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Updates

15/12/2010: Deceased Brother: Carlos Villalobos Padilla (México Central)

15/12/2010: Brother Teófilo Minga appointed member of the Executive Committee of SEDOS

14/12/2010: Deceased Brother: Benjamín Simón Gómez López (México Occidental)

14/12/2010: New marist link: Promoción 1975 del Colegio San José (Peru)

14/12/2010: CONANDA elections reaffirm the credibility of the work of Marist Brasil

13/12/2010: Deceased Brother: Felipe Fuente Castilla (Compostela); Lamberto Gioia (Mediterránea)

13/12/2010: First profession in Matola, Mozambique

10/12/2010: Mary, Bride of the Word

09/12/2010: Photo gallery: Remodeling work at the Hermitage

09/12/2010: The consecrated life which I believe is the future for Europe

07/12/2010: ChMMF of the Province of Rio Grande do Sul

06/12/2010: Former Brothers - Melbourne Marist Province

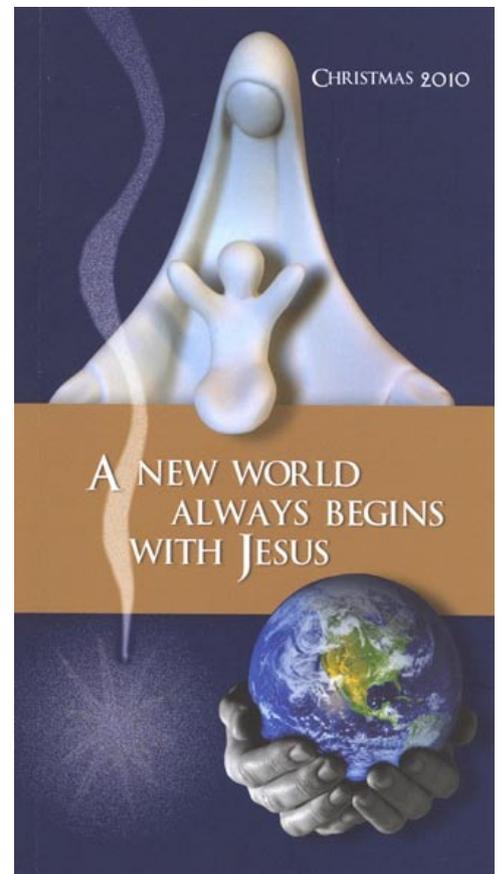
06/12/2010: Nigeria launches a year-long programme for childcare and education

For whom do the bells toll?

Christmas Message 2010 of Br. Superior General

In these days as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, it seems to me important to ask ourselves about the meaning of this feast. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, a 4th century Father of the Eastern Church, helps us when he boldly affirms that "the Word of God became man that we might become God". Saint Athanasius transmits to us a Christian vision of God, but also a specific way of seeing the human person. God became man so that man might become God. What a sublime dignity for the human person, called to such an exalted vocation! We recognize ourselves as pilgrims on the way to God, together with all the men and women of the planet. We are brothers and sisters, sharing not only our common humanity, but also our future.

When we meditate on the marvellous dignity of the human person, however, we are immediately reminded of the reality of our societies. It is difficult to talk about dignity when 1,400 million people have to live on less than one dollar per day. Or when people's rights are being continually violated. Or when violence drags down innocent people in its spiral of hate... As believers in Jesus Christ, we feel ourselves not only challenged, but compromised in the face of another's suffering. As John Donne, the 16th century English poet, noted: "No man is an island; ...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee".



The message of Christmas is that there is a place for hope, despite all the signs to the contrary. The data available to us on the social situation overwhelms us, but a deeper look opens us to hope. On all sides, signs of universal brotherhood can be seen sprouting: individual persons, often enough in an anonymous way, who are committed to making it possible for others not only to recognize but also to enjoy their dignity as sons and daughters

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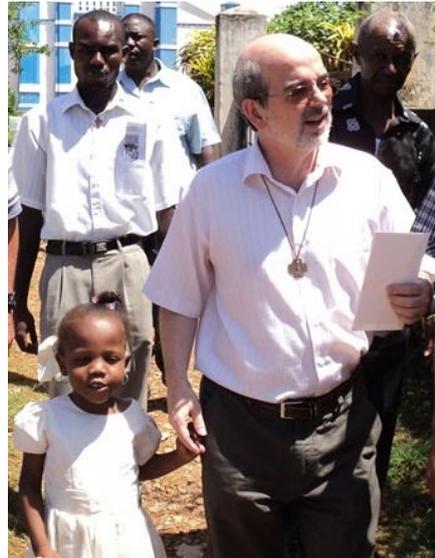
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of God.

Even in the midst of the harshest and most terrible situations, there is room for hope. Etty Hillesum, a young Dutch Jewish woman, a year before being deported to an extermination camp and execution, wrote in her diary: "Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight, for the first time, I lay in the dark, with burning eyes, as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise you one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow... I shall try to help you, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that you cannot help us, but we must help you to help ourselves".

Etty's testimony reminds us of the thousands of people who, on the five continents, have decided to "help God", conscious that the bells are tolling for them. I know that there are many 'Marists of Champagnat' who are doing this day after day, full of hope and joy. I was able to see for myself a few months ago, during my



visit to Haiti, where they are struggling against all kinds of adversity to secure a better future for the children and young people of this marvellous country. I see it too in what is being done in Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city on the border with the United States, considered one of the most violent cities in the world. Our brothers and sisters there are not only carrying out magnificent educational work, but also setting up bridges of reconciliation between rival gangs. These are only two examples among the many

that could be mentioned.

Thank you, Marists of Champagnat, for your indomitable commitment to the dignity of the human person.

More than a year ago, the members of the 21st General Chapter invited us to go in haste, with Mary, to a new land. And, in the form of a prayer, they said to her: "Your openness, faith and spontaneity touch our hearts to be open in our turn to the Spirit, the gift of your Son Jesus". Will we continue to let ourselves be challenged by Mary of the visitation during the coming year? Will we be capable of going fearlessly towards new lands?

With the response of our lives, let us go to "help God" to take flesh and to build the Kingdom. And let us strive to ensure that the Nativity is not limited to a single day, and that it is a truly happy one.

Happy Christmas.

Br. Emili Turú, Superior General



The communion of Bride and Bridegroom

Mary, Bride of the Word

The second icon described by von Balthasar is an icon of communion. The first is centred on Mary, handmaid of the Lord. Another Biblical image used by von Balthasar is that of the « bride ». By means of this image he wants to explain the communion that exists between Christ, Mary and the Church. The Church is a mystery of communion and Mary is its prototype. The perfect union between bride and bridegroom

This article continues the series starting on 5 May 2010.

is the expression of the mystery of the communion between God and the human being which is realized in the Church. This is an image which cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit, since Mary is at once, though in different senses, mother and bride of Christ, and the Church, in its turn, is

also mother and bride of Christ.

Mary's maternal and conjugal role

From a Biblical point of view, the fundamental meaning of the mystery of Mary is found in her maternal function: she is mother of Jesus and mother of the

disciples. But in her relationship with Christ there is an additional aspect, that of her « conjugal » role: she, « the Woman », the « Daughter of Sion » is the bride of Christ. How can Mary be at once mother and Bride of Jesus? Obviously, that is possible only on two different planes. As an individual she is the mother of Jesus. But by virtue of the place she occupies with regard to the mission of Jesus and to her collaboration in the work of salvation, Mary is also Bride.

The « great mystery » of the Letter to the Ephesians expresses itself at the same time: the Bride united to her Bridegroom, united because she lives from his life; united because she participates in his triple mission (*tria munera Christi*); united in such a way as to respond by a « free gift » of herself to the ineffable gift of the love of the Bridegroom, the Redeemer of the world¹.

The Church's maternal and conjugal role

What is said of Mary can be applied by analogy to the Church, which is also Mother and Bride. The maternal aspect of the Church maintains a perfect parallelism with what a mother does for her child: she conceives it, bears it, educates it, helps it grow, become an individual and mature in the family circle. All this applies to the Church and to Mary.

Numerous texts from tradition speak of the maternal role of the Church. Why? Because it is to her that we owe being born to supernatural life. It is our mother, the Church, who leads us to discover Christ. It is our mother, the Church, who has given birth to us as Christians. It is our mother, the Church, who instructs us in the faith. Thanks to the Church, our mother, we become children of God.

From the perspective of holiness and charisms, the Church also helps in understanding the significance of the « Marial principle » which places the Church as Bride in relation to Christ. In the Church, « holiness is judged in function of the 'great mystery' in which the



Bride responds by the gift of love to the love of the Bridegroom². »

The Marial principle operates in the Church through the communion of saints. That is, the communion of saints is the manifestation of the love of the Bridegroom which is made life. Von Balthasar explains this by the analogy of the conjugal union between man and wife, a union which engenders a child. The child is the « objective » love of the parents, and the measure of love reciprocated the « subjective » fruit. Insofar as we are « bride », we are called to live a life in the Spirit by participating in the « subjective » holiness of the reciprocal love in the intimate life of God.

The Holy Spirit is present in the Church, as much in the institution as in the gifts and charisms. The Marial principle of the Church is its « subjective » holiness, that of existential freedom in the Spirit, in following the inspiration of the charisms « from on high ». The laws and the organisation of the Church, the « objective » fruit of the conjugal union, are destined for the holiness of the Church and should serve for our formation, so that our personal projects are

open to the dimension of Trinitarian love. All this is born of love and invites to love. The Spirit is not only « law », but is also freedom. The pure, free « yes » of Mary, a living response, resonates through the whole mystical body as the living acceptance of the Spirit, response to Christ and immersion in the Father. Having been fashioned in Christ through the elements of the « objective holiness », what God wishes is our sanctification in terms of existential holiness.

« The great mystics and charismatics, in a special way the founders of new religious orders or families, or even persons who have had deep intuitions, show us the Marial charismatic profile of the Church³. » Their example gives witness of the freedom of ecclesial forms of life. This freedom is the issue of the inspirations and missions received because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Holiness lived daily in the Church finds its model in Mary.

« Vatican II, in confirming the teaching of the whole of tradition, reminds us that, in the hierarchy of holiness, it is precisely « the woman », Mary of Nazareth, who

1. John-Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* n. 27

2. John-Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* n. 27

3. *Teológica*, II, 314-316.

is « figure » of the Church. She « goes before » us all on the way to holiness; in her person « the Church has already attained the perfection which makes her without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5: 27)⁴. »

The charisms, inspirations and intuitions associated with the Marial principle are spread by the Spirit also through the non ministerial domain of the Church, thanks to the gift of holiness.

« The hierarchy, to which belongs in a special way the discernment of spirits, should always be aware that the new initiatives willed and guided by the Spirit in the Church rarely begins with itself; they flourish rather in the ranks of the non ministerial believers... The charism of the great popes and bishops extends to the revitalisation of the Church or of dioceses in their ensemble... founding special « families » is not in most cases their concern; but



famous examples show once more to what point communities flourishing in the Spirit can be placed by them (popes and bishops) at the service of the great task of the whole Church, of salvation and of mission⁵. »

The Marial principle and the Petrine principle are both involved in our education in love. The institution is a pedagogical instrument which forms in us an « ecclesial soul » transforming itself by participation in the wisdom of Mary, seat of Wisdom:

« Perfect holiness is, at the same time, wisdom; it is Mary, and not Peter, who is invoked as « throne of wisdom »⁶.

AMEstaun



4. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* n. 27
 5. *Teológica*, II, 316.
 6. *Teodramática*, II, 330.

National Council of the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent

Brazil



Elections to the National Council of the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent (CONANDA) for the 2011-2012 period were

held on 26 November in the auditorium of the Bureau of Rights of the Person of the Presidency of the Republic. Among the 38 associated non-governmental institutions, 32 offered candidates. The Brazilian Union of Education and Teaching (UBEE) was elected for the second time running to CONANDA, with 26 of the 38 votes. This good result shows the seriousness and commitment of the Marists' work for the Defense of the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent.

"The CONANDA elections represent a legitimate advance in the social control of policies for the Child and Adolescent. The result obtained recognises the social engagement of the UBEE and of all the organisa-

tions involved in the defense of the rights of Children and Adolescents, which supposes an intense effort to move forward with the implantation of effective public policies with regard to children and youth."

Jimena Grignani – Adviser of the Sector of « Social Assistance » (social work) of the Marist Province Brasil Centro-Sul

"It was a significant moment for civil society and the Marist Institution. With such a result we will have a stronger National Forum; the re-election re-affirms our commitment in the struggle for the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent and puts in operation the « Ten Year Plan"

Fábio Feitosa – Social Annalist of the « Marist Institute of Social Assistance » (IMAS) and President CONANDA (Brasil Centro-Norte)

