910, is again the main inspiration of the General Principles.

DECLINE OF THE AUTHENTIC SPIRIT

1773 – 1948

STRANGE DECISIONS

In a stormy period of unrest and confusion, the supreme authority of the Church, forced by political powers, did something nobody today could have dreamed of. On July 21, 1773 Clement XIV signed a document suppressing the Society of Jesus, all its works, ministries and activities. More than 20,000 Jesuits were sent home and the General was put into prison. Local Bishops had to read the papal decree in all the houses of the Society. This promulgation, essential for its validity, was forbidden in Russia. The Tsarina, Catherine II, who in 1772 had occupied a part of Poland, did not want to upset the Catholics of that country. Therefore the Society of Jesus and all its works, including a very flourishing CM movement, continued to exist.

Elsewhere, the Society and therefore also the CM disappeared. This was the logical consequence of the papal decision. But again Clement XIV did something that nobody expected. On November 14 of the same year, he decided that the CM could continue everywhere without the Jesuits! A surprising exception to the application of the suppression decree: instead of suppression, a new dimension... From privileged Jesuit work, the CM suddenly became one of the normal works of the universal Church. With one blow it was cut off from its original inspiration and at the same time exposed to inordinate growth: all Bishops the world over could establish the CM. And many did. In the first period (1540–1773) about 2500 groups were affiliated. This number will grow until 80,000 in the second period (1773–1948). It would have been a miracle if this evolution would not have damaged the authentic spirit. By now everybody knows that in the course of the years the movement as such changed, simply because the tradition was lost. Where was the fire of Ignatius?

It was not the suppression of the Society that caused the decline of the spirit in the CM movement, but the decision of 14 November 1773. Without this, the CM would have been suppressed only to be restored in 1814 together with the Society. To be a movement of the whole Church could have been of advantage, but the movement became vitally changed in its most essential characteristics. It had become – at least in most cases – a pious mass movement, different from what Ignatius or Leunis or Aquaviva had meant it to be.

Of course, this is only one side of the medal. Excellent groups were working in many countries, but the movement as such had lost touch with the spirit, the spirit of the founders. No need to say that also in its changed form the movement did a lot of good, answering the needs in many places.

Especially after the dogmatic promulgation of the Immaculate Conception (1854) the CM became even more popular. In the eyes of many pastoral workers it was an infallible means to protect youth from evil. Personally I have known a bishop who decided to start in all his parishes two Marian Congregations, one for boys and one for girls. Systematically they were organized and imposed. For all of them affiliation with Rome was requested and obtained without any difficulty. This bishop certainly was not an exception. No wonder that numbers were increasing and that – in terms of numbers – this time has been qualified as a "flourishing period" of CM history.

How did the Jesuits react? In the mind of a number of them the thought came up: are we allowed to accept the decline of the authentic spirit without trying to do something for its restoration? Was the CM not a child of the Society of Jesus? Is it not part of our vocation, especially since the CM became a work of the universal Church, to inspire the movement with the specific charism of the "man of the Church" Ignatius of Loyola?

GOOD DECISIONS

In 1922 Fr. Ledochowski, General of the Society, convened a meeting of Jesuits working in the CM. It was the first step towards restoration. Forty Fathers from nineteen countries, impelled by a strong sense of responsibility, wanted practical and concrete results. They had a very successful meeting. No long resolutions and only one decision: to start in Rome a central secretariate, a service centre not only for the Jesuit groups, but for all others as well. It was the first secretariate of this type in the Jesuit curia. Not because the CM was the most important work of the Society, but simply because the CM was the most neglected work and one most in need of help and inspiration. Today the curia has eight similar offices for other works.

The main argument of founding an international secretariate was the positive experience of some already existing national secretariates. Fathers from the United States of America and of the Netherlands reported that their national service centres worked very well. Why not apply the same experience on world level?

All this does not mean that the new secretariate was a perfect institution. Far from that! But it has proved that one can work effectively with modest and insufficient means. This international office, which had to serve a world movement whose female members were the greater majority, was not even accessible to outsiders, let alone to women. It was a private Jesuit institution, falling under the rules of cloister, in those days strict and severe. Moreover, how to reform an organisation without authority? Since 1773 the CM was, as we have seen, under the jurisdiction of the Bishops. Only 5% of the groups were established in Jesuit houses. And how to work without the cooperation of qualified lay people? Above all: how to "convert" thousands and thousands of spiritual leaders, everywhere in the world?

Also among Jesuits there was little knowledge and appreciation of the true meaning and nature of their own creation. They could not believe that the Marian Association, called CM, had something to do with the Society of Jesus.

A Pope caused the decline of the spirit; another Pope initiated its revival. Pius XII, knowing from personal experience the Ignatian spirituality and the original impact of the CM, followed with interest the efforts of the Central secretariate. In the year of his election (1939) Fr. Emile Villaret was in charge of the office. Between these two men friendship existed and mutual veneration. In 1953, after the death of Fr. Villaret, the Pope told me that he considered him to be a saint. Pius XII is certainly the greatest promoter of the CM. He did his utmost to support the renewal with all kinds of references, letters, messages and other proofs of his predilection. Finally he decided to take an extraordinary step, namely, to proclaim a new statute for the whole Church. He did it in the most solemn and official way of an Apostolic Constitution, binding for the whole Church without any need of special promulgation. *Bis Saeculari* was exactly what was needed: a clear authoritative statement on the authentic identity of the CM, a pressing call for reform, orientations towards the future and some declarations on lay apostolate in general.

NEW CHALLENGES

The impact of this document was enormous. It is not exaggerated to say that in some countries it had the effect of a bomb. This was also true for the Netherlands where I was in a privileged position to observe reactions. In those days I was not only in charge of the national CM office, but also happened to be acting national chaplain of the catholic press. On September 27, 1948 I received by special mail (splendid work of the office in Rome and... no strike!) a copy of the Acta Apostolicae Sedis of the same date, with the official Latin text of *Bis Saeculari*. We were expecting something from Rome, but never such an outspoken document like this. Everybody was very much impressed. We decided at once to prepare a release, trying to translate the compact Latin words into modern Dutch. The director of the KNP (National Press Agency) was very pleased to bring off a scoop. Next day it was front page news of our three national and more than thirty regional catholic daily newspapers. From then on the agency's telephone lines became red hot.

The main reason for this shock was the papal declaration that the CM was an "*outstanding and particular form of Catholic Action*", thus pulling down a solid system of uniform thinking on lay apostolate and opening the way towards a new and pluriform evolution.

All this is now past history and of no great interest any longer. There are other aspects of the documents however which are more important, e.g. the challenge to live up to an old ideal, the call for reform and renewal, the urgency for a response to be given by a world movement. But the most essential aspect is the stress on the Ignatian character, bringing into focus the absolute priority of the Spiritual Exercises.

A period characterized by strange and good decisions comes to an end. Strange decisions: for the Society of Jesus is forced to disappear while the CM is forced to go on without the Jesuits. Good decisions: the foundation of a central office in Rome followed by the promulgation of a fundamental document of the Church.

God works like that.

<p style="text-align: center;">TRANSFORMATION INTO CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY Since 1948</p>

FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD FEDERATION

The new Constitution, promulgated as law for the whole Church, was in a special way addressed to the CM. Not to one or more countries, but to the CM as a world movement. Everywhere the same question: and now, what has to be done? What should we do?

Meeting in Rome 1950

A first answer came from the Jesuits. The successor of Fr. Ledochowski, Fr. Janssens, did the same as his predecessor had done in 1922. He convened an international Jesuit meeting, organized by the central secretariate. From 15–22 April 1950 the sessions were held in the Jesuit curia. This time 71 fathers had come from 40 countries. I was there together with another father, representing the Netherlands. It was a heavily scheduled meeting: many talks and long discussions on all different aspects and elements of the CM, but it was also a meeting with too great overtones of respect and too quiet, reflecting more the status quo than attempting to come to new inspiration from the original sources. Everything was viewed in the light of the rules of 1910.

After a long talk on the “external forms of the CM”, I asked why we spent so much time on external forms, while all of us knew that no single external form was actually essential for the CM. One of its most specific qualities was exactly its flexibility and adaptability. I did not know whether it really was “all of us” who agreed on this point. It is certain that nobody reacted, only the General.

His intervention was extremely kind but to the point, at least to a certain extent: I had overlooked the juridical forms. Obviously Fr. Janssens' idea of the CM differed from mine.

After the meeting of 1950, a great part of the question "and now what has to be done?" remained unanswered. All agreed that the new Constitution should be implemented (which they already knew before the meeting). But we did not touch on: *how* to do it. Do we have the effective means? Do we need new ways?

Moreover, new questions arose. The Jesuits had their international meeting, but what about the laity? Can only Jesuits represent a lay association? Where are the lay representatives themselves? Where does the responsibility of the lay people on world level come in? What is the opinion of the laity on *Bis Saeculari*, on renewal, on new rules, new structures?

Back in The Hague, I was overwhelmed by the work of the national service centre: about 2000 groups wanted service and inspiration! No time for international problems ...

A few months later, my Provincial called me. He had just come back from a visit of some weeks in Rome. He had to tell me something "in the name of Fr. General". I was not surprised. Finally a remark. The Provincial, usually very outspoken, was a bit shy, "*I have done everything to save you, but I did not succeed*". I said that it was alright. Then: "The General wants you to go to Rome by all means, to be the head of the central secretariate". Me? I could not believe it. On February 19, 1951 I arrived in Rome.

Next day Fr. Janssens received me. Not one word about our discussion. Only cordiality and full trust: "Please, travel as much as possible, the time to sit at home is over. He also asked me to prepare an Instruction on the CM for all the Jesuits.

After one month the Instruction was ready. Before starting out on my first trip, I felt that it was urgent to write first a memorandum on the necessity of preparing a world federation. Arguments? The secretariate is not enough. It can never act as representative for the CM on world level. We need a representative body of qualified lay people (and there are enough of them), together with priests. The laity should take on their responsibility into their own hands. Call it world-union, world-federation, world-community, the name does not matter. Essential is, that we bring people together. Essential is, that they can work, deliberate and pray together, that they can cooperate with others and serve the Church on world level. Without this simple new structure, the CM, existing in many countries, does not exist and is not present on world level. Without this new union, the CM cannot live up to its vocation. Without this on-going communication between responsible people, it seems impossible to achieve the restoration of the CM, as desired by Pius XII. Finally, a world federation is the normal and logical outcome of existing national federations, surely indicated in a time that international communication is growing rapidly everywhere. Why, do we often come too late?

Fr. Janssens studied the memorandum carefully, but he was not yet convinced. We had discussed this subject several times and it was always difficult to come to an agreement. The main difficulty for Fr. General was: how to reconcile the proposed "centralization" with the traditional "autonomy" of the CM. But is not any federation a freely chosen unification with many elements of decentralization? And is not autonomy always limited and relative, never absolute?

At the same time Fr. Janssens received a long and strong memorandum against the world federation. The arguments however were so weak, that he did not pay any attention to them. On the contrary, he stimulated me to go on; "*but I still don't see it*", he said.

Meetings in Rome 1951 and Barcelona 1952

The first world congress for the lay apostolate, held in October 1951 in Rome, provided a welcome occasion to show the necessity for our world union. The CM, one of the oldest movements of lay apostolate, could not be invited, because it did not exist on the world level! Only due to the kindness and understanding of the organizers could we invite ten members to form our international delegation. The congress was also a good occasion to organize a meeting of all CM members present. We discovered 15 of them belonging to different national delegations. Before a group of 25 (two diocesan priests, four Jesuits and 19 lay people) I explained the urgency of cooperation on permanent international basis. All of them agreed but only one or two accepted the form of a world federation. The idea was too new for them and they wanted more time for reflection.

Some days later we had another meeting. This time we were 40 delegates from 16 countries. Cardinal Gracias of Bombay had come along with the delegates from India. He addressed the meeting, stressing the need for greater selectivity according to the spirit of *Bis Saeculari*. A proposal was unanimously accepted: to have a meeting of CM members on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona the following year, 1952. There the issue of a world federation would be discussed again.

In Barcelona everyone not only agreed, but asked the secretariate in Rome to prepare some Statutes "as soon as possible" and to go to Pius XII for approval. The vast majority of this gathering were university students, members of the famous CM of Fr. Verges. In 1947 they had organized an international congress. I was there with a Dutch delegation. All of us were impressed by the dynamic spirit of these young men. No wonder that it was self-evident to them to establish – finally – a permanent international contact between the groups of the whole world.

A draft of the Statutes was sent to all national federations and secretariates. We received many expressions of agreement and very few amendments. In the beginning of 1953 the project was presented to the Pope. His first reaction came very soon: he was extremely pleased and promised to send a letter of approval, which

would insist also on some points of general importance. This letter, dated July 2, 1953, begins with this sentence: *"All who know our thoughts about the modern apostolate, know too, how dear the CM is to us and how concerned we are for its continual spiritual growth"*.

With this letter, the WF was officially founded.

It was the result of a natural growth-process, the unification of existing realities: federations and communities.

"The WF has not been created artificially. On the contrary, it was born naturally. It must be considered therefore more as an organism than as an organization. It should attain its goal with a minimum of structures, inspired by a maximum of catholic spirit. We are living in a period of real problems, but often we complicate these problems by an excess of organization. The WF must be simple, the spirit of Our Lady is an extremely simple one". ("Reflections on the WF", General Council Rome 1954).

On April 13, 1954 Pius XII named Archbishop Joseph Gawlina Ecclesiastical Assistant of the WF. Mons. Gawlina was chief chaplain of the Polish army during the last war and lived exiled in Rome. He died suddenly on the night of 21 September 1964 while preparing an intervention for Vatican II on the duties of Bishops. Mons. Gawlina was a great and good friend, always ready to do whatever we wanted. He was a strong personality, firm and courageous, but at the same time a wonderful example of simple adaptability and childlike humility. Our Federation gave him not much pleasure, certainly not honour, but rather much work, troubles and sufferings.

On June 17, 1965 Paul VI named Bishop René Audet from Canada as his successor.

NEW GENERAL PRINCIPLES

And now, what will the next step be?

How to bring people together?

The answer was not difficult. Several countries had asked the secretariate in Rome to organize a "world-wide congress" on the occasion of the Marian year (1954). It seemed a good proposal and it could be combined easily with the first meeting of the new WF.

People together in Rome and Newark

The congress, organized with the help of our Italian friends, was really marvellous. An explosion of vitality and enthusiasm. A magnificent religious and artistic manifestation, only possible in Rome. It was a great surprise for many people. Newspapers spoke of a "historic gathering".

This qualification applied even more to the modest meeting at the Gregorian University where the General Council of the WF met for the first time. This university is the direct continuation of the Roman College, where Leunis began 400 years ago. Could there have been a better place in the world to start the WF than here? It was interesting and comforting to see how these first delegates understood their task immediately. Fully aware of their independence and responsibility, they no longer accepted instructions from the secretariate. In charming disorder and improvisation they planned the meeting and organized the elections for an Executive Council. A start had to be made. This was just a beginning, formulated in the program as "a starting point of world-wide renewal".

Newark 1959 was also a combination of a big congress with the General Council meeting. But Newark marked a considerable step forward. Most of the participants were housed on the large campus of Seton Hall University. There were greater possibilities for mutual contact, communication and sharing than in Rome. The five language groups of the congress, subdivided in some seventy small groups, tried to find ways of improving and adapting the CM.

The climate of the General Council was full of promise. A challenging spirit dominated many interventions. Everybody wanted serious and rapid renewal. Leading delegates pursued their aim in all kinds of informal sessions. In one of these meetings, particularly representative, all affirmed their full confidence in the secretariate of Rome and charged them to start preparations for new common rules without delay. It was the first step toward the General Principles.

What Newark wanted was more than justified. Two world-wars had fundamentally transformed human society and we were still working with rules of 1910. Between 1951 and 1959 I had traveled a lot and I knew the wishes at the base only too well. But this was more than just a wish: it was a mandate given by an official body.

I returned to Rome with this mandate, but also with a problem. Until now only the General of the Society had the power of making new common rules. This norm was out of date after the foundation of the WF, but juridically it was still valid.

I informed Fr. Janssens about the mandate. We did not talk about the problem since he, as an eminent scholar in canon law, knew it perfectly and much better than anybody else. But his reaction was (as I had expected) *"If all agree, go ahead"*. Thus he recognized the independence of the WF, eight years before the approval of the new juridical structures.

Now we could start with the preparation of the General Principles, thanks to the meeting in Newark and thanks to the great spirit of Fr. Janssens.

Especially since the Congress of Rome in 1954, Fr. Janssens had become a fervent promoter of the WF. Always stimulating, never interfering, he helped us in everything. This became very clear in 1962. Article 1 of the Statutes says that the WF has its seat in Rome. In order to assure the desired unity between the WF and the Society of Jesus, the same Statutes state that the person in charge of the Jesuit secretariate should be vice-assistant of the WF. It was therefore quite normal that the seat of the WF should find a welcome home in the Jesuit secretariate. On the other hand, this solution was not practical: the problem of the cloister! So we had to find a place, but it was very difficult. Then, unexpectedly, a large apartment with special entrance, belonging to the Jesuit curia, became free. There were many who wanted it as their office. But Fr. Janssens decided "this is for the WF ... " With the generous help of a good friend, the whole interior was remodeled and re-decorated under the artistic direction of Fr. Noyons. It was an ideal place: close to the Vatican and the city, full contact with the Jesuit curia and its numerous visitors and all kinds of services and facilities at the disposal of the WF.

Fr. Janssens died on October 5, 1964. His successor, Fr. Arrupe, elected in 1965, confirmed this arrangement. Not only the place is ideal, but also the relation between the Jesuits and the WF.

Not pre-fabricated

Historians and papal documents repeatedly tell us that the rules of the CM are the result of previous experiences. The first groups did not begin with rules but with life. They found their inspiration not in a system but in the dynamic spirit of a new religious order. They started in 1540. The first set of rules dates from 1574.

Likewise, the General Principles were not pre-fabricated behind a desk. They are the fruit of living experience. Not only the experience of a long tradition, but also the experiences of new groups all over the world. All of them followed the orientation of Pius XII and so there began within the CM movement a complete revival of the Exercises, the original source of the authentic CM.

In the USA this revival started with the courageous experiment of the CM at the John Carroll University in Cleveland. In 1951, despite strong opposition, students and young professional people were invited to make an 8-day retreat in silence. Until now this was an exclusive privilege for priests and religious. The results were so positive that the retreat had to be given every year. The example found imitation all over the States while the number of participants grew steadily. In 1959 this Cleveland group proposed a 30-day retreat for the first time. Again splendid results!

In Europe the revival of the Exercises started rather through study and reflection. In 1951, Fr. Hugo Rahner, a famous expert, conducted a series of conferences on the Ignatian Exercises and CM, for leaders in Austria. Translated in several languages, these profound considerations had an enormous influence on the renewal of the CM everywhere. One of the results was that also in Europe the practice of longer retreats became widespread.

Traveling around in these years I saw centres of renewal not only in the United States but also in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Mexico, Taiwan, Japan and India. France even had a new national movement Groupes de Vie Chrétienne, in England there was the Cell Movement, in Canada the Centre Leunis and on the continental level in Europe the Equipe Européenne which did very important and original work.

Inspiring and helpful was the European congress of 1963, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the CM. Fr. Giuliani presented his vision on "The Spiritual Exercises: foundation of the spirituality of the CM" and Fr. Karl Rahner fascinated his audience by exploring the consecration to Our Lady in depth.

At the end of 1959 the Secretariate in Rome had sent out its first letter to all federations, secretariates and centres. This was the beginning of a written dialogue with a movement fully dedicated to the cause of renewal. This world-wide consultation went on till 1964. There was a continual exchange of experiences, suggestions and proposals between Rome and the base. Little by little the main features of our General Principles appeared. They were practically ready in 1964 and could have been proposed at the General Council in Bombay in December 1964. But it was evident that we had to wait till the end of Vatican II in order to present the new Principles in its most up-to-date form.

After Bombay '64, it was planned to hold the next General Council in Latin America. But when Vatican II had finished its work and the third world congress for the lay apostolate was going to be convened in October 1967, the Executive Council decided to have our Assembly in Rome, immediately after the congress for the lay apostolate. This would be helpful for delegates who had to attend both meetings.

The time between 1964 and 1967 was very well used. New consultations with several countries produced new suggestions and proposals. The draft of the Principles became ever better: short, simple and clear. In these years we arrived at a consensus as regards composition and division into the Preamble and three parts.

The Preamble is much more than just an introduction. It is the centre, the core of everything, the heart of the matter. Here all what has to be said, is said in a very concise way. Part I is a first concretisation: a concentric circle around the Preamble. Part II is a still more detailed concretisation: another concentric circle around Preamble and Part I. Part III, the juridical norms, is the last concretisation, the last circle. Also the juridical norms have to be lived in the spirit of the Preamble, the spirit of love.

It is true that the draft, completed in 1967, was the result of permanent consultation. Nevertheless the last version was written in Rome. This is why the Executive Council decided to invite one delegate from each nation to a meeting previous to the General Council. There the text was studied line by line and revised in accordance with everyone's wishes. After two days the draft to be submitted to the General Council was prepared.

In the meeting of the General Council, held in Domus Pacis, 140 delegates from 38 countries had to vote. Among them were 62 who had participated in the congress for the lay apostolate. It was – again – a historic event. For the first time in CM history, a world community formulated its own documents. Thirty-three amendments of the draft were proposed and debated but of these 10 were approved for inclusion in the final text. Number 7, dealing with service was changed almost entirely. After voting in each single item of the Principles and Statutes, the Assembly, towards the close of the third day, approved the whole draft unanimously. An unforgettable moment, moving and full of joy. A well-prepared and long desired renewal was accomplished – the re-birth of a movement, "almost a new beginning".

Indeed, Rome '67 marked the beginning of a new evolution: new General Principles, new Statutes, a new name for the movement and a new name for the international magazine, new juridical norms recognizing the independence of the WF which from now on is itself, instead of the Prima Primaria, the bond of unity and the guarantor of its authenticity.

In 1968, March 25, Pope Paul VI confirmed the renovation "ad experimentum" for three years. On May 31st, 1971 the renovation was definitely confirmed. (9)

NEW NAME

A month after the confirmation by the Holy See, one of the leading spirituality magazines in Germany published an article in which the General Principles were highly praised as an example of *aggiornamento*. The author, without knowing it, formulated in a new way the main reason why the name CM was changed into CLC. He writes: "All those who have seen the recently published General Principles will find a difficulty in believing that behind them lies the CM. Not only the external form and nomenclature of this document, but especially the ideas, are diametrically opposed to the known image of the CM. A renovation of great style has taken place here." (10)

If the image of the CM suggests a reality which is so completely different from the best groups, which have renewed themselves in accordance with the original inspiration, then the name CM is no longer appropriate. It creates wrong ideas, misunderstanding and confusion. This name has become not a help for better service but an obstacle. It has to be changed, at least in those places where confusion is created.

This is why in the last 30 years so many groups have changed their name. Even national movements did it. After the foundation of the WF the question was discussed on the international level. In Newark (1959), in Rome (Europe Congress, 1963), and very strongly in Bombay (1964) and during the European meeting of professional people (1965).

In the General Council of Rome (1967) the same question was again put on the agenda. This time several new names were proposed but did not find a majority. Among the proposed names three involved versions of "Christian Life", a name adopted in France ten years ago and used also in other countries. The name CLC was never used before 1967. It came spontaneously from the floor and gained immediately the deciding majority. Afterwards the Assembly decided explicitly that the new name was the name of the WF but it should not be imposed on any federation or group. In the Rome meeting 13 countries voted against the change of name. Today, all of them, except one, call themselves CLC.

Sometimes the objection is made: in this new name there is nothing specific, every Christian community can call itself CLC. It is true that the CLC's do not want to practice all kinds of particular things. They simply live the Gospel but in a very special way: totally and radically in the spirit of the Ignatian Exercises. This is certainly a specific characteristic.

Another more serious objection: some people blame us that we are lessening the love for Our Lady. Such assertion makes me always sad. It is terrible if you hear: "You don't love your mother with your whole heart". Let me repeat what I have said and written on many other occasions. If it were true that the new name would lessen the love for Our Lady or if it were true that we are no longer faithful to the Marian character of our movement, then our entire effort of renovation would be a horrible mistake. A decrease in the love for Mary is desired by no one. What all delegates in Rome wanted was a deeper, more interior love for Mary. During the preparation of the General Principles many have asked for a new inspiration, a more solid orientation. They want a warm and profound personal love for their Mother, a love which never lessens but grows always together with the love for the Son. All our efforts aimed at the growth of the authentic, original spirit of our association which is essentially Marian. The new Principles expressed in the new name are exactly what the vast majority of our members wanted. In these Principles Our Lady is present much more than in any of the previous common rules. She is present everywhere, inseparably united with Christ who is in the center of the CLC. She is present as she is present in the Ignatian Exercises, specific source of the CLC way of life. She is present as she is present in the documents of Vatican II, not isolated or taken out of the context, but integrated in the totality of the salvation history. She is present as she is present in the Gospel, giving precedence to her Son.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1967

The orientations given by Pius XII in 1948, have proven to be most practical and effective. In his Constitution he insisted strongly on the Ignatian charism and on the absolute priority of the Spiritual Exercises. Already 20 years ago I had written on the occasion of the Newark meeting: *"The most important fact we see today... is that the CM is considered to be again what it had been in the beginning: the continuation and the practical application in daily life of the Ignatian Exercises"*.

This evolution made continuous progress. With the implementation of the General Principles after 1967, it reached new dimensions. Thanks to the personally guided retreats and the formation courses, the typical pedagogy of the Exercises has been rediscovered. It has become clear that CLC members and communities have a very special vocation. They are called to a particular way of life which opens and disposes them to whatever God wishes in each concrete situation of their daily existence. This way of life presupposes, on the personal and on the community level, permanent discernment, continual disponibility, total integration. Everybody who has some experience, knows that the consequences of this vocation are extremely demanding. I cannot go into details. In the March 1979 issue of PROGRESSIO, José Gsell tells us more about it. Nobody is more competent to write this article.

Some other important facts could be mentioned. First of all, the growing presence and activity on the international level. This began in 1957 when the WF became a member of the Conference of the International Catholic Organizations. All these organizations belong to the non-governmental organizations (NGO), which can have a consultative voice in one or more of the United Nations institutions in New York, Geneva, Paris and Rome. On April 24, 1975 the WF was granted consultative status with the ICOSOC (Economic and Social Council).

Another joyful reality is the growing presence of youth. At the Rome meeting in 1967 practically all delegates were adults. In Augsburg 1973 the number of young dynamic people was striking. In Manila 1976 they characterized the whole Assembly: almost all national delegations had a youth delegate of ages between 18-25. These young people asked for a special youth assistant in the WF. Last year this assistant was named.

One final observation is to note the interest and the active presence of many Jesuits on all levels: local, national and international. They appreciate the CLC much more than they ever esteemed the CM. This is not surprising. In the CLC they recognize very clearly their own way of life which was hardly possible in the CM. This growing presence of Jesuits does not mean that they direct the CLC movement. The WF is independent of the Society of Jesus. Jesuits assist, help and try to give some inspiration.

But it is also true that today, more than ever before, lay people inspire Jesuits. They have understood (sometimes better than we, Jesuits) the experience of Ignatius, as they have understood so well the attitude of Our Lady's fiat. They have only one aspiration: to grow in faith and in love. They want to grow in seeing the Reality, the divine Presence, working, loving, revealing Himself in all things, inviting us continuously to live and to live in abundance. They have accepted his invitation to receive at every moment the fire of Jesus and to communicate it to others.

NOTES

- (1) *Spiritualität Heute und Morgen*, Geist und Leben, November 1966
- (2) Emile Villaret, S.J., Les Congrégations Mariales I • Des Origines à la Suppression de la Compagnie de Jésus 1540–1773. Beauchesne Paris 1947, 607 pages

A second volume of the same size, dealing with the second period (1773–1948) was in preparation, but the author could not finish it before he died in 1952. After his death, a manuscript was found of an abridged history of the two periods together. It was published in 1953 by the Centre Leunis in Montréal: Petite Abrégé de l'Histoire, 309 pages. The Queen's Work translated it in English: Abridged History of the Sodalties of Our Lady, St. Louis, Mo. 1957, 181 pages
- (3) J. Wicki, S.J. with the collaboration of R. Dendal, S.J., Le Pere Jean Leunis 1532–1584, Fondateur des Congregations Mariales, Rome 1951, Inst. Hist. S.J.
- (4) Wicki, p.127
- (5) Wicki, p.131
- (6) Wicki, p.134
- (7) Elder Mullan, S.J., La Congregazione Mariana studiata nei Documenti, Roma 1911, p. 25*
- (8) Mullan, p.146* and p.277*
- (9) Annex of this Supplement, p.26
- (10) Georg Mühlenbrock, S.J., *Auf der Suche nacheiner Welt Spiritualität*, Geist und Leben, June 1968

Letters of Confirmation

Secretariate of State
N. 106352

The Vatican, 25 March 1968

Your Excellency:

After the meeting of the General Council of the World Federation of C.M. held in Rome on October 19–21, 1967, the secretariate of your Federation sent to the Secretariate of State of His Holiness a request for approbation by the Holy Father of the new General Principles, which are destined to replace the Common Rules of 1910, and the new Statutes of the World Federation.

In the desire to better serve the Church – as it has been explained to us – and in order to renew their association according to the spirit and norms of Vatican Council II, the members of the World Federation of C.M. realized the need to propose to the approbation of the Holy See several modifications, of which some are fundamental, so that their association, while serving faithfully the authentic riches of its tradition, would be able to consecrate itself with greater simplicity and efficacy to the service of God and of men in the world of today. This request was the result of deliberations pursued over a period of several years.

Some of these proposals touch upon certain norms of the Apostolic Constitution *Bis Saeculari* promulgated by Pope Pius XII on September 27, 1948 (AAS, 40, 1948 Pg. 393ss). This constitution did not foresee the foundation of the World Federation, which took place in 1953, nor the consequent juridical effects which resulted from it. From that time on the traditional structures confirmed by the Constitution *Bis Saeculari* have little by little lost their original significance.

Again in the same desire for better service, the participants at the meeting of the General Council chose to adopt the name of “*World Federation of Christian Life Communities*”, being convinced that this title better explained the reality and the internal dynamism of their association without removing any of its specific elements.

These General Principles and Statutes have been the subject of diligent examination on the part of the Holy See. And I am happy now to be able to communicate to you the confirmation and the approbation for three years *ad experimentum* by His Holiness Pope Paul VI of these documents conforming to the texts annexed to the present letter. All the previous rules and prescriptions which are contrary to these General Principles and new Statutes are by this act abrogated.

I rejoice also to be able to communicate this approbation to you on the Feast of the Annunciation, traditional feast of the Sodalities throughout the world and the mystery which from the beginning has summed up their spirit and even now inspires the new General Principles. May the Blessed Virgin inspire the members of your Federation to

an always more generous willingness to give themselves, eve ready to listen and to accept the word of God in the diverse circumstances of life.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my entire and devoted good wishes in Our Lord.

A. G. Cardinal Cicognani

His Excellency, Msgr. René Audet
Ecclesiastical Assistant
World Federation of Christian Life Communities
Rome

Secretary of State
NO. 182839/S1

Vatican, May 31, 1971

Your Excellency,

After the meeting of the General Council of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities, held at Santo Domingo August 11–15, 1970, the Secretariat of the Federation, in accordance with Article 18 of the Statutes, requested the approval of the Secretariat of State for some amendments to the General Principles and to the Statutes which were added on that occasion.

These amendments were studied carefully by this Office, which also submitted them to the Holy Father for his consideration.

On this subject, I hasten to inform you that the changes proposed in the following articles have been approved:

(...)

Finally, I am happy to inform Your Excellency that the Holy Father has confirmed and given definitive approval for the General Principles and the Statutes of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities (Marian Congregations). In doing so, he conveys his fatherly desire that norms there contained may be for the members of the Federation an important means in making their commitment and their witness of the Christian life effective in the world.

I gladly use this occasion to assure you of my high regard.

J. Cardinal Villot

To His Excellency Bishop René Audet
Ecclesiastical Assistant of the
World Federation of Christian Life Communities
Borgo Santo Spirito, 8 ROMA

Address of Paul VI to the Executive Council ✧ January 15, 1972

Dear Sons and Daughters,

The World Federation of Christian Life Communities which you represent is well-known to the Holy See, as you are already aware. Just recently we had the opportunity to examine and approve the revised General Principles and Statutes of your group. So it is with joy that we are receiving for a short time this morning the members of the Executive Council, with their president, Mr. Roland Calcat.

Yes, we encourage you with all our heart to keep on with what is, in our eyes, a top-priority goal in the Church of today: the forming of solid Christian personalities, who integrate the fullness of their human life and their varied responsibilities with a continually deepening spiritual life.

The means you use to do this seem to us simple, sure and effective, like the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, from which you draw your inspiration; meditation on the Word of God, on the doctrine and faith set forth by the Church; prayer, personal and communitarian; the search for God's will in the events which are His signs to us, done with the help of spiritual direction and of that brotherly exchange that you make use of in your 'communities of Christian life'; frequent participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; an organic bond with your assistants; and, in line with the origin of your movement, your eyes turned always toward Mary, our example of disponibility in her cooperation with the work of the Saviour.

Drinking from such springs and faithful to such demands, you are ready to grow in the life of faith and to become authentic witnesses of the Gospel in today's world by a concrete, well-adapted and effective commitment, in line with what the recent Council called for. As the program of your current meeting makes clear, you want to contribute, on your part, to the development of the whole man and of all men. And you show a concern for the young which we are glad to see. May their generosity find in the call of Christ the living water which quenches their thirst and the fire of love which sets aflame their action.

In this immense field of action which is the Church, you feel a sense of solidarity with those who devote themselves to the apostolate according to other methods in their social milieu, so as to penetrate its mentality and structures with the Gospel yeast of justice and peace. We urge you to put into practice that preoccupation which we notice with joy in your General Principles: 'sense of the Church'. Dear sons and daughters, keep this deep affection and fidelity to the Church, this openness to her pastoral projects, this insertion into the ecclesial communities of which you are part. Bring to this what is perhaps most characteristic of you: a continual resort to the wellsprings of Christ and His paschal mystery, following in the path of Mary. In expressing these desires, we give you, and those whom you represent here before us this morning, with all our heart, our fatherly apostolic blessing.

Letter of Cardinal Villot for Manila '76

Secretariat of State
No. 305090

From the Vatican, August 6, 1976

Mr. Roland Calcat
President
World Federation of Christian Life Communities

Mr. President,

The Holy Father has received with joy the news that the Christian Life Communities will soon be celebrating their General Assembly preceded by a formation course. He has given me the agreeable mission of transmitting his encouragement to the leaders, organizers and participants of these important days.

The framework and the program you have chosen to give this gathering are, in themselves, very significant.

You have, in fact, chosen to gather in one of those countries whose people are "*engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life*", to use the very words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 30). You are thus deliberately putting yourselves in living contact with the poverty and the desire for integral development that marks today the life of millions of persons in the entire world. In so doing you affirm that the Christian life, willed, sought and lived by your communities, does not shut their eyes to the serious problems that torture an immense part of humanity. Quite the contrary, it reveals that only a true brotherhood, fashioned by love, is able to provide a solution to the "*flagrant inequalities in development*" (see Letter, *Octagesima Adveniens*, n.2), the "*undeserved hardship*" (see Encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Populorum Progressio*, n. 9), the troubles and disorders that are today an open wound in the side of humanity.

On the other hand, you have prefaced your sessions with long and intense days. They are days marked at one and the same time by a burning search for the Absolute, God, in the school of St. Ignatius of Loyola, by reflection and serious study of key questions, by modestly learning the best means to announce the Gospel to the men of our time, by the lively and concrete experience of that community life which enters into the very definition of your association and which is its dynamo and its inspiration.

In interpreting the deep concern and the most enthusiastic good wishes of the Holy Father, I would like to suggest to you some major orientations.

The first has to do with the *need for a solid formation*. The active and effective presence of lay persons, as you know, has never ceased to be felt in the Church from its beginning. Proof of this is the list of those who collaborated with the Apostle Paul (see Acts 18:18; Rom. 16:3–16; 2 Tim 4:19 ff.) Nevertheless this presence has in these last years, and especially since Vatican Council II (see Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, chap.

4; Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem; Ad Gentes*, nn.17 and 21), acquired a scope, significance and features more and more remarkable. There, without doubt, is one of the marks of the Church in our time. Now experience shows that the more that the laity take on responsibilities within the ecclesial community or as Christians in the world, the more they need to be formed for the tasks they will be called on to carry out (see *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nn. 28-32). At bottom there is question, obviously, of as deep as possible a human formation. But this needs to be accompanied and enlightened by a Christian formation that, in order to be integral, will take place on different levels, doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic.

The second guideline concerns *intimacy with God*. There is no apostle except one who knows Jesus Christ, and this not by notions that are more or less intellectual, but by relationships that are personal and permanent. For those to whom you speak about the Lord will not believe you unless you speak as a witness, as a friend, as a confidant (see Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nn. 41 and 76; Discourse of Paul VI to members of the Council of the Laity, October 2, 1975). The spiritual life lived at Baguio during these days should not cease with the close of the Assembly but be prolonged in your daily life.

The last guideline completes in some ways the preceding ones: whatever happens, *remain men and women of the Church*. That means, keep the spirit of the Church, suffer or rejoice with the grief and joys of the Church, listen to the Church, but above all, love the Church (see, among others, the discourse of Paul VI to the general audience of July 21, 1976). Love her with a love that is spontaneous, simple, joyous, open as is the love for one's mother. To carry out now and always her mission, to be able to render to the world her service of salvation, to be truly a place for the communion of men among themselves and for that of humanity with God, the Church needs to be loved. Now this love is, today, often withered by criticism, contestation, reservations. To love the Church means above all not to rend her unity and therefore carefully to maintain union with her pastors, the symbols and the architects of unity, and in particular with the universal Pastor who is the successor of Peter.

At the end of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Holy Father chose to evoke Mary, the star of evangelization (n. 82). It is she who contemplated in the depths of her heart the mystery of her Son (see Luke 2:19 and 51), she who received the first outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost (Acts 1:14), she who assisted in a motherly way the missionary work of the Twelve at the Church's dawn. She is by a special title linked to your Communities, which formerly bore her name. Do not let anything of her presence and her inspiration be lost in your activity of evangelization.

Such are the encouragements and the hopes that I am happy to address to you, the President of the World Federation, on the part of the Holy Father. They are sent to you, to your immediate collaborators, to your ecclesiastical assistants, to all the participants of the Assembly of Baguio, but also to each of the Christian Life Communities scattered throughout the world. To all of you His Holiness sends, as a pledge of an ever more fruitful apostolate, his special Apostolic Benediction.

Be assured, Mr. President, of my most sincere regards in Our lord.

J. Cardinal Villot

Address of Paul VI to the Executive Council ✧ 29 December, 1976

Dear Sons and Daughters,

We are happy to meet the new Executive Council of your Federation, elected at the General Assembly of Baguio, in the Philippines, last summer. On that occasion we transmitted to you our encouragement and some essential guidelines. Keep on aiming at a solid doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation. This will make it possible for you to be authentic witnesses of the Lord in a world that does not know him: *The light shines in the darkness*, Christmas night repeats to us. In the same way, maintain constantly that intimate relationship with the Lord that he expects from his friends like Mary who *“kept and meditated all these things in her heart”*. Lastly, love the Church, make her loved, serve her as a mother: think and feel with the Church, your Statutes say. Tell all the members of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities again of the hope that the Church places in their apostolate. Your zeal will be all the stronger and your radiant influence more certain, the more that they have as a basis that brotherly sharing that your groups encourage. And may the Virgin Mary, whom we contemplate in a special way at this Christmas season, help you to give a welcome to her Son and to present him to the world! With our Apostolic Benediction.