

**Saint Joseph Calasanz,
a mystic in action**

Antonio Lezaun

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Acronyms

- CC:** *Constitutions of Calasanz*, written by the Founder for the Congregation of the Pious Schools between 1620 and 1621, and approved in 1622.
- EP:** *Epistolario di San Giuseppe Calasanzio* (10 volumes), Ed. Calasanctianae, Rome 1949-1956 and 1988.
- Reg. Cal.:** *Regestum Calasanctianum* – Documents of the Calasanctian Archive of Rome

Foreword

In the vocation of a Piarist the active dimension, special dedication to education, is clear, as corroborated by its four hundred years of history. The education of children and youth, in the first place: an integral education sought since its very beginning as an undeniable objective; a popular education, open to everyone, with a special reference to the most poor; an education always connected, though in different ways, with Christian faith and morality. The activity of the Pious Schools Order has also been often extended to adults, in universities, public churches and other environments; without forgetting the piarists who have worked or are working in research or have published scientific, spiritual or educational works. It is, undoubtedly, a Religious Order of active life throughout all its stages, with this feature being nowadays perhaps even clearer.

However, to have an integral and integrated vision of the piarist vocation or charisma, we need to broaden our perspective. In the foundational intention of Saint Joseph Calasanz other aspects have also been emphasized, that piarists of all times must not forget. To reach such integral vision of the vocation to which God has called us, it is utmost useful to carefully revisit Calasanz' life and thought, as well as the history of the Order and its Constitutions, both ancient and modern.

To this work we wish to contribute. By studying in depth the spiritual life of our Founder we would like to further clarify one of the constituent elements of the piarist vocation, just as Calasanz lived it and intended it for his followers. Thus, who feels called to live the Calasanctian charisma, either as religious or lay man or woman, will be able to know with greater clarity the elements that should integrate their vocation. We hope to contribute to some extent to the efforts that the Order is making to become more aware of our identity in the Church and to what God expects from us in these times. Great progress is being made regarding the awareness of our

evangelizing mission and the ways of implementing it, with a closer proximity to the poor, an expansion to new fields or regions, the sharing of our charism with the lay people, etc. We hope to make progress also in the knowledge and experience of the different aspects of spirituality, following the footsteps of our holy Founder.

There is quite abundant material written on the spirituality of Saint Joseph Calasanz. However, maybe some aspects could be further clarified. I refer to the mystical aspect of our Founder. Undoubtedly, he lived a strong spiritual life, including some mystical experiences. Unfortunately, he didn't write his spiritual biography, as other famous saints did, nor did he develop a spiritual treatise. Moved by the love of God and of the others, he lived entirely dedicated to the works of charity, especially the education of "so many children who wish to learn and there is nobody to teach them". So it will be necessary to track his extensive collection of letters and other documents, to understand and better value his personality and to ensure a better profile of his foundational intention. This is what we intend to do, trying to reach the depths of his heart, the "center of the soul", the "apex mentis" (the summit of the mind), the "scintilla animi" (the spark of the spirit)¹ where God became so present to him that all his life was changed and he became able to develop a long and fruitful life, full of peace, joy and hope, despite the difficulties he had to face.

I hope this will help to strengthen our spiritual life and to improve our response to the challenges of the new times, by living our Calasanzian charism eagerly, with healthy discernment and creative fidelity.

The book consists of two clearly differentiated parts. The first intends to reflect a set of essential data on the religious phenomenon and, more specifically, on the so called "mystical phenomenon". It will be like an extensive introduction to prepare us to interpret and to better assess the spiritual life of our holy founder Saint Joseph Calasanz. The second part will focus directly on the study of the spirituality of Calasanz, in which we can find, according to our vision, clear features of mystical experiences in the midst of an intense activity of charity and apostolate.

1 These and other similar terms are used by mystics to mean the last level where they meet with God (See Martín Velasco: *Mística y humanismo*, p. 192) –**The full data on the books that are quoted are available in the last page.**

Part I: spirituality and mysticism in our days

Since the late nineteenth century when F. Nietzsche proclaimed that “God is Dead”, many people have forecast the end of religion, and have advocated its removal from all the social instances, thereby intending to build a totally secularized society. It is true that our society, especially the Western European society, lives in a very advanced secularization state. However, it is also true that an unexpected phenomenon has taken place in this same society under a great variety of denominations such as “return to the sacred,” “return to magic,” “esoteric wisdoms,” “search of interiority,” etc., a phenomenon that often materializes in new forms of religiosity. However, even if it stands as a very complex, mixed and highly ambiguous phenomenon, it cannot be neglected, particularly by those who believe that religion provides an outstanding contribution to humanization of the human being.

We are likely assisting to a transformation of religion, compared with the way in which humanity has lived it for centuries. Some even speak of “mutation of the sacred.” Indeed, we often find the search of new spiritual experiences that are in contrast with traditional practices and institutions, or marginal in their regard; and a renewed interest for the writings and practices of the mystics. Juan Martín Velasco concludes that: “Anyway, it is clear that in this transformation (of religion) there is a component that cannot be ignored and that has to do with the mystical phenomenon, in terms and to the extent that are to be defined”².

2 J. Martín Velasco: *El fenómeno místico* (The Mystical phenomenon), p. 10.

We know that mystical phenomena are present throughout all religions and ages. And even present outside religious environments. The case, among others, of Plotinus, the Neoplatonic philosopher of the early third century, is famous in this regard. In all these cases we find the “transcendence dimension” that characterizes the human being, which can be designed as the will of going “beyond” knowledge, desire, freedom, love, etc.

In a brief summary we will now try to gather some data on the mystical experiences witnessed throughout history, paying particular attention to Christian environment. This will help us to position Saint Joseph Calasanz within Christian spirituality and to value more accurately his life and heritage.

1. Mysticism throughout history

Rafael Farina starts the *Diccionario de mística* with these words: “The word ‘mysticism’ has a quite long history ... Its current meaning dates back to just some centuries ... We think that due to the current inflation of the word mystic, there is the danger of labelling it hastily and approving any experience of a certain personal depth”³. For this reason, it may be useful to outline the various stages of the use of this word, till its current meaning, particularly within the Christian world.

In the pre-Christian Greek environment, some words as the adjective *mystikós* or the noun *mysterion*, are related in general with initiation rites of the so called “mystery religions”. The common meaning underlying these and other similar words implies always the existence of a secret reality, that is hidden to ordinary knowledge and is only accessible through an adequate initiation.

The Bible doesn’t contain the word “mystic,” but it can be said without any doubt that the reality referred to with this word is present. In the Old Testament there is a clear manifestation, on the one hand, of the reality of Yahweh as infinitely transcendent, that cannot be contemplated by a human being⁴ and, on the other hand,

3 *Diccionario de mística* (Dictionary of Mysticism), p. 5.

4 *Exodus* 33:20.

there are experiences of a special encounter of man with Yahweh in an extraordinary closeness: Abraham speaks with him⁵; Moses talks face-to-face with Yahweh⁶; Elijah is in the presence of the living God, who is about to pass by⁷; Jeremiah has personally experienced the irresistible strength of God's seduction⁸. In the New Testament, Jesus is in a steady and deep intimacy with the Father; he is with him when he is baptized in the Jordan, in the Tabor, in the Garden of Olives, on the cross; he sees his Father doing because he shows him all he does⁹; he clearly states "I and the Father are one"¹⁰. He is also "the image of the invisible God"¹¹; "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"¹². He also says: "No one comes to the Father except through me"¹³. He, therefore, lives in full compenetration with the Father and is the only way to reach the Transcendent being. For all this, Christ, his humanity, the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection are and will always be the foundation of every Christian mysticism. Saint John the evangelist will even tell us: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"¹⁴.

In early Christianity, Saint Paul is the person whose mystical life is better known to us. The experience lived in his way to Damascus is described with these words: "Christ Jesus took hold of me"¹⁵, and he feels graced by God "who revealed his Son in me"¹⁶, and knows that "he made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ"¹⁷. The

5 Gen 18:1.

6 Ex 33: 11.

7 1 Kings 19: 9-15.

8 Jer 20: 7.

9 John 5: 19-20.

10 John 10: 30.

11 Col 1: 15.

12 Col 2: 9.

13 John 14: 6.

14 John 17: 3.

15 Phil 3: 12.

16 Gal 1: 16.

17 2 Co 4: 6.

way to Damascus is, therefore, the starting point of the mystical experience of Paul, which he will intensely cultivate, as it is easy to imagine, during his relatively long residence in Arabia, and that will always be the driver of his tireless missionary activity until his martyrdom. Mystical are also the multiple experiences reflected in his letters: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”¹⁸; “For to me, to live is Christ”¹⁹; “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”²⁰; “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body”²¹; he lives in a unrestricted reality: “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ... this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”²². As a paradigm of his mystical experiences, maybe we could quote the self-description made by Paul: “a man ...caught up to the third heaven ... heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell”²³.

In the Johannine corpus we also find experiential contacts (seen, heard, touched) with the Word of life²⁴, of the inhabitation of God in the believer²⁵, of faith as a way of seeing, etc.

For the Fathers of the Church, in line with Saint Paul, the term “mystery” points to the divine will of salvation, hidden for centuries and now manifested, and “mysteries” refer to the different sacraments, where the saving love of God is hidden and operates. “Mystical”, then, means both the hidden sense of the sacraments and, above all, Jesus as visible manifestation of the mystery of the saving work of God. Hence the use of the term “mystical” to qualify the allegorical and figurative interpretations of the Holy Scriptures referred to Christ. With Marcellus of Ancyra (+ ca. 374) appears the expression “mystical theology”, meaning an “ineffa-

18 Gal 2: 19-20.

19 Phil 1: 21.

20 Col 3: 3.

21 2 Co 4: 10.

22 Eph 3: 18-19.

23 2 Co 12: 1-7.

24 1 John 1: 1-3.

25 John 14: 23.

ble and mystical” knowledge of God, different from a common knowledge. The term was assimilated by Dionysius the Areopagite (425-525), and was introduced through him in the history of the Church up to our days. Though it seems that Origen was the first to introduce this word with the meaning of a direct and quasi experiential knowledge of God. In his book “The Mystical Theology” Dionysius became the normative theologian of mysticism. His central idea is: God remains an inaccessible mystery both for knowledge and experience; it is only possible, as Moses in the top of Mount Sinai, to enter in the dark cloud of mystery²⁶. Then, the so called “negative method” is used: knowing not what God is but what God is not.

This doctrine of the experience of God that is hidden in the darkness of mystery is then present throughout the Middle Ages. This does not mean that the search of God through ecstasy is left aside. We may quote some of the great mystic Masters as saint Anselm, who announces the truth that is planted in man by God himself; saint Bernard, who captures divinity in the impetus of love; Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor, who stress the “*fruitio Dei*” (God’s fruition); saint Dominic and saint Francis of Assisi, who emphasize that it is not sufficient to tend to the contemplation of Christ, but it is necessary to seek his imitation.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, focus is not so much on the mystery to be known, on the object of the experiential knowledge, but on the subject. The psychological consideration prevails, or the subjective conditions of such experience and, more specifically, the subjective conditions of mystical contemplation and of the para-psychological phenomena that may accompany it. In the seventeenth century, the term “mystic” starts to be used as a noun. In the sixteenth century, according to M. R. del Genio, “two great Spanish mystics, saint Teresa of Jesus and saint John of the Cross, constitute the peak of mystical experience, whom all the subsequent theologians will refer to. They fully live in the atmosphere of the Council of Trent that links mysticism and missionary activity, inside and outside the convents. Mysticism becomes a mysticism

26 See Borriello: *Diccionario de Mística*, p. 687-688.

of the action, as it will be experienced in the Carmelite reform”²⁷. In this same line we should consider saint Ignatius of Loyola, who will be called “contemplative in action”.

In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment entails a secularized vision of man and human nature, emphasizing its liberty and autonomy, and leading to a reduction of the interest for mysticism. In parallel, esoteric approaches were strengthening, though mystical figures continued to appear. Close to the nineteenth century, new ways of searching transcendence reemerge, with a new interest in the spiritual element present in human being. The anthroposophy (1861) marks a new way of knowledge leading to the spiritual element present in the universe. All this was leading to non religious forms of mysticism. On the other hand, Catholic mysticism shows a new impetus with figures as Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Elisabeth of the Trinity or saint Gemma Galgani.

In the early twentieth century, Teilhard de Chardin outlines a wonderful vision of the universe, moving towards a personalized conscience centre, the “omega point”, identified with Christ. The power for unifying and personalising the world resides in love rather than in knowledge. In late nineteenth century or early twentieth century, in the United States the so called Pentecostalism emerges, a movement launched as a Christian revival, born within Protestantism and extending principally in Latin America. It is based on the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” and is characterized by the search of a personal, direct and immediate experience of the Holy Spirit with his gifts. In this century also the *New Age* movement emerges, emphasizing the need of an inward experience – divine, transcendent and immortality-oriented -- of the entire humanity. In the sixties and seventies, within the Catholic world there was also the emergence of the *Charismatic Renovation*, that encourages intense experiences of prayer and attention to the Holy Spirit and his gifts. The interest for mysticism develops outside the Christian area as well, with very different formats, which need to be carefully analyzed and assessed.

27 Del Genio: *Diccionario de Mística*, p. 1188.

The Second Vatican Council provided important teachings regarding the subject we are dealing with. It says: “The root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God’s love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator”²⁸. Commenting this text, M. R. Del Genio concludes: “Mystical aspiration is, therefore, inherent to human nature, and very often the mystical experience has shown the potential and capacity of all the children of God for living human adventure with authenticity and longing for the face of God”²⁹.

2. Meaning and use of the term “mysticism”

Currently, this term has a widespread dissemination, including entirely secular contexts, and is subject to a great variety of meanings. Juan Martín Velasco refers to this situation as follows: “A fact already proven and deplored from the early twentieth century by scholars dedicated to the study of mysticism: the polysemy of the word, the extreme ambiguity of its meaning and the confusion that it generates”³⁰. And he quotes several testimonies, as the one of C. Butler in 1923: “No word is likely more abused in our days than *mysticism*”, and of C. Tresmontant: “*Mystique* is one of the most confused terms in the French language today”.

It won’t be easy, therefore, to find a perfect definition. First, because phenomena that are related to it cover a great variety and complexity that easily overflows any specific definition. Other difficulty results from the diversity of fields in which it is sometimes used, as in expressions like “hippie mysticism”, “mysticism of Communism”, “ecological mysticism”, etc.; or when it is studied from the viewpoint of Psychology, Medicine, and so on. However, we cannot either remain in a complete lack of definition, which would result in a great confusion. Moreover, our interest is the religious environ-

28 *Gaudium et spes*, 19.

29 *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1194.

30 Martín Velasco: *Mística y humanismo*, p. 53.

ment and, more in particular, the Christian world. In this field the convergence is greater, though there are differences.

Some definitions or descriptions provided by qualified authors.

Juan Martín Velasco, in *Mística y humanismo*³¹, offers some definitions:

- Saint Thomas: “Cognitio Dei experimentalis” (experimental knowledge of God).
- John Tauler: “An experience of God’s presence in the spirit caused by the inner joy that provides us an intimate sensation of such presence”.
- Jacques Maritain: “A fruitive experience of the absolute”.
- Bernard McGinn: “A direct knowledge of God’s presence”.
- Robert Charles Zaehner: “Awareness of the union or unity with or within something that is immensely greater than the empirical self”.

In his previous work *El fenómeno místico*, he had these other definitions:

- Saint Teresa: “A direct and tasty knowledge, in which something is known not by an objective information but by a personal experience of it”³².
- Karl Rahner: “An intensive experience of Transcendence”³³.
- Gershom Scolem: “Experiential awareness of divine realities”³⁴.

We could add some other definitions, of authors of great actuality, that will help our understanding:

- Saint John of the Cross: “Contemplation (equivalent in those times to mystical theology) is a science of love, a loving news

31 Page 56.

32 Page 292.

33 Page 463.

34 Page 192.

of God, that enlightens the soul and at the same time it makes it fall in love, raising it by degrees to God its Creator”³⁵.

- Giovanni Moioli: “A particular religious experience of unity-communion-presence, in which what is ‘known’ is precisely reality, the datum of that unity-communion-presence and not a reflection or conceptualization of it”³⁶.
- María Rosaria del Genio: “Experience developed at the supernatural level, in the mysterious depths of the encounter of man with God”³⁷.
- Charles A. Bernard: “Let’s call ‘mystical life’ the spiritual life in which the inner action of God is usually experienced, either in a kind of purification or enlightenment”³⁸.
- Federico Ruiz Salvador: “Loving, intimate and transcendent knowledge of God, signed by immediacy, passivity and certainty”³⁹. This definition reflects the widespread opinion in the first part of the twentieth century.
- Juan Martín Velasco: “Experience and awareness of the close union of man with God”⁴⁰. The author warns that this is an ‘utmost general understanding’, that he applied in *El fenómeno místico*. Further on, he says: “If we try to provide a general outline of the mystical experience understood as contemplation, we could summarize it in these terms: a unique, simple act of the spirit, in which conscience, news and love coincide, with love being infused in the soul by God, the object of contemplation and, therefore, is passive; all this takes place in the night, in the darkness of senses and of discursive intelligence, it develops within faith and releases a new spiritual dynamism”⁴¹. In *Mística y human-*

35 Saint John of the Cross: *Noche oscura* II, 18,5.

36 G. Moioli: *Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad*, p. 931.

37 Del Genio: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1182.

38 Charles A. Bernard: *Introducción a la teología mística*, p. 158.

39 Ruiz Salvador: *Caminos del Espíritu*, p. 451.

40 Martín Velasco: *El fenómeno místico*, p. 213.

41 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 364.

ismo he specifies more accurately what he understands by 'mystical experience', applied even to profane mysticisms: "To capture what is unique in the different experiences it is vital to consider attentively their content and the peculiar contact that it generates. Regarding their content, it can appear more or less clearly, as the Whole, the One, the Real, the Good, the Transcendence, etc. And (regarding the relationship it establishes) it is a mystical experience if the subject actually and consensually experiences the act of transcending itself as a result of the attraction of the transcendental reality ... Compared with these (mystical experiences), the experiences of interiorization, deepening, concentration and fusion with something beyond oneself, yet focused on personal 'self-fulfillment' and, thereby, fruit of an egocentric attitude, is an entirely different phenomenon from religious mysticism, in spite of external similarities, and in some cases, distortions or substitutes"⁴².

In this short selection of definitions a variety of approaches and emphasis can already be observed. It is possible, however, to try to find in them some common, either explicit or implicit, elements. For example:

- It is always an extraordinary personal experience: the subject feels something special, that affects it in its deepest core.
- It entails a relationship between man and the Divinity; that is to say, with somebody who is much more than the subject of the experience.
- A relationship felt by man as an intense and most particular closeness or union; not only as an idea or conviction, but as something that affects him most particularly.
- These experiences are pleasant, tasty, fruitive; and result in a special joy.
- They are perceived by the subject in such a direct and immediate way that they remain in him as an undoubtful, absolutely real experience, though he fails to explain it.

42 *Misticismo y humanismo*, pp. 107-108.

3. Problems related to mysticism

Through the ages, different issues have emerged regarding mystical phenomena. Here are some indications on some of them:

3.1. With regard to its possibility

The most radical issue is the denial of the feasibility of its existence. In some cases, due to the fact of not accepting any kind of transcendence regarding man. In this case, the so called mystical phenomena would only be false inventions or the result of psychological anomalies. These stances, however, do not seem to be sustainable nowadays in view of so many well evidenced and documented cases, led by persons with a recognized moral and psychological solvency. Even in the context of some significant religions, there are some scholars who have denied the feasibility of mysticism. For example, A. Harnack and other theologians of the Reform, as well as Catholic theologian R. Schnackenburg⁴³, who sharply states: “The revealed and history-related biblical religion leaves no room for mysticism (meant as an -historic technique of concentration).”

From this perspective, two kinds of religions are distinguished: the mystical religions, mainly represented by Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism; and the prophetic religions, essentially Judaism, Christianity and Islamism. The former, according to them, tend to the union with the Whole; while the others take care of and improve society. Some contemplate beyond, the others contemplate present world and history.

However, this interpretation of religions is not accepted nowadays by most scholars of religious sciences, at least as formulated with such radicality. In fact, if we look at reality with more respect, we can find ascetical and ethical elements (related therefore to behaviour in this world) also in the so called “mystical” religions; and on the other hand, in the so called “prophetic” religions, we see many aspects referred to the transcendent God and union with him. In the Bible and, specifically in Christianity, mystical experiences occupy a very significant place, as seen above.

43 Quoted by Martín Velasco in *El fenómeno místico*, p. 210.

3.2. *With regard to its universality*

A typical issue of the last century relates to the universality or non universality of mystical experiences. In the twentieth century many discussions have emerged around mysticism, which F. Ruiz Salvador calls “the mystical issue”. These discussions address several questions (the nature of Christian perfection, the relationship between sanctity and mysticism, the Christian authenticity of the mystic, the infused or acquired contemplation, etc. However, there is one that is particularly emphasized and encompasses several of them, and remains topical: is the one revolved around the universal call to mysticism or, in other words, around the relationship between Christian experience and mystical experience. Whether there is identity, distinction, continuity, necessity between them, or not.

In the past, these experiences were generally considered as exceptional, only achievable by some privileged individuals, to whom God granted this utmost particular grace. However, even in the past there was the opinion that mystical experiences were achievable by all Christians.

This last approach seems to be the most accepted nowadays, based on the fact that a true and authentic faith always implies some personal experiences of relationship with God. And a true theological life, to which all Christians are called, entails some sentiments, attitudes and personal changes that cannot but be experienced by the subject⁴⁴. The famous sentence often quoted, of K. Rahner, should be understood in this perspective: “The religious man of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or will cease to be anything at all”, a sentence he changed some years later, saying: “The devout Christian of the future will either be a

44 Martín Velasco explains this experience as follows: “With the term ‘vivenciación’ (vital experience) I understand the incarnation in the different faculties and levels of a person (reason, desires, sentiments and affections) of that essential adherence that is specific to faith, and the close relationship with the Mystery, with the Absolute, with God, who establishes it. We have already noted that no religion can be practiced without some degree of personalization of faith and, therefore, without some degree of experiential exercise of it” (*El fenómeno místico*, p. 319).

‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or will cease to be a Christian⁴⁵.

The rationale of this discourse is essentially supported by secularization of social life, at least in Western Europe. When God and religion have virtually disappeared from social life, the individual can only support his faith and religious life on himself, as no incitement could he receive from society, but just the opposite. To believe in God and to live in relationship with him, the sentiments, experiences and intuitions are definitely more influential than ideas or reasons, that is to say, that there is a need of experiencing in some way God’s presence and action. Not forgetting the influence of communities, our closest environments, that nourish these personal experiences. If every experience of personal relationship with God is called mysticism, we should conclude that every religious man must be a “mystic”, or is called to mystical life. This conclusion seems to be supported by the Second Vatican Council: “The root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin, man is invited to converse with God⁴⁶. Even if these words could be applied to prayer in this life, and to full union with God in the other life.

This position is explained by several supporters:

- Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange is against the idea commonly accepted in his time that contemplation (mysticism) is an extraordinary gift that only few persons receive, advocating the vocation of all Christians to infused contemplation or mystical union with God. Though he admits that not everyone is in a position to reach this target: “There may be souls that for lack of conditions, not depending on their will, would only reach the mystical way in a longer time than our earthly life. This can reflect not only an unfavorable environment, or a lack of guidance, but also a physical temper...”⁴⁷.

45 “Espiritualidad antigua y actual”, in *Escritos de Teología* VII, p. 25.

46 *Gaudium et spes*, 19.

47 Letter to J. Maritain, who emphasizes the gratuitous nature of this gift.

- Karl Rahner: “... in every human person ... there is something like an anonymous, unthematic, perhaps repressed, basic experience of being oriented to God ... which can be repressed but not destroyed, which is ‘mystical’ or (if you prefer a more cautious terminology) has its climax in what the classical masters called infused contemplation”⁴⁸.
- Luigi Borriello emphasizes the experiential nature of faith and of theological life, that leads to the fulfillment of the saving project of communion implemented by Christ, introducing us ever more deeply in the Trinitarian life. Thus he says: “All Christians in any state or way of life are called to the fullness of Christian life as an anticipation of future life”⁴⁹. He acknowledges, however, that “we are not given the access to the highest degrees of mystical experience”⁵⁰.
- André Leonard: “In the line of this initial mysticism of faith and charity, which is a real experience of God at the level of a devout Christian life, it is easy to understand that a real mystical experience is its natural culmination”⁵¹.
- Romano Penna: “An important conclusion comes forth: ‘mysticism’ affects all Christians without distinction. All those who are baptized are in communion with the Lord: this communion is renovated particularly in the Eucharist, but qualifies every Christian from the Baptism ... Strictly speaking, therefore, there are no different degrees of ‘mystics’ in the Church: at least in its origin; Christian identity is equal for everyone and it is a ‘mystical’ identity ... The

48 Quoted by H. D. Egan, en *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1497. Egan says: “The human person is, for Rahner’s way of thinking, *homo mysticus*, a mystical man in the world, created to surrender to Mystery. Everyone—even the agnostic or atheist— who lives moderately, selflessly, honestly, courageously and in silent service to others, lives what he calls the ‘mysticism of daily life’. When anyone courageously and totally accepts life and him- or herself, even when everything tangible seems to be collapsing, then that person experiences, at least implicitly, the holy Mystery that fills the emptiness both of oneself and of life”.

49 *Diccionario de mística*, p. 690.

50 *Ibidem*, p. 700.

51 *Diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 2024.

addressees of the letters to Corinthians are indicated as ‘called to be saints’ ... It is this holiness that identifies the ‘mysticism’ of all those who are baptized”⁵².

- Juan Martín Velasco: after stating that an authentic faith and theological life imply personal experiences, he says: “Including experience in a true life of faith, and understanding mysticism as a unique experience of faith, leads me to consider that all those who live an experience of faith are mystics, even though in quite different ways and degrees, and that only few people who have this experience in an utmost intense way are mystics as understood in the history of spirituality. In this broad but authentic sense K. Rahner uses the term when speaking of ‘mysticism of everyday life’ and on this same broad sense Bernhard McGinn supports his position...”⁵³.

However, it seems useful to make a distinction, as the experiences mentioned are different though they have a common origin and destination. Even if it is true that faith and theological life to which all Christians are called require some kind of personal experiences to be authentic, and that Christ has opened all the doors to the union with God, history witnesses that some Christians have reached very different levels of intensity than those reached by most Christians. This is a phenomenon that has attracted general attention from the beginning, most particularly of religion sciences’ specialists.

Even those authors who hold the thesis of the universal call to mystical life do not fail to refer, more than once, to some kind of distinction. We find this in some of the above-mentioned authors: Garrigou-Lagrange speaks of souls that even if they are very close to God, will not reach the mystical way in their life on earth; Borriello acknowledges that there are very high levels of mystical experience that we cannot know; Leonard refers to an “initial mysticism” and of “a specifically mystical experience”; Martín Velasco says that only some people that experience faith in particular levels of intensity are mystics in the traditional sense of this term; he also introduces a clear distinction when speaking, on the one hand, of mys-

52 *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1353.

53 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 290-291.

ticism “in a broad but authentic sense”, and, on the other hand, of “mystical experiences in a stricter sense”⁵⁴ or of “more eminent realizations of the mystical life”⁵⁵ or of “peak experiences”⁵⁶. It seems, therefore, that we can speak of “mysticism in a broad sense” and “mysticism in a strict sense”.

In the latter approach, Federico Ruiz Salvador proposes the following solution. In the first place, he calls the above indicated distinction “widespread mysticism” and “characterized mysticism,” respectively. (The latter is also referred to as “mystical experience per se”⁵⁷). However, his proposal goes beyond. In his opinion, the term “mysticism” should be reserved to the second group⁵⁸ (peak experiences, eminent realizations, mystical experiences per se, etc.), while the other Christian experiences would be included under “theological life”. This would avoid confusion, without reducing the importance of the other Christian experiences: “With the *theological* experience we have nowadays a new category, that allows us to frame and fully value Christian experience without the need of qualifying as mystical all that is good, deeply felt, and leading to communion with others. As indicated in Chapter 2, theological life presents the same features of mystical experience: communion with the living God, who is present and communicates, utmost personal nature, conscious passivity, growing intensity ... As far as we can humanly appreciate ... we find non-mystic individuals with a Christian experience of a greater intensity and quality than other individuals who have had mystical experiences”⁵⁹. And he adds what he considers the underlying reason: “Actually, to be or nor to be a mystic represents regular modalities of the same Christian grace, that can develop in one way or the other in its drive of holiness”⁶⁰.

54 *Ibidem*, p. 32.

55 *Ibidem*, p. 319.

56 *Ibidem*, p. 296.

57 Ruiz Salvador: *Caminos del Espíritu*, p. 462.

58 “To say something useful from a theological and pedagogical point of view, we need to understand with certain rigor the terms mysticism and mystic.” (F. Ruiz Salvador, *o. c.*, p. 457.

59 *O. c.*, p. 456.

60 *O. c.*, p. 455.

Ángel María García Ordás presents an interesting phenomenological discrimination between religious experience and mystical experience: “Mystical experience is not a mere experience of God, as any religious experience could be: it’s a new and special way of experiencing God. Religious experience is bottom-up: from human religious actions towards God. Mystical experience goes from top to bottom, as it experiences the action of God in the soul. In religious experience, in order to establish a relationship with God man must reflect in some way on his actions; a reflection that sometimes can be minimal. Mystical experience precedes any reflection whatsoever; God’s action within the soul is discovered in a mysterious way. The supernatural acts of a Christian are infused just as those of a mystic; but awareness is different. A Christian knows that they are infused, a mystic has a direct experience of it. A mystic is aware of an infused gift directly operating in his soul. He doesn’t need any reasoning; he must only accept God’s gift. A religious soul must prepare the experience in an adequate environment. The gift that is granted in a mystical experience is above all the Divine Person, Christ and the Trinity”⁶¹.

Another distinction should be made, as it seems clear and based on the way of acting of the human being. In words of Charles A. Bernard: “All the mystical authors admit two levels in the soul’s activity: a common level, where rational and discursive operations take place, and a higher level, where God becomes present through a simple way of knowledge and adherence (a simple operation of an intuitive-emotional nature). The way of conceiving these two levels and the names they receive are completely different, but this does not hinder a substantial agreement”⁶².

3.3. With regard to its relationship with sanctity and Christian life

Finally, we will refer to something that has been always clear to scholars, but not to the Christian community. For many Christians, the mystical phenomena with its extraordinary manifestations are

61 Quoted by F. Ruiz Salvador: *o. c.*, p. 478-479, note 34.

62 *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 253.

understood as a sign of holiness of the person concerned. A careful consideration, however, at least from a Christian viewpoint, leads us to the conviction that perfection is not all about that. In fact, the New Testament is very clear in this respect: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”⁶³, “Be perfect (compassionate) as your heavenly Father is perfect (compassionate)”⁶⁴; “Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. ... If I do not have love, I gain nothing ... Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”⁶⁵.

Spiritual theologians are all consensual on this. For example, Charles A. Bernard: “The substance of spiritual life does not rely on the mystical dimension, but on the theological life shared by all those who are baptized and are docile to grace”⁶⁶. F. Ruiz Salvador: “The identity of a Christian, from his early steps through the fullness of holiness, is always marked by this threefold evangelical dimension: the disciple of Christ is one who believes, loves and is always hopeful”⁶⁷. Even more explicitly: “To be or not to be a mystic are different manifestations of the same Christian grace, whose impulse towards holiness develops in different ways. As can be observed in other vocations and charisms (contemplation, mercy, missions...) and in the different kinds of Saints (confessor, martyr, virgin...), each other living his grace, not being for that in a higher level”⁶⁸. G. Moioli: “The Christian mystic is aware of the relative – though real– importance of the experience he lives ... Indeed, mystical experience is not essential to Christian life, nor necessarily the highest gift. The essence is charity, the exclusive measure of perfection. Hence the importance for a Christian and for a mystic not ‘to seek’ mystical experience but charity”⁶⁹. Moioli says the same

63 Mt 22: 37-40.

64 Mt 5: 48.

65 1 Co 13: 1-13.

66 *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, p. 172.

67 Ruiz Salvador: *o. c.*, p. 102.

68 Ruiz Salvador: *o. c.*, p. 455.

69 *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 933.

thing in a different way: “An acknowledged mystical experience is not the foremost test of the authenticity of a Christian experience in general or of its ‘perfection’”⁷⁰. Ch. A. Bernard clearly discriminates Christian maturity and mystical dimension: “Let’s try to outline the features of a spiritual individual who reached maturity stage. For this purpose, we leave out the mystical dimension ... We state, indeed, that the substance of spiritual life does not rely on the mystical dimension”⁷¹.

However, while mystical experiences, including those that are very authentic and eminent, are not the measure of holiness, they are clearly significant. In the first place for the individual who receives the gift, that will help greatly him to live according to God, and also for religion and even for humanity. They are a further evidence of the active presence of God among us, and an anticipation, or partial tasting, of the fullness and joy that God’s presence yields to human being. Juan Martín Velasco explains it in a beautiful way: “The exercise of mystical life is an eminent accomplishment of human condition, an invaluable source of humanization ... Because to be a mystic means to exercise, to live and to implement the capacity of infinity, the status of image of God present in every individual. Mystical experience puts at stake the deepest dimensions of a person, it releases the most powerful energies of human being, it extends the vital horizon in inconceivable ways, starting from a wonderful expansion of conscience and desires”⁷². The same author emphasizes its meaning for the religious life, in general, and for humanity itself: “What I intend to do is to justify the hypothesis or, rather, to express a double conviction, namely: - the cultivation of mystical dimension is a prerequisite for the survival of religions, particularly of Christian religion, in the present socio-cultural circumstances; - any religion, in particular the religion, that develops its mystical dimension is able to contribute, along with other contemporary spiritualities, to the building of a humanism that is worthy of this name”⁷³. Ch. A. Bernard has a similar reflection: “The

70 *Ibidem*, p. 942.

71 Charles André Bernard: *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, pp. 171-172.

72 *Mística y humanismo*, p. 185.

73 *Ibidem*, p. 15.

new dynamism infused by grace demands an elevation in the religious life, strictly understood ... Prayer, commonly defined as ‘an elevation of the mind to God,’ implies for a spiritual man a regular practice of the elevation of his heart and mind. This effect of the life of grace takes place in a particular way in mystical life. Not only because the mystics’ experience proves to be always valid to suggest that human vocation is to participate in the divine life, but because the mystics are aware of the usual elevation of their lives; they describe the ‘peak of the spirit’, distinguishing the double role of the human conscience: either towards the world to act in it or towards God to be united to him. As Bergson says, mystical life is a stimulus for a man to surpass himself. Thus, broadly speaking, contemplative and mystical life, just as artistic or philosophical creation, is a prominent element of human life and an irrefutable testimony of the religious demand that is deeply engraved in the human heart”⁷⁴.

4. Unique features of mystical phenomena

Without forgetting the diversity and complexity of mystical experiences, most scholars focus on some features that define and identify this kind of experiences. Let’s read once more Martín Velasco, who repeatedly speaks of mysticism “in a broad, yet authentic, sense”: “Any living faith has something of mysticism, as any mysticism is a peculiar development of faith ... Hence, it is not easy to set strict frontiers between mystical and non mystical experiences of faith. *In the light of the most prominent manifestations of mystical life*, it is feasible, however, *to highlight the most significant features* that define the experiences of faith that can be identified as mystical experiences”⁷⁵.

Our focus will be, therefore, on these “most prominent experiences”, on these “peak experiences”, also called “characterized mysticism”. Thus, the following features will be applied in particular to these mystical experiences, without denying their applicability, at a certain extent, to “mysticism of everyday life”.

74 Charles André Bernard: *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, p. 98.

75 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 319 (el subrayado es nuestro).

Summarizing the findings of several scholars⁷⁶, the following seem to be the most characteristic features:

- *Presence, encounter, contact*: in their deepest intimacy, mystics discover the presence of God as a living presence that appears to them as an encounter with someone that surpasses them infinitely. They thus know and contact a different reality, that is beyond every visible thing; they feel touched by it and called to a union with it. This is a completely new experience that moves their whole being, “something experienced, not merely thought or believed in”⁷⁷.
- *Immediacy...closeness*: this is a very characteristic feature. It consists in a sudden evidence, as if it were an ‘unveiling’, the fall of a veil that hindered the vision of reality and of oneself. It is a liberation process as well as an illumination process. It isn’t a direct vision by which man could perceive God as an object. It is rather a ‘touch’ or loving contact of God and the soul. The trace of God’s action in man is what the subject experiences, discovering the “face of the beloved that is drawn in his heart” (Saint John of the Cross). This kind of knowledge meets the desires so often expressed by mystics: “show me your face,” “tell me your name,” “let my eyes see you.”
- *Simplicity*: this perception is a simple act, a sort of a pluri-comprehensive intuition. Not through the intellect or through the senses. It is present there, perceived all of a sudden and in a shining light. It is like contemplation, that streamlines all the subject’s activity consolidating it in the loving reception of God who offers himself. However, simplicity does not mean impoverishment. On the contrary, mystical experience is focused on the “only thing required”, it captures the essential core, leading every human being towards a new kind of unity and harmony.

76 Mainly, F. Ruiz Salvador, J. Martín Velasco, G. Muioli.

77 Saint Teresa: *Camino de perfección*, 6,3.

- *Gratuitousness*: this presence and communication of God, and their echoing in the subject, are perceived as entirely gratuitous: as unmerited, unprepared, unimaginable gifts. They are not the result of searching and efforts. It's a surprising event, infinitely surpassing the subject.
- *Passivity*: this is one of the most significant features. According to Bernard, this feature is a particular manifestation of the receptive nature of the Christian spiritual life, which identifies this experience as a mystical event: "Christian life has a general nature of receptivity regarding the action of God; this receptivity, exercised through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, may appear as passivity when man experiences God's intervention. The experience of such passivity constitutes the mystical dimension of spiritual life"⁷⁸. Common knowledge is exceeded in that the subject doesn't take possession of the object by his own means but faces something that invades his life and whose presence or absence is out of his scope. It is something that happens to him, not caused by him. It is a conscious passivity that is lived at a psychological level. The soul perceives God without having to do anything else but to be open, listen and host. However, passivity is not lack of action, abandonment, quietism; on the contrary, it requires an intense activity, in the sense of a response to and collaboration with God's self-donation. The soul feels a burning desire of being united with God, which purifies it from all other attraction. This desire is met by God in the form of a vision, an embrace, a love hurt, and so on. This kind of passivity entails a clear emotional content.
- *Joy and fruition*: Mystical experiences are always fruitive, delightful. They are always accompanied by new sensations of happiness, joy and peace, not experienced before. Hence the comparisons often used by mystics: "It goes beyond all pleasures on earth ... Union with God is the great-

78 Charles A. Bernard: *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, p. 157.

est pleasure on earth”⁷⁹. Joy and peace even felt physically, as Saint John of the Cross says: “This good of the soul results in an anointment of the body by the Holy Spirit with a great joy for the sensitive substance, all the members and bones and marrows ... with a great sense of joy and glory that is even felt in the feet and hands”⁸⁰.

- *Certainty and darkness at the same time*: in all the stories of mystical experiences there is an emphasis on the fact of having known the true reality and of having crossed the bark of appearances. And in every case, an awareness accompanied by a great certainty: “You cannot doubt of the presence of the living and true God”⁸¹, “Up to now I knew you by hearsay; now I have seen you with my eyes”⁸². At the same time, however, they acknowledge the presence of darkness in what they know. The light that allows them to see reality in a new way is so bright that it turns them blind in a certain way. God’s mystery is so great that closer the soul comes to him and more conscious it becomes of his absolute unknowability. Hence they speak of “darkness”. Saint John of the Cross states it in a concise and poetical manner: “I know the fountain well that flows and runs, though it is night!”⁸³.
- *Ineffability*: inability to adequately express both the object of experience and its components. Most of the authors of works on mysticism emphasize this quality, based on the very statements of mystics: I cannot explain with words what I have lived, they usually say. This may reflect the fact of the intensity of the emotions or sensations experienced, but it may also reflect that the experience doesn’t match with our concepts or sensitive images. However, many mystics have tried to share what

79 Saint Teresa: *Moradas*, 1,6.

80 *Llama B*, 2,22.

81 Saint Teresa: *Cuenta de conciencia*, 42.

82 *Job*, 42, 5.

83 *The song of a soul that knows God through faith*.

they have lived, using symbols, analogies, paradoxes, antithesis, etc., very repeated in their language. Symbols point to cosmic elements (fire, wind, water...); others, to personal features (depth, height, joy, sorrow); others, to interpersonal relationships (love, marriage...); or they use negative expressions (night, emptiness, silence, solitude...). For the same reason, mystics often use superlatives, leaving the impression of an exaggeration in the use of words as highly-prominent, hyper-essential, super-natural, etc.

- *Personal transformation*: every mystical experience leads to the conviction of having touched a reality that is beyond our senses, of having discovered a completely new reality, of having reached another level of reality. God appears in all its value, over and within everything. In front of him everything loses its value or, rather, acquires a new value, the value that God gives with his presence. There is a deep transformation of the affected individual, who experiences a new way of being in the world. This transformation starts from within, from the deepest part of the heart, gradually permeating all its feelings, attitudes and behaviours. The encounter with God takes places “in the deepest centre of the soul”, in the “bottom of the soul,” in the “substance of the soul.” This leads to the most complete and effective transformation that a human being can undergo.

The above are common features of all mystical experiences, in particular of those in the religious sphere. Regarding Christian-specific mysticism, the following features must be included:

- *Christocentric and ecclesial*: a feature that identifies its radical link with the historical saving economy, as performed by Jesus of Nazareth and continued in the Church. This explains the great relevance of Christ’s humanity among Christian mystics (passion and resurrection, holy Eucharist, different events ...), as well as their interest in being always in communion with holy mother the Church.

- *In the scope of the covenant*: not a simple encounter with the authentic Reality or Wholeness. It's an encounter with a personal God, who gratuitously offers man his love and his covenant, establishing a "Me and you" interpersonal relationship, to which man responds with gratitude, praise, prayer ... A covenant to which man is often unfaithful, while God remains always faithful. Hence the feeling that their experience is grace and mercy towards their situation of sinners, and consequently their gratitude, availability, desire of purification and penance.
- *Relativity of the mystical experience itself*: The Christian mystic is well aware that his experience has a relative, though real, significance regarding the final eschatological status and also regarding his present Christian status. He knows that his mystical experience is not essential, nor even the highest gift. What is essential is affective and effective charity towards God and the others. Christian's ideal is not to reach mystical experience, but to love truly and with all the heart.

5. Typology of mystical phenomena

Mystical experiences manifested throughout history are so many and varied that any typology would remain incomplete. On the other hand, it is not always easy to qualify a mystic within one type or the other. This is the opinion of Ch. A. Bernard in the first of three volumes on a number of Christian mystics, where he states: "In Christian tradition there cannot be strict compartments between the different modalities of mystical life ... Actually, some mystics, as for example Saint Ignatius or Mary of the Incarnation, cannot be easily placed in one or the other category"⁸⁴.

We will now outline the typologies proposed by several modern authors, expecting to reach a broader vision of these phenomena and to have more elements to understand Saint Joseph of Calasanz.

84 Charles André Bernard: *Il Dio dei mistici*, Vol. I, p. 9-10.

5.1. After reviewing several typologies, Juan Martín Velasco proposes one that includes the mystical phenomena of all the religions and of all the cultures. This typology distinguishes the following mystical experiences⁸⁵:

- a) **Mystical experiences based on nature or universe:** those lived in an aesthetic or natural environment.
- b) **Self-experience:** on the background of a meta-empirical subject.
- c) **Mystical experiences of the Absolute, the Divine, or the personal God.**
- d) **Mystical experiences of emptiness, night, nothing.**

5.2. Giovanni Moioli⁸⁶ argues that in the history of mystical experiences within Christianity we can find at least the following types:

- a) **Mysticism of the essence:** in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the Rheno-Flemish spirituality would have developed a mysticism called “of the essence”. According to this school, the union of man with God is understood as an experience of the unity of the created being with the Primordial Being; a union entailing participation of man in God’s reality, with alterity not clearly outlined. Hence, there would be an ontological union-participation of man with God. This union would take place in the essence of man, who is an image of God (in the bottom, in the spark, in the peak or in the centre of the soul); and it would be a union-participation with the essence of God (in the point of union of the three Persons). This approach raised serious objections in the Church based, among other reasons, on the suppression of the mediation of Christ.
- b) **Sponsal mysticism:** this approach is based on a more biblical and Christian background, namely on the covenant

85 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 96.

86 *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, pp. 934-936.

and its nuptial symbols. The communion of man with God is seen as the communion of wife and husband, of total availability and surrender, in a free love that responds to the initiative of the sovereign Love. This response is part of God's plan, which is a story of love accomplished by Christ. And the sense of this story materializes in the offering of a communion-divinization of the sinful man that makes him similar to God. In this horizon, mystical communion is not about being one thing with God but being united to him in a communion that is a response to an inviting love and that leads to a transformation or renovation of the human being. This approach is shared by the great Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century, and is also attributed to the so called "monastic mysticism".

- c) ***Anthropocentric mysticism***: it develops in the seventeenth century in particular. It sees God focused on man and his salvation. Communion with God is the object of human desire. However, this desire must be purified; hence, the importance of asceticism. As man does not respond appropriately to the saving God, a special sense of penance grows in him. The communion achieved in this way is felt as a gratifying possession ... This mysticism "is not illegitimate, but not pure in itself".
- d) ***Mysticism of the absence***: it emerges, according to some scholars, as a reaction against the anthropologic mysticism, and is called "Theocentric mysticism". It starts from the absolutely transcendent and gratuitous God. Its criterion and ultimate end is "pure" love, complete lack of interest, unconditional obedience. In this kind of mysticism the dominant and eventual experience is the absence of God, a vast aridity, a purification of desire ... that finally becomes pure resignation to the will of God. Its icon would be Jesus on the cross, claiming "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Close to this perspective is the approach of H. U. von Baltasar in the twentieth century, though with a more Christocentric bias: the disciple participates in the 'unique' death of his Lord, in which "he carried the sins of men", that separate them from God. Giovanni Moioli

notes, however, that this position moves away from Saint John of the Cross, who definitely followed another path. In fact, for this mystic, the passive night of the spirit is not the peak stage of the mystical way, but a transitional stage, as the ultimate experience is a loving presence, the communion-transformation already achieved, though still expecting the final fullness in heaven.

5.3. After mentioning some other typology, Federico Ruiz Salvador⁸⁷ argues: “of greater significance and interest is for our days to qualify Christian mysticism in its life and action context, that account for the mediations and sources of the experience.” So that in our days it is more interesting to consider two kinds of mysticism: the contemplative and the active mysticism:

- a) *Contemplative mysticism:*** takes place in prayer and in the degrees of prayer. ‘Mysticism’ is here equivalent to infused contemplation. It is regarding this kind of mysticism that we have the most interesting descriptions, with Saint Teresa of Jesus being the one who has expressed this experience more accurately. This kind of mysticism enjoys a certain primacy due to the fact that the subject is more aware of it and it is easier to be observed and manifested; and also because the most famous mystics are among the contemplative. Anyway, we keep always at the covenant level of interpersonal communion in faith and love, of loving knowledge.
- b) *Active mysticism:*** The current theological and spiritual reflection includes undoubtedly the existence of a Christian mysticism of the ‘active life’. While there are less resources on this matter, it is currently common to speak of “mysticism in action”. “Mystics of an active nature, as Ruiz Salvador says, have a less reflexed conscience, or they have not left clear writings in this regard”; but they may have

87 *Caminos del Espíritu*, pp. 468-470.

similar experiences as the contemplative mystics, though supported by different mediations. The mystic in action lives an immediate encounter with God in the action itself: identifying with God's designs and love in the exercise of his charitable activity or apostolate, contemplating God in those whom he serves, etc. "In this context, mysticism has a strong meaning, in the sense that it entails the experience of passive purifications and of union." Saint Teresa is an example of a mystic who has lived the experience of God also "in the midst of businesses and on the roads", primarily as a contemplative mystic. While Saint Anthony Mary Claret may be primarily an example of a mystic in action, as he lived the immediate encounter with God in the action itself. From all the above we can conclude that mediations towards mystical experiences can be and actually are different, both in prayer and in action. It should not be forgotten, however, that for a mystical experience it is not sufficient an enabling mediation; it is also required that the individual receives this grace in a mystical manner and translates it in an authentic way of life.

5.4. Charles André Bernard presents a typology⁸⁸ "with the only intention of highlighting the variety of the Christian mystical life and its different nuances", that is to say, without expecting to include in his outline all the Christian mystical experiences. He highlights the following three types:

- a) *Mysticism of interiority*:** the most known and studied, though not the most lived. Its nature is strictly anthropological and psychological, and can be shared with mystical forms of other religions. Its entry point is the subject in search of the union with God, not the object itself understood as "a hidden and extremely valuable reality". The subject seeks the union with the Absolute. The knowledge of God that is reached is always general and blurry, beyond concepts and symbols, and rooted in love. All the myster-

88 *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, pp. 159-163.

ies appear against the background of the infinite mystery of God, and of his love and design of salvation. Love is the formal agent of mystical union. It stretches back to Platonic tradition, to Origen and the Scholastic theology, and reaches to Saint Teresa of Jesus. Within this category there is a certain variety: a rather *speculative* form, under which God is considered under the abstract ideas of Being, Good and One; it's the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius Areopagite, Eckhart, etc. Other form is more directly *emotional and sponsal*, with an emphasis on the personalistic aspect of the relationship with the God of love and of the Covenant; it is somewhat based on the 'Canticle of Canticles'; representatives of this approach include Saint Bernard and Saint Teresa of Jesus. Other form is rather *symbolic*, based on the cosmic sense or in the liturgy. The Franciscan mysticism and the Eastern Church mysticism follow this approach.

- b) *Mysticism of the configuration with Christ*:** not comparable with other religions as it is a specific Christian form of mysticism. Here the anthropological aspects are very reduced. The mystic is placed in the centre of Christ's mystery and seeks to be configured with him, according to the reality received in Baptism and the other Sacraments. It is not about replicating a particular feature of Christ, but reaching a mysterious knowledge of the Father through an insight of the mystery of Jesus, and living in union with him, against a background of infinity, through the configuration with certain aspects of the Redeemer. Throughout history it has taken different modalities. *Martyrdom* is the first example: the martyr doesn't expect any other end than to be configured with Christ in his passion and death, and to participate in his glory; *evangelical radicality*, by replicating the forms of life of Christ (for example, Saint Francis); *emotional participation*, by seeking to participate in his pains (pierced side, scourging, crucifixion) and in his feelings and attitudes as Redeemer of the sinful men; *Eucharistic participation*, by living the union with God through union with Christ present and operational in the Eucharist; *priestly partic-*

ipation, by an inner and sacramental union with Christ the Priest: the mystic aims to live in an intense manner the priestly role of Christ, either as a ministerial priest or as a member of the common priesthood of the faithful (this spirituality is a significant feature of the Berullian school).

- c) ***Apostolic mysticism***: this kind of mystics focus on the participation in the historical action of God as Creator and Saviour. Their apostolic activity is seen by them against the background of the divine design of salvation and of its accomplishment for all human beings. The mystical apostle feels as an instrument of Christ for continuing his work of liberation and redemption. Their fundamental attitude is that of a radical availability in obedience to God's provisions. These are always mysterious as God is a hidden God, not only regarding his being but also regarding his action in the world. On this spirituality, Bernard states: "Apostolic mysticism is less known, since 'apostolic' mystics have not developed a theology of their inner life." This is the mysticism lived by Saint Ignatius of Loyola and by "Charity giants", as Saint Vincent of Paul, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and others. It should be noted as well that the two last types of mysticism may often walk together: "Since God's action develops primarily according to Christ Jesus, the only Mediator, the apostolic mysticism may easily match with that of the configuration with Christ"⁸⁹.

6. Phases or stages of the mystical itinerary

The path or itinerary performed by mystics in their personal experience is often present in discussions on mysticism. The road or the path to go up a mountain or to reach a castle are metaphors often used. This assumes the existence of a progress, a growth or a deepening between an entry point and an arrival point, through several phases, degrees or stages.

89 Charles A. Bernard: *Introducción a la teología espiritual*, p. 162.

However, any mystical itinerary is an “a posteriori” description of what the person has lived. It is an autobiography where the subject struggles to understand the journey followed and reflects on previous experiences. It is a subjective construction, trying to show the obstacles, phases, causes, hardships, perspectives, which perhaps at the time of the experience couldn’t be distinguished so clearly. The mystical itinerary is, therefore, a mental construction of the process of the loving encounter of God and human creature. The encounter is the end of the itinerary, which is not the cause of the encounter, since God acts by his own and in his particular style. This is the reason why, strictly speaking, the mystical itinerary is not the path followed by man to reach God but the road that God follows to reach man, to which man has to respond with love and detachment. The tracks of this encounter appear in the conscience as transforming tracks gratuitously left by God, until the human ‘form’ becomes the ‘form’ of divine life. It is, therefore a loving encounter. Reported in human experience as signs of a road in the desert towards self-annihilation, signs of a dark night. Eventually, any mystical itinerary is not but the way to understand the mysterious fact that God gratuitously makes man participant of his own life.

Many efforts have been made to systematize the mystical itinerary. All of them distinguish developmental stages or phases to reach this loving transformation.

6.1. The most classical in Christian tradition include the proposal of Origen in the third century, with the distinction of three phases or stages: starting, proficient, perfection stages⁹⁰.

- a) Starting stage:** the mystical way starts, totally under God’s initiative: it’s the divine touch, the vocation, the conversion, or the perception of the divine reality. This “touch” appears as instantaneous, gratuitous, captivating, unconditional, passive, beyond any control, and multifaceted. The main point is to discover that man has been created in the image of God. This experience is the

90 Hein Blommestein, in *Diccionario de mística*, pp. 956-958.

entry point to a process of transformation that develops over time.

- b) *Proficient stage:*** a progress is experienced. With the grace of God, the divine transformation is consciously interiorized to the point that it defines the intentional structures of the mystic: the whole area of his desires, searching, love, fears ... starts to change.
- c) *Perfection stage:*** mystics contemplate the divine work that is performed in their most intimate being, without their intervention. The awareness of human reality disappears and is substituted by passive contemplation of the divine love.

6.2. The itinerary most frequently mentioned by authors, from Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite through Garrigou-Lagrange, shows three main stages, called with different denominations (stages, ways, stations...), subdivided at times in a more or less high number of minor steps. The most frequent names used for the main stages are: “purgative way,” “illuminative way,” “unitive way”:

- a) *Purgative way:*** also called “ascetic stage”. It includes an extensive and intensive series of exercises that prepare the subject for the encounter with God. Generally, they are purifying practices regarding many aspects of the individual. They can be grouped in two great blocks: moral virtues⁹¹, that avert from vices and disorders, and particular practices that aim to prepare the mind and the will for a new form of conscience and for intensifying the desire of the Absolute. Moral virtues precede the mystical itinerary in order to remove obstacles and to ensure a previous preparation.

91 “Moral good consists in the restraining of the passions and the curbing of disorderly desires, from which restraint there come to the soul tranquillity, peace and rest, and moral virtues, all of which things are moral good... the soul that is disturbed, and has no foundation of moral good, is to that extent incapable of spiritual good, which impresses itself only upon souls that are restrained and at peace” (Saint John of the Cross: *Subida (Ascent)*, Book III, ch. 5).

Ch. A. Bernard provides an idea of these ethical virtues: “Since every form of union with God implies the mediation of Christ and, therefore, an ongoing effort of the mystic to configurate with Christ, it is possible to introduce ethical elements that are also part of the mystical ascension, such as love, poverty, humility, abandonment, compassion, trust, peace, etc.... The most important is charity, a ‘sine qua non’ condition of mystical development”⁹².

- b) *Illuminative way:*** in which a spiritual illumination is received that results from a greater understanding of the word of God and from a deeper sacramental life. It provides consolation and strength. This is a core stage of the sheer path towards God, which includes a deeper and tastier knowledge of God and his mysteries. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are critical in this stage, according to Saint Thomas, in particular the gifts of understanding, knowledge and wisdom. Based on F. Ruiz Salvador, we can add something else about the ‘dark night’ that accompanies or follows this ‘illumination’: “In the process of searching God with absolute care and generosity, illumination is followed, or is occasionally accompanied, by a terrible mystical experience, leading to a deep and thorough purification of the individual. This experience is known as dark night, mystical death; life and participation in the passion and death on the cross, and is accompanied by a sense of absence, abandonment, nullity”⁹³.
- c) *Unitive way:*** in a certain manner and degree the goal of any mystical journey is reached in the unitive way. The soul enjoys not only a greater understanding of divine realities but experiences as well a transforming communion and union in the living God’s mystery. A state of maturity is attained, as well as of peace and balance, joy and happiness, along with an indestructible certainty regarding God’s love.

92 Charles A. Bernard: *Teología mística*, p. 243.

93 Ruiz Salvador: *Caminos del Espíritu*, p. 481.

7. Mystical state

We now face the last stage, that of the mystical state already achieved. What is it about? How should it be described? Which are its manifestations or the aspects that should be highlighted?

The following is Ángela Merriman's description: "The mystical state could be defined as an ongoing experience of the presence of God through loving knowledge. At the spiritual level, this state is considered as the full development of Christian life; traditionally known as unitive way and associated to the highest degrees of prayer ... With human forces it is not possible to reach this peak of spiritual conscience and of union with God"⁹⁴. According to Saint John of the Cross, perfect union is reached once the nights of senses and spirit are over and purification of all human affections and desires is accomplished⁹⁵, and the soul is totally immersed in faith, hope and charity⁹⁶. On the other hand, an ongoing peace and quiet in the centre of the soul will become the peculiar signs of a mystical state fully accomplished.

Mystics suggest that the core and peak of this state are to be found in some varied and very intense experiences that can be considered key elements of this mystical summit. And they use different terms to identify them such as union with God, contemplation, ecstasy, spiritual marriage, transformation, to be plunged into, Theopatic state, etc.

7.1. Union with God

Union with God involves the whole life of mystics and it seems to be the core or essence of what we call 'mystical state'. However,

94 Ángela B. Merriman: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 663.

95 "To quiet the 'spiritual house', you need to mortify tastes and spiritual appetites in pure faith. ... The soul joins with the Beloved in a union of simplicity, purity, love and similitude" (*Dark Night*), Book II, ch. 1,2.

96 "This white garment of faith was worn by the soul on its going forth from this dark night... Charity, in the same way, voids and annihilates the affections and desires of the will for whatever is not God, and sets them upon Him alone; and thus this virtue prepares this faculty and unites it with God through love ... And thus, unless it journeys earnestly, clad in the garments of these three virtues, it is impossible for the soul to attain to the perfection of union with God through love" (*Dark Night*, Book II, ch. 21.

it is an experience not easy to identify accurately⁹⁷. In fact, union with God is used both for any authentic religious life and for the highest degrees of mystical life. Any deeply faithful human being, of any religion whatsoever, aims at the union with the Whole, the One, or God, where to find fullness and happiness. At times, this fullness is designed as an absorption into the Whole, with a loss of individual personality. In Christianity (and in other personalistic religions), this union does not entail the loss of individuality, however intimate and penetrating it may be. For Christians, union is not merger or fusion but transformation. Any Christian can reach it by developing the so called ‘theological life’⁹⁸. This supernatural life with God is strongly supported by the Bible, starting from Jesus’ statement: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”⁹⁹.

For a further understanding, let’s reflect on some descriptions made by modern scholars:

- Martín Velasco: “In the immediacy of loving contact, the subject lives the most intimate union with the very reality of God, present in his deepest bottom”¹⁰⁰.
- Dalmazio Mongillo says: “To live in union with God is not about having ideas on him; it is about allowing him to enter in us, hosting and living his word, walking on his paths, growing in the love with which he loves us, following him in his own way and in ours, letting him introduce us in the ineffable experience of his mercy”¹⁰¹.

97 “It is difficult to define accurately the extent of this expression (union with God) that, nonetheless, is a classical expression in the vocabulary of prayer” (G. Lafont: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1707).

98 “According to revelation, union with God is the most sublime core of human vocation and, at the same time, the most difficult condition to describe and the most sensitive to educate ... These ‘three things’ (faith, hope and charity) summarize the attitudes that structure the relationship with God, One and Multi- form” (D. Mongillo: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1728-1729).

99 John 14, 23. Ver otras citas: 2 Pedro, 1,4; 1 Co 6,17; Gal 2,20.

100 J. Martín Velasco: *Mística y humanismo*, p. 90.

101 D. Mongillo: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1736.

- Saint John of the Cross speaks of two modalities of the union of man with God: i) Essential or substantial (natural) union by which God, as Creator, dwells in each of his creatures. With a “thorough and ongoing union” God dwells “in each soul, even if the greatest sinner in the world.” ii) Union of (supernatural) resemblance that is achieved through the soul’s transformation by love: “When both wills, God’s and the soul’s, are in agreement without any contrast. So when the soul removes what is not in accordance with God’s will, it will be transformed in God by love”¹⁰², “and God provides the soul its supernatural being so that it resembles God and has what God has”¹⁰³.

On the other hand, the wording ‘union with God’ is not always used in the same context or with the same scope. Ghislaine Lafont, for instance, distinguishes two different contexts in which it is used: “Actually, when we usually speak of union with God we mean something like what Lawrence of the Resurrection used to call ‘the practice of the presence of God’. It may be about a non-violent effort to ‘remain in the presence’, ‘to be with’ or, with a negative wording, not to lose a certain ‘sense’ of present relationship. But it may also deal with a gift that could be identified as a kind of ‘presence awareness’ that inhabits the soul (in the Latin sense of ‘mens’), while both theoretical and practical reason and the senses continue to be involved in daily life needs”¹⁰⁴.

Being aware of the great variety of degrees and modalities that the “union with God” can account for, we will now seek to approach the highest experiences of this union as they appear in persons who seemingly have reached mystical state. In this context, the union with God appears as the core, the synthesis, the quintessence, the ultimate degree, the most perfect form of the mystical life.

In these experiences some special features seem to be emphasized, namely: intimacy, immediacy, love, humility:

102 *Subida*, libro 2, ch. 5,2-3.

103 *Ibidem*, 7.

104 G. Lafont: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 1708.

- ***Intimate union***, a penetrating union that reaches the mystic in the deepest of his being; an experience of unimaginable closeness and compenetration with God. Sometimes mentioned with other terms which point to a particular closeness, such as ecstasy, vision, deification, unity without distinction (*unitas indistinctionis*), etc. Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross use the image of the ‘spiritual marriage’, noting that it doesn’t mean a merger of substances, but a convergence of wills and a deeply emotional union.
- ***Immediate union***, implies a direct contact with God, in line with the mystic’s desire of seeing the face of God. The knowledge shared through this union excels all the other forms of knowing God, while ‘the clothing of this sweet encounter’ – the corporal and limited condition of the human being – never disappears. “It is an ‘immediate’ contact in the sense that nothing that is strange to its most personal centre interferes between the divine presence and itself. The immediacy, however, is mediated by God’s action in the soul (J. Maritain); through this action God becomes present to the soul, in ‘the desired eyes that are drawn in my inner depths’”¹⁰⁵.
- ***Union of love***: love is the origin, the way and the means of this union. The mystic’s life is dominated by a burning desire of God, or it would be better to say by the beneficial, convenient, attracting force of his love, that only appeases in the union with the beloved being. This love leads to union, and at the same time to a greater knowledge of God. St. Gregory the Great says: ‘*amor ipse notitia est*’ (love is already knowledge). An increasing loving knowledge.
- ***Humility***: due to the acknowledgement of personal unworthiness, and to the weakness of its love and the inability for such union, even if so much desired. Humility becomes in this case an abandonment in the mercy of one

105 Martín Velasco: *Mística y humanismo*, p. 92.

who loves me. Humility bridges the gap to the extent that it hopes in God's forgiveness and in the generosity of his love. Humility, therefore, leads to an increasing love and overcomes its radical powerlessness: "Love speaks, and the soul is so estranged that the gap with God does not count for her"¹⁰⁶.

7.2. *Infused contemplation*

Those who have reached the high degrees of mystical life have enjoyed the gift of infused contemplation. As an introduction, let's say something about contemplation in general, a term used in many contexts and with different meanings.

Usually, the term contemplation suggests a kind of vision and a particular and higher knowledge. Luigi Borriello: "Finally, contemplation is a kind of higher knowledge, marked by the simplicity of the event, as it is performed through a simple act of intuition of truth (*simplex intuitus veritatis*) or through a calm rest on the known object (*fruitio, possessio veritatis*)¹⁰⁷. This knowledge can be related to nature, aesthetic or religion. It is marked by an intense attention and concentration, that includes some kind of taste (a cognitive tasting = *fruitio*), that permeates reality and captures its truth (*possessio veritatis*), and is accompanied by a component of admiration of the quality of what is contemplated (its beauty or goodness) and an attitude of rest or stillness. In this sense it is rather used for a work of art.

The term contemplation has a long tradition that goes back to the Greek philosophy, as a synonym of rational intuition. The Fathers of the Church take from the New Testament two Greek words (*gnosis* and *epignosis*), that suggest an intimate, vital and quasi experiential knowledge of God, and they translate them as 'theoria' and 'contemplatio'. Clement of Alexandria is the first Christian author to speak of contemplation as a higher knowledge of God. Origen, while influenced by Neo-Platonism, outlines the Christian ideal as the soul's communion with its Spouse, as a loving union that

106 Saint Teresa: *Vida*, 34,8.

107 L. Borriello: *Diccionario de mística*, p. 458.

generates an emotional knowledge: contemplation. Saint Thomas defines contemplation as “a simple intellectual view of the truth ... that ends in love”, adding: “Contemplative life is essentially an act of the intelligence, but its source is in the will, because charity moves to contemplate God”¹⁰⁸.

In Christianity, therefore, the term contemplation encompasses always knowledge and love: knowledge with ‘amazement and astonishment’ before the transcendent mystery of God; and love, which leads to an increasing union with God. It is not surprising, then, that since the Middle Ages the term contemplation has been used to identify the mystical life. For centuries, contemplation and mysticism have been synonymous.

Before moving ahead, it should be noted that in the Christian world this concept is used in two quite different contexts. Indeed, it is often referred to as ‘contemplative life or activity’ and sometimes as ‘contemplative prayer’. Regarding the first expression, Ch. A. Bernard¹⁰⁹ states: “By contemplative activity we mean a more or less methodic search of a knowledge regarding high level realities”. And he adds: “Contemplative life was opposed to practical activities, such as manual labor, and also to moral life efforts. The current meaning of the term ‘contemplation’... connotes always a certain liberation from practical life and, in this sense, the idea of contemplation links with the most ancient opposition between *theoria* and *praxis*”. He finally highlights the ‘utmost’ importance of this activity for the whole religious life, so that “it is absolutely impossible to conceive a saintly life if no time is dedicated to contemplative activity.”

Regarding what Bernard calls ‘contemplative prayer’, Luigi Borriello defines it as “any spiritual activity that considers the mystery of God the Father revealed in the Son through the Spirit, so that the soul adheres to it in an impulse of pure faith”¹¹⁰. However, as the mystery of God the Saviour is found in different fields or manners, Borriello distinguishes three main kinds of ‘contemplative prayer:’

108 *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 9, a. 7.

109 *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 250.

110 *Diccionario de mística*, p. 463.

- **Liturgical prayer:** performed on behalf of the Church throughout the year, it offers the entire mystery of Christ, which we are called to live in all its aspects though we can emphasize some particular one. Christ's presence grants a particular value to each liturgical act.
- **Personal contemplative prayer,** usually called **meditation:** it is based on the 'lectio divina', a careful reading of the Holy Scripture, by which we enter in contact with Revelation and the accomplishment of the mystery of salvation that enlightens all our life. Under its influence we can change our thoughts, desires, affections and all our self, to align them to the will of God.
- **Actual contemplation:** Bernard defines it as "the activity that captures a spiritual reality with a simple operation of the human spirit, of an intuitive-affectionate kind"¹¹¹. The simplicity by which the human act captures the divine reality is emphasized in this definition. And as usual, two kinds of contemplation are also distinguished:
 - *Acquired contemplation:* when intuition is reached at the end of a meditation activity and, consequently, based on human forces (with the help of grace) through rational and discursive knowledge. Some authors, particularly of the Dominican school, do not accept the legitimacy of the acquired contemplation, while experience seems to confirm it.
 - *Infused contemplation* (also called 'mystical' or 'passive')¹¹²: it is not an immediate continuum with meditation but a particular spiritual state, "a higher level, in which God is present through a simple mood of knowledge and adhesion"¹¹³. Martín Velasco tries to identify the mystical experience, understood as contemplation, as follows: "a unique and simple act of the

111 Bernad: *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 253.

112 Terminology is not univocal among scholars.

113 Bernard: *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*, p. 253.

spirit, in which conscience, knowledge and love coincide under the influence of the very 'object' of contemplation, God. It is, therefore a passive experience that takes place in the night, in the darkness of senses and of discursive intelligence, develops within faith and releases in the subject a new spiritual dynamism"¹¹⁴. J. Mouroux explains the notion of contemplation as follows: "It is not a vision; it is a loving knowledge lived in faith. Nevertheless, this kind of profound intuition, this trans-luminous experience, particular perception of our life in God, is so accurate that we Christians 'know' that we are in God and God is in us"¹¹⁵.

From the above we can highlight the main features of the infused or mystical contemplation:

- A noetic, cognitive nature: it is knowledge.
- A simple act, like an intuition; it is not reflection, reasoning or inference.
- A loving and fruitive nature: God shows love and man responds with love, surrender and gratitude. Astonishment and admiration are accompanied by a great inner joy.
- A free initiative of God, that man receives with passivity and at rest: it isn't a fruit of his effort, as in the other kinds of prayer.
- Immediacy way: man perceives God directly; to be exact, he perceives or experiences the presence and action of God in himself.
- A true and accurate knowledge, though dark as faith.
- It promotes a deep transformation of the human person.

According to Bernard, the foundations of this contemplation should be sought in the dogma of the inhabitation of God in the soul of the righteous man. His presence is a living and active pres-

114 Martín Velasco: *El fenómeno místico*, p. 364.

115 Quoted by J. Martín Velasco en *El fenómeno místico*, p. 365.

ence. Thus, the gift of contemplation is essentially the fact that the soul becomes aware of the presence and supernatural work of God in it. This awareness is granted by God when and how he wants. Its moods and degrees are, therefore, multiple. Usually it becomes increasingly interior. History teaches that there can be different degrees in contemplation: there can be acts of contemplation that are brief, sporadic, that result in a vague conscience or perception of the action of God, and there can also be a state of perfect, stable, enduring contemplation, that keeps man in loving awareness of God's presence and accompanies the development of all his life.

Thus conceived, "contemplation is an alternative name for the union with God"¹¹⁶.

Finally, it should be noted that when speaking of different stages or degrees of prayer and, more specifically, of mystical contemplation, they shouldn't be understood rigidly, since traces of one stage could be present in another one; and there could be progress and setbacks. The division is a tool that helps to outline this complex process of the soul towards the union with God, that varies from one individual to the other and relies only on the design of God and on man's fidelity to God's action.

116 Martín Velasco: *Mística y humanismo*, p. 93.

Annex: Saint Teresa of Jesus and the Contemplative Prayer

It could be helpful to review, if only briefly, what Saint Teresa of Jesus has to say on this matter, considering her significant experience in contemplating and her ability in explaining it to others.

We know that the Saint does not always use the same nomenclature, nor she follows the same steps in the progress of prayer. However, she does maintain a similar doctrine throughout her writings. Her main teachings can be found in the *Relación 5a.* (trans.: *Relation V*), in the *Moradas* (trans.: *Mansions... Dwelling Places or Interior Castle*, in *Vida* (trans.: *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*), in the *Camino de Perfección* (trans.: *Way of Perfection*).

See below a Table of the Degrees of Prayer, as explained in the *Mansions*, mature work of the Saint¹¹⁷.

DEGREES OF PRAYER		
Mansions	Content	Degree or Stage
Three first mansions	Meditation prayer (ascetic stage)	1. True prayer starts 2. Authentic meditation prayer 3. Stabilization in this prayer
Fourth Mansions	Transition to Contemplation (the mystical stage starts)	4. Infused recollection 5. Quiet or Taste of God (in <i>Mansions</i> , these two degrees are merged)
Three last Mansions	State of infused contemplation, in a process of union with God (Mystical stage)	6. Starting union 7. Ecstasy or Rapture 8. Consummate union or spiritual marriage

Saint Teresa knew the theories of the three ways or lives (purgative, illuminative and unitive) and of the three stages (beginners, profi-

¹¹⁷ See: *Diccionario de Saint Teresa*, pp. 172-176.

cient, perfect), and she seems to equate them, calling them “those in the beginning, the middle and the end”¹¹⁸. However, she doesn’t identify herself with these divisions. She presents other divisions, which in the *Mansions* appear to be seven, substantially reduced to two (the Beginners and the Perfect), with an intermediate stage of transition. Tomás Álvarez writes: “A deeper perspective divides the whole process of spiritual life into two stages -- ascetic and mystic – which correspond to the two components (initial and final) of the way: on the part of man, the ascetic struggle in the first three Mansions; on the part of God, the divine grace and initiative in the three final Mansions. And to underline the fusion of these two components, Teresa includes the stage of the Fourth Mansions, supported by the image of the two fountains, the exterior and distant and the interior and profound”¹¹⁹.

According to the objective of our work, we will focus on the kinds of prayer in the mystical stage. Our aim is to reflect the teachings of the Saint, possibly with her own words, in order to have a doctrinal basis that will allow us to understand to a certain extent this complex and wonderful process of the contemplative prayer experienced by the Saint and will hopefully help us to clarify the path of other prominent Christians, and particularly of Saint Joseph Calasanz.

In her *Relation V*, Saint Teresa starts explaining what she understands for ‘supernatural’ (mystic)¹²⁰. This prayer is an absolute gift of God, which no skill or effort can reach, no matter how much we labor, but we should prepare for it.

1. *Prayer of infused recollection*¹²¹: “The first prayer of which I was conscious...¹²² —is a certain interior recollection, of which

118 *Vida*, ch. 11, 5.

119 *Diccionario de Saint Teresa*, p. 102.

120 Saint Teresa: *Relación* 5, 3.

121 The Saint is not constant in naming the degrees of prayer, since she refers sometimes to a non infused ‘recollection’, last form of a non mystical prayer, and sometimes to an ‘infused recollection’, first degree of the mystical prayer (Saint Teresa: *Obras completas*, Ed. Monte Carmelo, 2001, p. 685, note 1).

122 But in n 25 of this same *Relation* she speaks of another previous gift.

the soul is sensible”... the soul, withdrawing into itself, seeks to go away from the tumult of its outward senses... to be able to converse with God alone”. “This will be easily understood by him whom our Lord shall have raised to this state.” “This is a kind of recollection which, I believe, is supernatural. There is no occasion to retire nor to shut the eyes, nor does it depend on anything exterior; involuntarily the eyes suddenly close and solitude is found. Without any labor of one’s own, the temple of which I spoke is reared for the soul in which to pray: the senses and exterior surroundings appear to lose their hold, while the spirit gradually regains its lost sovereignty”¹²³. Recollection leads to the higher world where the wonders of God gleam.

The Saint knows, however, that besides ‘given’ recollection, there is an ‘acquired’ recollection, which prepares to receive greater goods: “Beginners at first suffer much, because they are not convinced that they are penitent for their sins; and yet they are, because they are so sincerely resolved on serving God. They must strive to meditate on the life of Christ, and the understanding is wearied thereby. Thus far we can advance of ourselves—that is, by the grace of God—for without that, as every one knows, we never can have one good thought”¹²⁴. The Saint gives plenty of advices on how to develop this acquired recollection, that is also of great profit.

But afterwards she focus on the infused recollection that God provides when and to whom he wishes, as an absolute gift of his own: “This, then, is what we can do. He who would pass out of this state, and upraise his spirit, in order to taste consolations denied him, will, in my opinion, lose both the one and the other. These consolations being supernatural, and the understanding inactive, the soul is then left desolate and in great aridity. As the foundation of the whole building is humility, the nearer we draw unto God the more this virtue should grow; if it does not, everything is lost. It seems to be a kind of pride when we seek to ascend higher, seeing that

123 *Moradas* 4^a, ch. 3.

124 *Vida*, 11, 9; *Camino* 28-29.

God descends so low, when He allows us, being what we are, to draw near unto Him¹²⁵.

2. *Prayer of Quiet*: In *Relation V (Relation VIII)*, the Saint speaks of herself with these words: “. Out of this recollection grow a certain quietude and inward peace most full of comfort; for the soul is in such a state that it does not seem to it that it wants anything; for even speaking wearies it,—I mean by this, vocal prayer and meditation; it could do nothing but love. This lasts sometime, and even a long time.” However, she sometimes changes the name of this kind of prayer: “ What I call ‘divine consolations’, or have termed elsewhere the ‘prayer of quiet,’ is a very different thing”¹²⁶. This is a supernatural gift that permeates the human being: “This is a supernatural state, and, however hard we try, we cannot reach it for ourselves; for it is a state in which the soul enters into peace, or rather in which the Lord gives it peace through His presence... all the faculties are stilled. The soul..., realizes that it is now very close to its God, and that, if it were but a little closer, it would become one with Him through union... . It cannot understand how it knows Him, yet it sees that it is in the Kingdom (or at least is near to the King Who will give it the Kingdom), and it feels such reverence that it dares to ask nothing... . It is, as it were, in a swoon, both inwardly and outwardly, so that the outward man (let me call it the “body”, and then you will understand me better) does not wish to move, but rests... The body experiences the greatest delight and the soul is conscious of a deep satisfaction... There seems nothing left for it to desire”¹²⁷. Notwithstanding her praises for this kind of prayer, Teresa knows that it can be better... “like one who has almost reached the end of his journey.”

This peace and quietude do not hinder active life: “It is a great favor which the Lord grants to these souls, for it unites the active life with the contemplative. At such times they serve the Lord in both these ways at once; the will, while in contemplation, is working without

125 *Vida* 12, 4-5.

126 *Moradas* 4^a, 2,2.

127 *Camino*, ch. 31.

knowing how it does so; the other two faculties are serving Him as Martha did. Thus Martha and Mary work together"¹²⁸.

And she gives some advices to those who are in such situation; firstly, not to fall into the temptation of trying to hold it. In this regard she says: "This is ridiculous: we can no more control this prayer than we can make the day break, or stop night from falling; it is supernatural and something we cannot acquire".

In short, we can say that recollection affects mainly the intellect, which focus on God present; while the prayer of quiet directly affects the will, thoroughly united (captive) to God's will; the rest of the faculties can continue to attend practical duties of daily life.

3. *Prayer of initial union*: In this third degree of contemplative prayer all the faculties and inner senses are busy with God; only the external senses are free: "When all the faculties of the soul are in union, it is a very different state of things; for they can then do nothing whatever, because the understanding is as it were surprised. The will loves more than the understanding knows; but the understanding does not know that the will loves, nor what it is doing, so as to be able in any way to speak of it. As to the memory, the soul, I think, has none then, nor any power of thinking, nor are the senses awake, but rather as lost, so that the soul may be the more occupied with the object of its fruition: so it seems to me. They are lost but for a brief interval; it passes quickly away. By the wealth of humility, and other virtues and desires, left in the soul after this may be learnt how great the blessing is that flows from this grace, but it cannot be told what it is"¹²⁹. Also the pleasure and delight are greater than in the former state: "It is a sleep of the powers of the soul, which are not wholly lost, nor yet understanding how they are at work. The pleasure, sweetness, and delight are incomparably greater than in the former state of prayer... To me it seems

128 *Camino*, ch. 31,5. It is known that Master Eckhart proposes Martha, not Mary, as the ultimate model for Christians (See Martín Velasco: *El fenómeno místico*, p. 483). However, this does not seem Saint Teresa's thought, as she rather thinks in a harmonious union of both.

129 *Relaciones* 5, 6.

to be nothing else but a death, as it were, to all the things of this world, and a fruition of God¹³⁰. She sees that the union is greater than in the former stage but not complete: “I knew well enough that it was not altogether the union of all the faculties, and yet most certainly it was higher than the previous state of prayer; but I confess that I could not determine and understand the difference... I knew well that it was the work of God, but I never was able to understand the manner of His working here; for, in fact, the faculties are almost all completely in union, yet not so absorbed that they do not act”.

On the other hand, who experiences this union will overcome all the afflictions. The Saint confesses that she enjoyed this kind of prayer for several years and never understood it: “It is now some five or six years, I believe, since our Lord raised me to this state of prayer, in its fullness, and that more than once,—and I never understood it, and never could explain it”.

To those who deplore the fact that they don’t receive this grace Saint Teresa ensures that they will receive it if they follow the will of God: “The advantage of entering is so great, that it is well that none should despair of doing so because God does not give them the supernatural gifts described above. With the help of divine grace true union can always be attained by forcing ourselves to renounce our own will and by following the will of God in all things¹³¹.”

Once again, Martha and Mary together: “It differs from the prayer of quiet, of which I have spoken, though it does seem as if it were all one with it. In that prayer, the soul, which would willingly neither stir nor move, is delighting in the holy repose of Mary; but in this prayer it can be like Martha also. Accordingly, the soul is, as it were, living the active and contemplative life at once, and is able to apply itself to works of charity and the affairs of its state, and to spiritual reading. Still, those who arrive at this state, are not wholly masters of themselves, and are well aware that the better part of the soul is elsewhere¹³².”

130 *Vida*, ch. 16, 1-3.

131 *Moradas* 5, ch. 3, 3.

132 *Vida*, ch. 17, 4.

In the transformation that this union causes in the soul, the love for the neighbor emerges vigorously: “I think the most certain sign that we keep these two commandments is that we have a genuine love for others. We cannot know whether we love God although there may be strong reasons for thinking so, but there can be no doubt about whether we love our neighbor or not. Be sure that in proportion as you advance in fraternal charity, you are increasing in your love of God, for His Majesty bears so tender an affection for us that I cannot doubt He will repay our love for others by augmenting, in a thousand different ways, that which we bear for Him”¹³³.

4. *Rapture or ecstasy or suspension*: It is also about the union with God; but the Saint shows the difference with the former stage: “The difference between union and trance is this, that the latter lasts longer and is more visible outwardly, because the breathing gradually diminishes, so that it becomes impossible to speak or to open the eyes; and though this very thing occurs when the soul is in union, there is more violence in a trance for the natural warmth vanishes, I know not how, when the rapture is deep; and in all these kinds of prayer there is more or less of this. When it is deep, as I was saying, the hands become cold, and sometimes stiff and straight as pieces of wood; as to the body, if the rapture comes on when it is standing or kneeling, it remains so; and the soul is so full of the joy of that which our Lord is setting before it, that it seems to forget to animate the body, and abandons it. If the rapture lasts, the nerves are made to feel it”¹³⁴. We find here an odd yet expressive description of what we usually understand for “ecstasy”. The joy of the contemplation of God is so great that it paralyzes the regular functions of the body, leaving the body cold and stiff. Regarding this state, we can add some other quotations: “What I do understand is that the soul has never been more alive to spiritual things nor so full of light and of knowledge of His Majesty as it is now. This might seem impossible; if the powers and senses were so absorbed that we might call them dead, how does the soul understand this mystery? I cannot tell; perhaps no one

133 *Moradas* 5, ch. 3, 8.

134 *Relaciones* 5, 7.

but the Creator Himself can say what passes in these places”¹³⁵. “While the soul is in this suspension, our Lord favors it by discovering to it secrets such as heavenly mysteries and imaginary visions, which admit of description afterwards because they remain so imprinted on the memory that it never forgets them”¹³⁶. “As the soul is made one with God ...”¹³⁷. “This condition lasts but a short while; I mean in the same degree, for when this profound suspension diminishes the body seems to come to itself and gain strength to return again to this death which gives more vigorous life to the soul This supreme state of ecstasy never lasts long, but although it ceases, it leaves the will so inebriated, and the mind so transported out of itself that for a day, or sometimes for several days, such a person is incapable of attending to anything but what excites the will to the love of God; although wide awake enough to this, she seems asleep as regards all earthly matters”¹³⁸.

There are many parts in which the Saint emphasizes the goods and joys provided by God to the soul in this kind of prayer. Here are some: “O, my sisters! what nothingness is all we have given up, or that we do, or ever could do for a God who thus wills to communicate Himself to a worm! If we hope to enjoy this favor even during our mortal life, what are we doing? Why do we delay? What can repay the loss of the time of a ‘Memento’ in searching for this Lord, like the bride through the streets and squares. Oh, what a mockery is everything in this world that does not lead towards and help us to attain to this state! Even though all the earthly pleasures, riches, and happiness that can be imagined could last for eternity, they would be disappointing and base contrasted with the treasures which are to be enjoyed for ever—and yet even *these* are nothing compared with the possession for our own of the Lord of all treasures in heaven and earth”¹³⁹.

135 *Moradas* 6, ch. 4, 4.

136 *Moradas* 6, ch. 4,5.

137 *Moradas* 6, ch. 4, 8.

138 *Moradas* 6, ch. 4, 13.

139 *Morada* 6, ch. 4, 10.

These gifts and favors of God increase humility and sorrow for the sins in the subject that receives them: “It may seem to you, sisters, that souls to whom God has communicated Himself in such a special manner may feel so sure of enjoying Him for ever as no longer to require to fear or to mourn over their past sins. Those of you will be most apt to hold this opinion who have never received the like favors; souls to whom God has granted these graces will understand what I say. This is a great mistake, for sorrow for sin increases in proportion to the divine grace received... it remembers for what vile things it forsook so great a Sovereign...”¹⁴⁰.

It is surprising how Saint Teresa, having reached such a high degree of mystical union with God, gives such an importance to the humanity of Christ. Also in this she appears as a pioneer, and seems to be aware of it: “You may fancy that one who has enjoyed such high favors need not meditate on the mysteries of the most sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ but will be wholly absorbed in love. I have written fully about this elsewhere. I have been contradicted and told that I was wrong and did not understand the matter; that our Lord guides souls in such a way that after having made progress it is best to exercise oneself in matters concerning the Godhead and to avoid what is corporeal; yet nothing will make me admit that this latter is a good way... Some souls imagine they cannot meditate even on the Passion, still less on the most blessed ... I cannot think what such persons are to meditate upon.... How much less should we willfully endeavor to abstain from thinking of our only good and remedy, the most sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ? I cannot believe that any one really does this; they misunderstand their own minds and so harm both themselves and others”¹⁴¹.

5. *Spiritual marriage*: Saint Teresa describes the experience of a particular person (herself?): “the person I mentioned, after having received Holy Communion beheld our Lord, full of splendor, beauty, and majesty, as He was after His resurrection. He told her that henceforth she was to care for His affairs as though they were her own and He would care for hers: He

140 *Moradas* 6, ch. 7,1-2.

141 *Moradas* 6, ch. 7,5-6.

spoke other words which she understood better than she can repeat them. This may seem nothing new, for our Lord had thus revealed Himself to her at other times; yet this was so different that it left her bewildered and amazed, both on account of the vividness of what she saw and of the words heard at the time, also because it took place in the interior of the soul where, with the exception of the one last mentioned, no other vision had been seen... You must understand that between the visions seen in this and in the former mansions there is a vast difference"¹⁴². And she continues considering the novelty and greatness of this gift: "So mysterious is the secret and so sublime the favor that God thus bestows instantaneously on the soul, that it feels a supreme delight, only to be described by saying that our Lord vouchsafes for the moment to reveal to it His own heavenly glory in a far more subtle way than by any vision or spiritual delight. As far as can be understood, the soul, I mean the spirit of this soul, is made one with God"¹⁴³. "Perhaps when St. Paul said, 'He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' he meant this sovereign marriage, which presupposes His Majesty's having been joined to the soul by union"¹⁴⁴.

This union transforms profoundly the person, as we can see by the effects that the Saint attributes to such union": "The little butterfly has died with the greatest joy at having found rest at last, and now Christ lives in her. Let us see the difference between her present and her former life, for the effects will prove whether what I told you was true"¹⁴⁵. And she describes them in detail: a self-forgetfulness so complete that she really appears not to exist, for such a transformation has been worked in her that she no longer recognizes herself; a strong desire for suffering, though it does not disturb her peace as before because the fervent wish of such souls for the fulfillment of God's will in them makes them acquiesce in all He does; a great interior joy when persecuted... she bears no grudge against her enemies... They fear death no more than they would a

142 *Moradas* 7, ch. 2,1.

143 *Moradas* 7, ch. 2,3.

144 *Moradas* 7, ch. 2,5.

145 *Ibidem*, ch. 3,1.

delicious trance ... “this mansion differs from the rest in that, as I said, the dryness and disturbance felt in all the rest at times hardly ever enter here, where the soul is nearly always calm... It is thus with this temple of God, this mansion of His where He and the soul rejoice in each other alone in profound silence.”

And she adds another surprising effect: “I, too, am astonished at seeing that when the soul arrives at this state it does not go into ecstasies except perhaps on rare occasions—even then they are not like the former trances and the flight of the spirit and seldom take place in public as they did before... In short, sisters, I cannot tell the reason, but as soon as God shows the soul what this mansion contains, bringing it to dwell within the precincts, the infirmity formerly so troublesome to the mind and impossible to get over, disappears at once”¹⁴⁶. In this stage the ecstasies and raptures disappear, though with some exception.

However high...no matter how high the contemplation may be and great the joy with God, the Saint turns down to the floor and claims for ‘works’: “Oh, my sisters, how forgetful of her ease, how unmindful of honors, and how far from seeking men’s esteem should she be whose soul God thus chooses for His special dwelling-place! For if her mind is fixed on Him, as it ought to be, she must forget herself: all her thoughts are bent on how to please Him better and when and how she can show the love she bears Him. This is the end and aim of prayer, my daughters; this is the reason of the spiritual marriage whose children are always good works.”

Teresa, the great contemplative, the lover of God, continues to highlight the importance of service and apostolate, so that ‘Martha and Mary keep together’: “This, my sisters, is what I would have us strive for—to offer our petitions and to practice prayer, not for our own enjoyment but to gain strength to serve God. .. believe me, both Martha and Mary must entertain our Lord and keep Him as their Guest, nor must they be so inhospitable as to offer Him no food. How can Mary do this while she sits at His feet, if her sister does not help her?”¹⁴⁷.

146 *Ibidem*, ch. 3, 12.

147 *Ibidem*, ch. 4, 12.

7.3. *Theopatic state*

The situation experienced by a human person totally invaded by God's action and guidance is called 'theopatic state'. "Pati" means 'to suffer', to undergo the influence or the action of something or someone. Dionysius Aeropagite had already used the term 'pati' referring to the invasion of God in the life of a deeply religious man. Mystics feel invaded by God who transforms, enlightens, supports and guides them. They live with God's life: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"¹⁴⁸. God donates himself to man, who receives him with a passivity that favors the reception of a greater life of an enlightened faith (Saint John of the Cross), a greater life of love, a greater life of filial abandonment.

Martín Velasco acknowledges in these words a new category, that can help us: "We use this expression (Theopatic state) as a new category to design the core and summit of a mystic experience, with a focus on the subject that experiences and suffers it ... It's a recent category, though rooted in the most venerable Christian tradition ... With the help of this new category we expect to be able to capture and play new harmonics of this music"¹⁴⁹.

Henri Delacroix describes it as follows: "A Theopatic state is a state in which consciousness of self is reduced or cancelled due to the purifying process and the ecstatic events... Whatever was previously referred to self is now referred to God, so that the subject, somehow divinized in all its being, is a divine instrument in all its actions"¹⁵⁰.

Saint John of the Cross refers to this 'divinization': "That which the soul aims at is equality in love with God, the object of its natural and supernatural desire. He who loves cannot be satisfied if he does not feel that he loves as much as he is loved. And when the soul sees that in the transformation in God, such as is possible in this life, notwithstanding the immensity of its love, it cannot equal the perfection of that love with which God loves it, it desires the clear transformation of glory in which it shall equal the perfection of

148 Gal 2: 20.

149 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 407.

150 Quoted by Martín Velasco en *El fenómeno místico*, p. 409.

love with which it is itself beloved of God; it desires, I say, the clear transformation of glory in which it shall equal His love. For as the understanding of the soul will then be the understanding of God, and its will the will of God, so its love will also be His love. Thus the soul loves God with the will and strength of God Himself, being made one with that very strength of love with which itself is loved of God. This strength is of the Holy Spirit, in Whom the soul is there transformed"¹⁵¹. In this state, the soul becomes deiform, and participates of the Trinitarian life itself: "Nor is it to be thought impossible that the soul should be capable of so great a thing as that it should breathe in God as God in it, in the way of participation. For granting that God has bestowed upon it so great a favor as to unite it to the most Holy Trinity, whereby it becomes like unto God, and God by participation, is it altogether incredible that it should exercise the faculties of its understanding, perform its acts of knowledge and of love, or, to speak more accurately, should have it all done in the Holy Trinity together with It, as the Holy Trinity Itself?"

We are, therefore, before a sublime gift that God grants to mystics. An anticipation, as Saint John of the Cross says, of the perfect state of the other life: "This, however, takes place by communication and participation, God Himself effecting it in the soul, for this is 'to be transformed in the Three Persons' in power, wisdom, and love, and herein it is that the soul becomes like unto God, Who, that it might come to this, created it to His own image and likeness"¹⁵². This 'perfect state' is the summit of mystical life. It is not only about instants of supernatural enlightenment, but about a whole life that is invaded and transformed by God.

This allows to understand better the wonderful consequences that follow in those who live this state. Firstly, the mystic, who becomes able to take care of ordinary activities and to live them all in union with God. All the human faculties become instruments of God. In this way, both contemplation and action can be harmoniously present in the same person, unified as it is by a more perfect union with God. Martha and Mary are in perfect harmony, and do not need dif-

151 *Cántico A*, 37, 2.

152 *Cántico A*, 37, 4.

ferent moments or acts. In this state God grants to human beings the ability to see reality as He sees it, in its authentic truth. That is why, at this point, mystic can “live in great peace and quiet”¹⁵³, with an inner harmony and with the external world, and with joy for the presence of the beloved. This doesn’t mean to remain still and resting on the joys of spiritual life but, on the contrary, to work more in God’s vineyard.

Two models among many others are surely better known: Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Teresa, a contemplative par excellence, was an action woman, with a great and hard action for the reformation of the Carmel. Martín Velasco says: “She lived a Theopatic state as a complex synthesis of ongoing prayer and external activity, to which she was consecrated by vocation and ‘character’”¹⁵⁴. Also Saint Ignatius combines very well the apostolic activity with a prayerful and contemplative attitude. In his autobiography *El peregrino* he writes: “Siempre creciendo en devoción, esto es, en facilidad de hallar a Dios... Siempre y en cualquier hora que quería hallar a Dios lo hallaba. Solía hallar a Dios en todas las cosas” (Growing always in devotion, in the easiness to find God... Whenever I wanted, I found him. I used to find him in everything). That’s why his close collaborator, Fr. Jerónimo Nadal, calls him “in actione contemplativus” (contemplative in action). Commenting this phrase, Martín Velasco says: “it is an excellent description of the Theopatic state”¹⁵⁵.

8. Extraordinary phenomena

This name is given to unusual phenomena that sometimes appear in mystics, but also in individuals that are not mystics nor even religious.

The list of the extraordinary mystical phenomena is large and varied. They can be divided in two groups: those that appear in the physical reality of the body, and those affecting only the soul or

153 *Llama B*, 4, 15.

154 *El fenómeno místico*, p. 416.

155 *Ibidem*, p. 422.

psiche. Those of physical nature include levitation, stigmatization, ecstasy, tears, starvation (protracted fast), bilocation, etc. Those of psychic nature include knowledge of hidden facts, visions, auditions, revelations, spiritual sentiments, etc. Ecstasy is considered the most peculiar of these phenomena. Ruiz Salvador describes them as “the psychic or somatic impact of an inner experience”¹⁵⁶.

Ch. Bernard emphatically asserts that “they do not belong to the essence of the mystical life”¹⁵⁷. We know that in principle such phenomena can be attributed to different agents or causes: God, human psychology, or other influences, even evil.

Due to their oddity and apparently ‘supernatural’ nature they usually draw attention. But the Church never considered them determining factors to measure the sanctity of persons, nor even to guarantee per se the authenticity or Christian value of an event. We know that in the Bible there are some of these manifestations (visions, dreams, revelations to saints or prophets). However, the New Testament teaches that the greatest manifestation of God is Jesus Christ, and that charity towards God and the others is the first criterion to value the sanctity of the individuals. Prudence is, then, required to accept these manifestations: other data regarding the personal and social context should be examined in order to discern, even provisionally, their authenticity. And we should always be able to relativize their value regarding Christian life.

156 *Caminos del Espíritu*, p. 481.

157 *Teologia mistica*, p. 217.

Part II: spirituality of Saint Joseph Calasanz

1. The sources of his spirituality

Calasanz arrived in Rome when he was 35 years old. In Spain he had lived 9 years of his priesthood, working in several places and in different ministries, some of them quite strong and demanding. During these years he also worked on his spiritual life with the assistance of the Dominican Bishop Friar Felipe de Urriés; the Bishop of san Agustín, Gaspar de la Figuera; and the Carthusian Bishop, former Jesuit, Friar Andrés Capilla. With the first and the third he had lived in community in the Religious Orders where they came from. His activity as Master of ceremonies Seo de Urgel helped him to cultivate the liturgical spirituality. In Rome, during his first eight or ten years he developed relationships with different kinds of persons, visited the holy places of the city and of the Peninsula, and collaborated with several Confraternities (of charity or piety). Towards 1602, he started the ministry of the Pious Schools, living in community with the teachers of the schools. At the age of 45, Calasanz is a priest with a good level of pastoral zeal and a developed spirituality.

His zeal for the charitable ministry was increasingly focusing and specifying, to the point of concentrating all or nearly all his energies in the education of the children, which he considered an authentic ministry for religious and priests, both as a charity and evangelization work. The creation of the Religious Congregation of the Pious Schools at the age of 60 was only the culmination of an institutionalization process of a work that was marked by a particular

style of ministry as well as of life and spirituality. Our purpose is to further explore Calasanz' spirituality, which has undoubtedly been the driver and support of his work, and which marked his work with a particular style and shape.

Without undervaluing the Spanish roots of his spirituality, we find in Rome two powerful sources of spirituality that nourished our Saint abundantly: the Franciscan and the Discalced Carmelite Spirituality. To these we will add some data on the spirituality of Antonio Cordeses, who seems to have been also a source of spirituality for Calasanz.

1.1. The Franciscan spirituality

Calasanz' approach to the Franciscans

Towards the middle of May 1592, Calasanz was staying in the palace of Cardinal Colonna, next to the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles, ran by the Franciscan Conventuals. Calasanz immediately started to visit their church and became friend of the Religious. In particular, of two of them: Fr. Jacobo Bagnacavallo and Fr. Juan Bautista Larino, who afterwards became Superior Generals of the Order and struggled for its Reform. Fr. Bagnacavallo became one of the revisers of the Constitutions written by Calasanz. One of the witnesses to the process of Beatification describes their relationship as follows: "The two above Generals were great friends of the Venerable Servant of God, as well as many other Religious who lived in the convent of the Holy Apostles, where he used to go during several years to engage with those Religious in the exercises of piety, both public and private, and where it can be said that he conceived the spirit of the evangelical perfection through the intercession of the Seraphical Father S. Francis, of whom he was very devout"¹⁵⁸.

On July 18, 1599 Joseph Calasanz was registered in the Confraternity of St. Francis' Wounds, where he stayed until his death. It was known as "the school of mortification", due to the penances that the members used to practice. Their Statutes included "daily Mass,

158 *Regestum Calasanctianum* XIII, 14.

or at least a visit to the Blessed Sacrament; common prayer of the Office every Sunday and days of obligation; practice of charity and mercy; both internal and external humility; their habit (for processions and solemn acts) was a coarse woolen cloth, the thickest that could be found, tightened with a thick rope, with sandals as the apostles¹⁵⁹.

All the biographers state that St. Joseph of Calasanz had a great devotion to St. Francis of Assisi and went on a pilgrimage to Assisi and to Mount La Verna. The first visit to Assisi seems to have been on August 1599, though very likely he went more than once. Witnesses also say that, according to Fr. Joseph, Saint Francis appeared to him twice. Once, he spoke of “the great difficulty to gain the plenary indulgence”; and the second time “he married him with three ladies who represented the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.” They also say that “while in St. Francis’ Wounds Church in Rome, a lady wearing ragged clothing and crying appeared to him saying: I am poverty; everyone flees away from me¹⁶⁰.”

Main features of the Franciscan spirituality

Here we highlight some traces of the spirituality of St. Francis, including some that are reflected in the life of Calasanz:

- Poverty: so present in the life of Francis that he was called “il poverello”, who abandoned the clothes bought with the money of his father (a wealthy trader of the twelfth century’s Italy), chose “supreme poverty” as a distinctive sign of his Order (no private or common possession whatsoever), and expressed the desire of dying naked on the ground in front of the chapel of the Porzioncula.
- Humility and smallness chosen by Francis after his conversion: dressing a woolen cloth as the peasants and choosing the name of “the minors” in a society that was composed by so different classes. Coming from “the greatest people of Assisi,” he decided to be part of the “least, the minors”.

159 Quoted by A. García Durán in: *Itinerario espiritual de S. José de Calasanz*, p. 84.

160 Quoted by S. Giner in: *San José de Calasanz, maestro y fundador*, p. 383.

- Christ in the poor and the sick: thereby, closeness to and veneration for the leper, whom he cared for and kissed.
- Christ Crucified: he wanted to become as Christ in everything and to think in him in every moment. He saw him crying in the forest and saying “love is not corresponded;” referring to the highest love shown on the cross, when he gave his life for our salvation. In his retreat in Mount La Averno, his contemplation of Christ Crucified was so strong that the five wounds of the Crucified appeared in his body as stigmata.
- Love of nature: maybe the most known feature in current society. Francis saw always in nature its Creator. Hence his love and tenderness for every creature of God.

1.2. *The Carmelite spirituality*

Calasanz’ approach to the Discalced Carmelites

The reform of the Carmelite Order, initiated in Spain by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, was expected to extend in Italy. For that purpose, at the end of the sixteenth century three Spanish Religious arrived in Rome and were hosted in the convent of Santa Maria della Scala, very close to Santa Dorotea. This meant that the church and the convent “della Scala” became one of the most appreciated and influential centres of spirituality in Rome during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Calasanz used to visit frequently this place where he received a great spiritual assistance, as well as valuable counseling and aids for the development of the emerging Pious Schools. Fr. Sànthà comments in this regard: “It is not possible to understand most of the life of St. Joseph Calasanz without taking into consideration his intimate and spiritual friendship with the first Fathers of that Italian Congregation of the Reformed Carmel. His close relationships with the Carmelites opened the final path of his life, spirituality and apostolate. They have been, above all, those who encouraged and helped him, even with alms, and contributed to the seeding and sprouting of the first teaching Order”¹⁶¹.

161 G. Sànthà: *San José de Calasanz y su amistad con los Padres Carmelitas Descalzos: Revista Calasancia* (1955), pp. 183-184.

These Spanish Carmelites were: Pedro (de Villagrana) de la Madre de Dios, arrived in Rome in 1596; Juan (de San Pedro) de Jesús y María, arrived in Rome in 1598, considered the third mystic of the Reformed Order; Domingo (Ruzola) de Jesús María, arrived in Rome in 1604, Calasanz's confessor and counselor for a long time.

Fr. Domingo Ruzola founded in the convent "della Scala" the so called Oratory of St. Teresa, a sort of confraternity or school of spirituality. Joseph Calasanz became one of the first members of this confraternity.

Fr. Joseph was very devout of Saint Teresa and a regular reader of her works. In his room he had, among other books, the "*Compendio de las solemnnes fiestas que en toda España se hicieron con motivo de la beatificación de la Madre Teresa de Jesús, fundadora de la reformación de Descalzas y Descalzos de N. Sra. del Carmen*". And he used to recommend with great enthusiasm to his Religious the book *Camino de perfección* (The Way of Perfection): "If our Religion's priests used the time that they cannot use in helping the children to read the 'Way of Perfection' of Saint Teresa, they would feel their hearts burning, as her words are very effective for those who read them with devotion"¹⁶².

Peculiar traces of the Carmelite spirituality

- Recollection and detachment from the world and from oneself, looking for the essential.
- Intense and ongoing prayer, in search of and in dialogue with God.
- Contemplation, as an encounter with God that transforms us deeply, in a progressive and continuous search of the conformation with Christ. "In the Carmelite tradition, contemplation and prayer have been nearly always identified, though it is important to differentiate them, referring to prayer as the door to contemplation. To outline the limits of each other is not easy, but we can surely say that contemplation includes and exceeds prayer, and is much higher"¹⁶³.

162 EP 2860.

163 *El carisma y la espiritualidad carmelita*, posted in the Web.

- Service: the heart that is inflamed by the love of God feels encouraged to radically commit its life to the cause of Jesus Christ, serving the Gospel and the others.

* The Carmelites' model is Elijah, who passionately sought God in his retreat of Mount Carmel (first alone, then with companions), who spoke with him face-to-face from the crack of a rock in Mount Horeb, and with prophetic boldness and burning zeal defended the cause of the living and true God, against Baal's priests who were inducing God's people to prevaricate.

1.3. *The spirituality of Antonio Cordeses*

Personality of A. Cordeses

Born in Olot (Gerona) in 1518 and deceased in Seville in 1601.

At the age of 29 he was studying in Gandía to become a Jesuit. Once ordained priest, he worked as professor in the university that the Society had founded in that same city, where he became Rector. In the Society he also performed other important roles, such as Rector of the University of Coimbra, Provincial of Aragon (including Catalonia and Valencia) and Toledo.

He worked on the "affectionate prayer", a spiritual approach that emphasizes recollection, mental prayer and contemplation. He was closer to the Franciscan spirituality that was then under discussion. In the university and in the Jesuit community of Gandía, where Cordeses resided for a long time, a particular spiritual current started with the aim of promoting contemplative life, somewhat close to the spirituality of the *Alumbrados* (Illuminated, Enlightened). Actually, several young Jesuits went to Orders of contemplative life¹⁶⁴. This spirituality was considered strange to the Jesuit spirituality and far from the principles held in the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. Hence it was

164 "His style (of Cordeses) seems eremitical and friar-like and not of the Society of Jesus, because he is all recollection and silence in his room". On April, 1574 Fr. Román wrote to Fr. General from Valencia: "This Charterhouse (of Portaceli) is our moth and if it is not solved it will do great harm to us. From this school five have left during the last few years" (S. Giner, *San José de Calasanz, maestro y fundador*, p. 332-333).

repressed by the Superiors of the Order. Cordeses, a right and honest man¹⁶⁵, fully accepted the orders of his Superiors. Nearly all his writings remained unpublished until after his death, though disseminated in manual copies. The titles of some of his books are: *Catecismo de la doctrina cristiana* (Catechism of Christian Doctrine, the only book that was published during his life); *Tratado de la luz del alma* (Treatise on the light of the soul); *Tratado de la vida purgativa* (Treatise on Purgative life); *Tratado de las Tres Vidas, activa, contemplativa y mixta* (Treatise on active, contemplative and mixed life); *Tratado de las Tres Vías, Purgativa, Iluminativa y Unitiva* (Treatise on the three Ways: Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive); *Tratado de la oración mental* (Treatise on mental prayer); *Itinerario de la perfección cristiana* (Itinerary to Christian Perfection), translated into Italian in 1607).

Relationship between Joseph Calasanz and Antonio Cordeses

In some of their most renowned schools the Jesuits were instituting “lectures on Theology” for their own Religious students and, later on, for other students. This resulted in some conflict in some cities where there were already universities, with the exception of Alcalá where harmony prevailed. Fr. Giner considers “most probable that in the 1579-1580 course, the theologian student Joseph Calasanz was among the numerous students of the Jesuits’ university” in Alcalá¹⁶⁶. And it is possible, he continues, that there he knew Fr. Antonio Cordeses, who at the time was lecturing in that school. This would be another reason of the appreciation and veneration of Joseph Calasanz towards the Jesuits since he was young¹⁶⁷.

165 Fr. Alcázar writes: “This Venerable Father is one of the most perfect men in all kind of virtues of our Religion, decorated with wisdom, zeal for the souls, charity and love of God, and with everything that can be desired in a perfect Religious and Superior”.

166 S. Giner: *San José de Calasanz*, p. 129-130.

167 In a letter to Fr. Jerónimo de Chieti, written in 1641, Calasanz says: “You cannot give me greater consolation than giving satisfaction and pleasure to the Fathers of this Society ... Continue with due reverence to these Fathers, to whom I had great reverence when I was young, as Fathers sent by God to enlighten the world with their doctrine and efficient example, as it is clearly seen nowadays ... With particular affection I beseech the Lord an increased spirit and fervor in the Fathers of this Society, so that in this second century they double the fruits of the first century, to the greater glory of his Divine Majesty and the greater profit and extension of the Catholic Faith” (EP 3704).

However, we have a document of 1617 where we find a very special relationship of Calasanz with one of the main books of Fr. Cordeses. It's an attestation written and signed by Fr. Bagnacavallo, General of the Franciscan Conventuals, and endorsed by our Calasanz, then General of the Pauline Congregation. This attestation is included in the fourth Italian edition of the book of Cordeses "*Itinerario de la Perfección Cristiana*" (Itinerary to Christian Perfection).

"With this writing we witness that the book entitled Itinerario de la Perfección Cristiana, dividido en siete jornadas, con una Práctica de la Oración Mental y Contemplación (Itinerary to Christian Perfection, divided into seven days, with an exercise of mental prayer and contemplation) was shown to us as a manuscript and a copy given to us by the M.R.Fr. José Calasano (sic), current Rector General of the Congregation of the Pious Schools in Rome, when we were studying in our convent of the Holy Apostles of this city, so many years ago. Since then, Fr. José used to say that he had received this manuscript from a companion of Fr. Antonio Cordeses, a Catalonian of the Society of Jesus, its author. At that time we also came to know that Fr. José had granted another copy of the Itinerario to M.R. Fr. Juan Peña, a Regular Cleric of Saint Silvester in Rome. Our handwritten copy has always been kept by us as something very appreciated and most helpful for the spirit ... Given in Rome, in our convent of the Holy Apostles on the 28th day of the month of September, 1617". And under the signature and seal of Fr. Bagnacavallo, we read: "I, José Calasano (sic), today of the Mother of God, Prefect General of the Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God, claim that the above corresponds to truth, which I witnessed signing with my own hand on the day and year as above. The seal"¹⁶⁸.

Conclusions regarding Saint Joseph Calasanz

- Who gave him Cordeses' manuscript? The document says that "he received the manuscript from a companion of Fr. Antonio Cordeses". "All the indications suggest (says Giner) that it was Friar Andrés Capilla"¹⁶⁹. In fact, who subsequent-

168 S. Giner: o. c., p. 333-334.

169 S. Giner: o. c., p. 334.

ly became bishop of La Seu d'Urgell had been in Gandía, in the Jesuit Novitiate, where Fr. Antonio Cordeses was the Master of Novices; and some years later he had passed to the Carthusians in search of a more contemplative life. Capilla, then, would have encouraged Calasanz to appreciate the book of Cordeses and his spirituality, during the time in which the young priest Calasanz lived with his bishop in the episcopal palace of La Seu d'Urgell, in 1588-1589.

- The interest of Calasanz for this book of Cordeses appears also clear by the fact that he took it to Rome, he made copies of it and gave it at least to two persons: to the conventual student Bagnacavallo and to the regular cleric Juan Peña.
- It is reasonable to suppose the great appreciation of Calasanz for this book and its content, as it is a short treatise on mental prayer and an itinerary to reach perfection and union with God. This appreciation is explicitly shown by Bagnacavallo, and all leads to suppose that it was Calasanz who inculcated it on him since their first contacts in Colonna Palace.
- Other possible consequences that can be drawn refer to the influence exercised by this book. Giner focuses on the institutional impact, as reflected in the configuration that Calasanz decided for the Order of the Pious Schools¹⁷⁰. Still clearer appears the influence on the personal spirituality of Joseph Calasanz. It is sufficient to see the topics addressed in the book of Cordeses, usually in a concise and concrete language: 1) Mental prayer; 2) Penance; 3) Mortification, and life and passion of Christ; 4) Moral virtues; 5)

170 "The spiritual atmosphere encouraged by Cordeses may have influenced the personal spirituality of Calasanz more than it could be expected, and not only his manifestations of strong piety and ascetical-mystical experience of these years (first years in Rome), but also the configuration of the Order of the Pious Schools The excessive austerity and Conventual practices that he imposed on his Institute were more relevant of reformed friars than of regular clerics of active life. The encounter with the Discalced Carmelites and their undeniable influence on these austere aspects confirmed the spiritual attitudes that he had already incorporated in contact with the spirituality of Cordeses" (S. Giner: *San José de Calasanz*, p. 335-336).

Theological virtues; 6) The gifts of the Holy Spirit that lead virtues to perfection, and the virtues of Christ; 7) Contemplation; 8) Supernatural contemplation and union with God; 9º) Affectionate prayer and mystical theology. Many of these topics are frequently mentioned in Calasanz' letters and writings.

2. Physiognomy and personality of Calasanz

Joseph Calasanz died when he was more than 90 years old. This long life resulted in significant physical and psychological changes, some of them due to the evolving of his own nature and history, and others to the action of the Holy Spirit. Let's start approaching as far as possible the human reality of Joseph Calasanz.

We are aware that the external and natural aspects do not condition the sanctity of a person. Indeed, sanctity and mysticism have been present in very different tempers, and without any relationship with physiognomy or physical aspect or temperament. However, our natural curiosity likes to know as far as possible the external and most visible aspects of the persons we love and admire. On the other hand, to know the character that is fruit of nature and of the first education received is important in order to better value the work that the grace of God, with the collaboration of the subject, has been performing in an individual that has walked on the paths of sanctity. We are convinced that in our Calasanz we can clearly capture the work of the Spirit that shapes and transforms his first personality. For these reasons we introduced this section.

We have in the first place the testimony of Fr. Francisco Motes, a priest born in Pont de Claverol, who at the age of 73 sends in 1648 an interesting report on that young priest who stayed in his house when he went to visit his parishes of Ortoneda and Claverol. He says:

“When I was fourteen or fifteen years old I knew him, and I met him many times because he was a friend of my father. He was tall, of venerable look, brown beard, long and white face”
(Bau: Biografía crítica, p. 174-175).

Another direct witness, who knew Calasanz when he was already old, is Fr. Alejo Armini, who received the piarist habit in 1639, and,

after the restoration of the Order, became Assistant General and Superior General. In his book *Compendio della vita del Venerabile P. Giuseppe*, he wrote:

“Fr. Joseph was tall, fair-skinned, lightly pink. His hair was fair and his beard reddish blonde, though grey when he became old, with an ample forehead, large eyebrows and sharp nose. The eyes seemed to be rather small, but in harmony with the face. In short, every part was well proportioned with the symmetry of the face, resulting in a quite noble and majestic look. Even when he became old he continued to be very natural, friendly and polite. Finally, through his modesty he showed the purity of his soul, for which reason everyone loved him and venerated him as a great servant of God” (Reg. Cal. 92)¹⁷¹.

We also have a recent graphological study of our Saint by Raymond TRILLAT, a hand-writing expert. Due to its significance, we transcribe the full text from the French original:

“This writing causes great surprise due to its vital, burning and combative, but always flexible and harmonious force ...

It shows an ambivalence: on the one side a regular compensation between a materialistic element and a reference to the mother who guides his life and supports him; and on the other hand, an elevation towards thinking and poetry, a kind of premonition of events and a protecting psychology that places him in motions mutually interweaving as fish scales and containing the protecting force and the restless and troubled vigilance that he manifested in his social relations, in his intense care for the others.

We have found the central axis. We have identified in this writing the intimate, passionate, generous, expansive level, along with stormy threats from opponents, but above all with a great care for communication and understanding ...

There is a double aspect of educator, protector, leader, a soul with burning but not hurtful movements. Behind the appearance of a demanding and intransigent though compassionate father, there is the need of carrying the guilt of others and assuming their weaknesses.

171 Towards the end of the book, without page numbering.

In his writing there are signs of the Greek culture, as well as a logic, that can be seen in the continuum of his intellectual structure. But traits of intuition, of bold innovating and even revolutionary approaches are amazing and provides him a modern air. He is clearly linked to the past, but he feels attracted by the future, with a visionary strength that appears strange ...

A last comment on this writing is that it shows exacerbations of violence, due to his impetuous nature; however, they never end in aggression, but nearly always in a sort of compensation, buffering and relativization.

I've equally reviewed his last letters, in which the writing shows signs of senility by his trembling hand; but even in these old documents it is possible to find the same fire, the same zeal and above all the same compensation, the same vital exchange between spirituality and realism” (Free translation of Estudio grafológico de San José de Calasanz, COPP, Valencia, 1971).

With the available data we could try to outline a brief synthesis, although surely simple and incomplete, of Joseph Calasanz at the age of 35 years, just arrived in Rome:

- Tall, blond-headed, and elegant look.
- Strength and physical ability above average¹⁷².
- Intelligent and cultivated; however, more inclined to active life than to speculation or theorization.
- Strong nature, very demanding with himself and with the others, tough in meeting his objectives .
- Of strong sentiments, though reserved in their manifestation.
- Sensitive and protecting heart, in particular towards those who suffer or are in danger.

¹⁷² This is confirmed by the anecdotes that his biographers collected during his residence in the diocese of La Seu d'Urgell. Notwithstanding this fortitude, we must not forget that Calasanz had to suffer for many years several evils or chronic illnesses: residual problems from his broken leg, badly cured (Vestri palace); the inguinal hernia (one or two), since 1623; the disease of the liver, at least since 1626, with its recurrent pains.

- Practical, efficient and resolute, “down to earth”; but, at the same time, open to great ideals and prone to projections towards a different future.
- Self-esteem, not without a certain personal ambition.
- A good, pious, zealous, responsible priest, who adequately performs entrusted duties.

3. The spiritual life of Joseph Calasanz

We want to know and to describe, as faithful as possible, the fundamental aspects of the spiritual life of Saint Joseph Calasanz. For this purpose we will review his writings and the narrations of those who knew him closely. However, in many occasions we will have to proceed by inferences and interpretations, as he didn't leave any autobiographical writing or doctrinal teachings on spirituality. We do count with numerous letters (about 5,000) containing advices and guidelines regarding spiritual life and some sharing of personal experiences.

3.1. Conversion and self-detachment

In Rome, Calasanz underwent a real conversion which included critical changes in his life. Between Doctor Calasanz arrived in Rome in 1592 and Fr. Joseph of the Mother of God whom we will see since 1617, many significant external changes have occurred, reflecting profound changes in his inner personality.

a) Conversion

Joseph arrives in Rome at the age of 34, with his brand new doctor's degree, accompanied by influential letters of recommendation that facilitate his access to the Spanish Embassy and the Vatican, with plenty of money (he grants a high non interest-bearing and costly gift¹⁷³), with the explicit intention of obtaining as soon as possible a good office in Spain (maybe at the suggestion of his bishop, to better serve the Church “according to his qualities”); very soon we

173 The chalice he sent to the parish of Peralta, in 1693, with the inscription “Pro ferro, argentum et aurum” (instead of iron, silver and gold).

see him staying in the palace of Cardinal Marco Antonio Colonna, one of the most influential families of Rome. As a result, in three months he obtained what he wanted, a canonry in La Seu d'Urgell (too soon for the Vatican timing). And on this line he'll be moving for some years.

What happened afterwards, that resulted in the significant changes that we will be seeing? Was it a special "touch" of God? Probably it has been a process, with different interventions of Grace, that he experienced and accepted. Several signs of these interventions of God are available. As, for example, the testimonies of Fr. Castelli and the Polish Canon Judiski:

- Fr. Castelli: "I know this because I heard it from him or from others who heard it from him ...Walking around a square, I don't remember which, he saw a group of naughty boys throwing stones, and he heard a voice 'Look, look'. While these words were repeated more than once and he continued to look and try to understand their meaning, he thought: maybe the Lord wants me to take care of these boys"¹⁷⁴.
- And the Polish Canon Judiski adds: "When I asked him once what had led him to found the Pious Schools, he answered: the only reason was the dissipation I saw among the poor children in Rome, who had no education due to poverty and carelessness of their parents. Reflecting on the words of the Psalm 'But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless', I considered this sentence as addressed to me and so I started"¹⁷⁵.

Calasanz, moved by the poverty he found in Rome after years visiting, as a member of the Twelve Apostles Confraternity, the poor and needy families of the outskirts of the city, he felt touched by God to take care of so many children that were abandoned in the streets

174 *Reporting Process*, p. 446-447.

175 *Regestum Calasanctiamun XXX*, p. 653.

of Rome, not learning anything but vices. That he felt “touched” by God seems to be witnessed. How he lived this experience, we don’t know. As a practical man, he soon translated it into action and works. Consecrating all his forces to this task: firstly, collaborating with the existing school in Santa Dorotea, assuming its costs in order to make it a gratuitous school. Soon afterwards he hired houses in Piazza del Paradiso and in Vestri Palace. Children were already hundreds, and Calasanz is completely dedicated to them. His collaborators were also enough. In 1602 he leaves Colonna Palace to live in community with other “operators” of those “pious schools” (charity schools). However, he was also changing internally: he is not ‘doctor Joseph Calasanz’ any more, but only ‘José Calasanz’¹⁷⁶, he doesn’t live in Colonna Palace any more, but in community with his companions in order to improve the mission and to be more dedicated to prayer; he leads a life full of work and great poverty (in 1606 they start begging alms at the Roman houses). And when, in 1600, the Secretary of the Spanish Embassy notifies him that a wealthy Canonry is available for him in Seville, Calasanz manifests his inner feelings. Fr. Berro says: “To the Secretary of the Embassy of the Catholic King he answered: In Rome I found the best way of serving God, helping these poor boys; I won’t leave this for anything in the world”¹⁷⁷. Calasanz, who had arrived in Rome 8 years before with the desire of returning soon with a good office, has changed radically: he doesn’t seem to have any interest in returning to his country (indeed, he will never return) and he only desires to serve God assisting the poor children. A wonderful union of the love of God and of the others, especially the most needed. His decision is very firm, as it will continue till his last breath, at the age of 91. Calasanz has detached from himself and has been filled with the love of God and of his smallest children. A love transformed in deeds, as the mystic Santa Teresa claimed for. This conversion towards a complete dedication to God is witnessed by people who knew Calasanz very well, such as:

176 In a letter of June 27, 1599 (EP 7) we find for the first time his signature as “José Calasanz”, while in the previous letters from Rome he signed as “El Doctor José Calasanz”.

177 Berro: *Annotationi*, tomo I, libro I, Archivium 21-22, p. 73).

- Fr. Francisco Motes, an old priest who had known Calasanz when he was a young priest: “He then went to Rome ... I heard that he claimed for some benefit in his country, but having obtained it, as God had designed him for higher things, a legal action was promoted against him. As it didn’t favor him, he decided to abandon his claims and to consecrate himself wholeheartedly to God”¹⁷⁸.
- Fr. Tomás Simón, who was in charge of providing hosts to the church of Saint Pantaleon: “He came to Rome claiming for some benefits. Touched by God, however, he decided for another style of life, saying that the one he had started was not fit for him (*non faceva per lui*), and so he delivered himself totally to the Spirit and to teach and found his religion”¹⁷⁹.

It wasn’t an “ethical” conversion, as his behavior was not dissolute at all, but a spiritual conversion: he changed the paradigm of his life, a new consciousness emerged in him, and his values, sensitivity and spiritual life were modified. This change was also called “second conversion”. From being self-centered, though with the intention of being a good priest who provided good services to the Church (from a strong and renowned personal status), he shifted to forgetting himself, to spending all his resources (he was heir of the House of the Calasanz in Peralta), not looking for renowned offices, and focusing (‘burying himself’, as some would say) in a school of poor and ragged children, undergoing many economic hardships and a great insecurity regarding the future. Driven by compassion and charity, he started to live new moral virtues such as humility, poverty, personal detachment, and an increasing trust in God. He thus gets free from many earthly attachments, which prepares him to receive further gifts from God, according to all the masters of spirituality. He went through the “purgative way”, a prerequisite of any mystical development, which in his case had been initiated by the “divine touches” suggested by the witness. And for his religious,

178 *Regestum Calasanctianum* XIII, 1,1.

179 *Ephemerides Calasanctianae* 17 (1949), p. 118.

he desires that from the novitiate “the purgative way started appropriately”¹⁸⁰.

We will now see how Calasanz did actually practice some of the virtues that, according to Ch. A, Bernard¹⁸¹, are characteristic features of the ways of mystical ascension and that Calasanz lived in a radical form in his life. Further on we will see other virtues also considered typical by Bernard.

b) Detachment

This virtuous attitude is called with different names among spirituals. Santa Teresa usually calls it “detachment”, assigning great importance to it for the spiritual life, in particular for prayer and the reception of special gifts of God. In the Way of Perfection (*Camino de perfección*), whose reading Calasanz eagerly recommended¹⁸², she speaks of it frequently. For example: “Let us now come to the detachment which we must practice, for if this is carried out perfectly it includes everything else. I say “it includes everything else” because, if we care nothing for any created things, but embrace the Creator alone, His Majesty will infuse the virtues into us ... all blessings are in Him”¹⁸³. And continues: “How it is not enough to be detached from what was mentioned if we are not detached from ourselves”¹⁸⁴.

All this can be seen in Calasanz, both in his life and his teachings. Indeed, a few years after his arrival in Rome he abandons claims for offices and dignities, he moves from the noble residence of Colonna Palace, he detaches from elegant clothes and from the title of doctor and even from his surname. We also see how he spends his money and his patrimony, how he moves away from his country ..., while, “to serve God”, he dresses poorly, he accepts a hard and despised work, and focuses his relationships on the poor and humble people. Later on, during the hard times of Fr. Mario and afterwards,

180 EP 1360.

181 Quoted in Part I, 6.2.

182 EP 2860.

183 *Camino*, ch. 8,1-2.

184 *Ibidem*, ch. 10, heading.

we'll see him detached even from his reputation, disregarding any injustice and contempt whatsoever.

The strength and clarity of his teachings on this virtue should also be noted, particularly those addressed to his religious. He encourages a detachment from all worldly things, which are "vain and fallacious". They should also be detached from self-love and even from their own self, including personal preferences and interests. This detachment, Calasanz continues saying, renders us more attentive to and receptive of the holy Spirit and makes our apostolate more effective.

The following are some of his statements:

- CC 33: "A faithful religious wishing to get the most seasoned fruit in our Institute must consider this exhortation of the prophet as addressed to him: "Listen, O daughter; give ear to my words: Forget your own people and your father's house. So will the King desire your beauty".
- EP 586: "I would want you to be a perfect religious, but you need to have holy simplicity and detachment from everything and from yourself, which few know how to do and I wish you will know" (To Fr. Pietrangeli, n 1627).
- EP 1301: "I will send you the crucifix of Fr. Antonio María, which you should carry as your only guide and authentic bill, as the Apostles ... And the less things you take, the more you will trust in the crucifix, and the more you take the less you will trust. If God gives you this confidence in him, it would be a great benefit and a grace to help others" (To Fr. Alacchi, in 1630).
- EP 1408: "May God give you strength and spirit to help the novices to be humble and detached from the things of the world, so that they may do great things where God is served".
- EP 1466: Ten days afterwards he writes again to Fr. Busdraghi: "Please convey my greetings to Brother Miguel and encourage him to be detached from the vain and false things of this world and to imitate Christ, the hidden treasure that few find".

- EP 4121: “I entrust to Your Reverence the care of these novices ... Instruct them often on how to pray ... Ensure that they cultivate self-detachment and mortification of self-love ... ”.
- Fr. Berro left us this testimony: “I remember having heard him recommending frequently to sweep the schools and to work willingly for the love of God, adding that his Divine Majesty grants spiritual graces to those who work for him ... However, the Spirit of God is so delicate that he is not perceived but by those who are most attentive and have their souls well purified and detached from all things of this world and from themselves” (*Annotationi* I, Vol. I – Archivium 21, p.79).

Poverty and humility are inseparable from detachment and self-emptiness, which Calasanz also lived in a high degree. Saint Teresa advises: “It is here that true humility can enter, for this virtue and that of detachment from self, I think, always go together. They are two sisters, who are inseparable”¹⁸⁵. Let’s say something about these two virtues.

c) Poverty

Calasanz had a great appreciation for poverty. This appears clearly during his religious life but also before. In his great interest for the poor families, whom he visited during six or seven years as a member of the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles¹⁸⁶. This interest focused afterwards on the poor children, for whom he established and ran schools with a total material and personal dedication. However, he and his companions started to feel poverty personally and as a community: heavy debts, food shortages, widespread hardships. In words of Fr. Berro: “Teachers often decided to go away on account of the huge needs they had to undergo, at times of essential goods, and for the debts of the house”¹⁸⁷. This was the situation during the years of Mannini Palace (1605-1611). In 1606 they sought and obtained permission to beg from door to door (though not in their stu-

185 *Camino*, ch.10,3.

186 See EP 4185.

187 *Annotationi*, Vol. I, Archivium 21-22, p. 81.

dents' homes). His life and work are, therefore, supported by alms. As we know, one of the main causes of the failure of the union with the Lucchesi was the issue of poverty that Calasanz wanted for people working in the schools.

Once they became religious, after the approval of the Pauline Congregation in 1617, his poverty acquires more accurate shapes and modalities. Nobody can have money... No one must either have with himself any goods or money (excepting the treasurer, who must be held strictly accountable), clothes should be coarse, personal and community effects should be poor, and food should be sober... Every now and then they felt hardships and shortages, as Calasanz had written in his Constitutions: "try to experience sometimes its consequences"¹⁸⁸, which wasn't a mere rhetorical sentence or religious ideal but the reality that had been lived in the Pious Schools since the first years¹⁸⁹. The legal form that Calasanz used for piarists was "supreme poverty". Piarist could not own anything in particular or in common, nor could have stable goods to ensure future to some extent. This kind of poverty went beyond the prescriptions of the Council of Trent for Religious¹⁹⁰. Apparently, its pattern was the Capuchins' poverty, quoted by him in some occasions¹⁹¹. Anyway, for Calasanz, Piarists are "the poor of the Mother of God"¹⁹².

Concrete applications of poverty of the first piarists:

- Regarding clothing, Fr. Berro's description is: "A full length black cassock, having in the front a little opening on the

188 CC 147.

189 For instance, in 1629 Calasanz wrote: "I would be glad to spend 25 or 30 joules to buy wax for his church (of Frascati), but God knows how hard my situation ... I left the house in Rome with a great poverty in terms of shirts ... and of other necessary things..." (EP, 1185).

190 The Council of Trent had confirmed the individual poverty of the religious, unable to own anything; but authorized the communities to own movable and immovable assets. This was applied in our Order by the Brief of Innocentius XI *Exponi nobis nuper* de 1686. With this change the aim was to provide a greater stability to the schools and the availability of means for the formation of new piarists.

191 EP 135, 729, 2372, 3826.

192 EP 99 and often.

chest, closed with wooden buttons, and a cloak with a length till the knees, of the same black and coarse stuff as the ones used for equestrian clothing; on bare feet and closed sandals, though after some days open sandals, ‘as the apostles’; at the beginning without shirt, but after doctors’ advice they used canvas shirts, very thick and coarse, and eventually they started to use woolen shirts”(*Annotationi*, tomo I, Archivium 21-22, p. 91-92). It was, therefore, a habit as the one used by the secular clergy, but extremely coarse and rude, so that it distinguished them even from the other religious. Sandals were open, as used by the Reformed Carmelites and under their influence.

- Regarding meals, sometimes criticized for their excessive austerity, Calasanz outlines a short description, defensive in tone: “Daily nourishment, though frugal, is enough for any person, and made with food that the poor use to eat; they live by begging or with alms they receive for the love of God. During the harvest season they may collect for the whole year so that they haven’t to stop the work at schools during the year” (A. García-Durán: *Itinerario espiritual*, p. 189, note 828).

Which is the value that Calasanz sees in poverty? Why does he emphasize it so much? In his writing we can find aspects of high spiritual value. In the n. 4 of his Constitutions we read: “And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: ‘What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me’”. It seems that Calasanz provides two reasons: one of a socio-psychological nature (to be poor, as a form of not looking down on poor children or despising them), and the other, of a theological-spiritual nature (to imitate and love Christ who became poor for us). The latter reason would strengthen the first. However, in Calasanz’ heart the reason was only one: the love of Christ, which extends to his least brothers. This love sprouts from the contemplation of Christ, who being poor approaches the least. However, this love is more effective and lasting if it leads us to be also poor like the poor. Otherwise, we would soon despise poor

children and move away from them. This seems to be the approach of Calasanz who throughout his life ruling the Pious Schools will often repeat not to fall into the temptation of doing other works or more glorious and pleasant ministries, such as to preach to adult people, to teach higher sciences, etc.

Let's listen to some precious and far-reaching words, by... which Calasanz shows a tender love for Christ-poor and towards poverty: some are found in the Constitutions and are addressed to all the piarists, others to the Rector of communities, and others to the Holy See advocating the kind of poverty he wanted for his Order:

- CC 137: "Religious must love the venerable poverty - mother of the delicate humility and other virtues - as the strongest defense of our Congregation".
- "We encourage and ask, for the love of the Lord, all Ministers (Rectors) to remember the Lord who, being so rich, became poor in order to enrich his children, and suffered hunger, thirst, warm, cold, weariness, even scourges azotes, thorns, nails and spear, and in his extreme need they gave him gall and vinegar ... and finally died naked on the Cross. So if we want to imitate him carrying a bit of his holy cross, we need to be detached ... and be covered with the mantle of holy charity which leads us to perform with joy the wonderful words of the Apostle: 'charity is not self-seeking'" (*Exhortation of Calasanz to Local Superiors: Reg. Cal. 13, 47*) .
- "Our Religion has been founded with supreme poverty and extreme humility according to its ministry and work of teaching the poor and most poor children, who need more than others that someone breaks the bread for them ... This low exercise of humility of teaching the poor, not implemented by the other religious, could not continue among us without an supreme poverty" (*Memorial of 1644 to avoid changes in the Constitutions: Reg. Cal. 14,64*).

However, Calasanz sees other values in poverty that he wants for the Pious Schools: it shows that love for God is above all the rest, an occasion to encourage trust in God, it encourages humility that pleases God so much, it allows to follow the poverty of the Apos-

ties when they went out to preach without any bag, money or tunic; they attract God's gifts being empty of other affections, they are an example for lay people, it moves us away from lawsuits and disputes, and helps us to keep charity towards everyone, etc.

The following are the very words of the Saint:

- EP 727 a: "I ensure everyone that the more they move away from properties and imitate the holy apostolic poverty, the wealthier they will become and the more fervent regarding the spiritual gifts of the blessed God, who, by his mercy, communicates this spirit of poverty to all our Religious".
- EP 729: "If we have this holy spirit of apostolic poverty, we shall do great things for the service of God and the souls, because the Lord will pay our sincere poverty with abundant spiritual wealth that is so important".
- EP 956: "Regarding that affair ... I wrote that ... we shall not litigate, thus avoiding to gain a bad reputation since we profess poverty and charity towards everyone".
- EP 1725: "Regarding money, forget it, as we are not in extreme need of it. I would be more satisfied if you gave a clear example of holy poverty, because seculars remain very edified when Religious observe it accurately".
- EP 2630: "The more one becomes poor, the more we will love God; some lose this great love due to their extraordinary affection to a book ...".
- "Begging provides them more occasions of being supported by Divine Providence ... so they would make a great mistake if they let go the joy of holy poverty." (*Memorial al Card. Tonti*, 22).

Calasanz knows well that not everybody understands this kind of poverty or accepts it easily. That's why he often insists on it in his letters, as for example:

- EP 1243: "Among the poor, things shall be done with a focus on poverty as well as on humility, or baseness, which we profess or should profess. These being so high, senses cannot understand them" (To Fr. Casani).

- EP 1755: “Regarding holy Poverty, known by few people and embraced by very few of them, the more we take it to perfection, the more we ensure the Order” (To Fr. Alacchi).
- EP 2190: “Regarding Fr. Esteban, encourage him not to use silver objects ... while he is ill, as I didn’t use them during my serious illnesses, even if I could if I wanted. Let him show his love for poverty” (To Fr. Graziani).

Perhaps we could say that in some of its practical applications this kind of poverty of saint Joseph Calasanz was not so appropriate for the hard work of the piarists or for their responsibilities in the educational institutions; however, it cannot be denied that they reflect a high spirituality of the saint, that was nourished and supported by very profound experiences, even mystical. We just mention here the apparition and marriage with lady Poverty, as related by several of his biographers, to which we will turn later.

d) Humility

Humility is another of the characteristic virtues of the piarist Calasanz. It is remarkable that in the very upgrading of the Pious Schools to a Religious Order the Founder saw a further reason to be humble: “This grace (to be recognized as an Order) demands from us a true and deep humility, in order to gain great benefit for us and for the others”¹⁹³. The reason of this is that for Calasanz, the perfection of his Congregation is reached, precisely “with great humility and charity”¹⁹⁴. This humility is particularly required from the priests, as he often repeats¹⁹⁵. Humility is a virtue “that pleases the Lord so much”¹⁹⁶; “without humility we would be religious only nominally”¹⁹⁷. Humility ought to be cultivated since the beginning of the novitiate “to start the purgative way appropriately”¹⁹⁸.

193 EP 82.

194 EP 187.

195 See, for example, EP 1193, 1588, 2083, 2336, 3647, 2264: “If you want to obtain benefit for the people with your preaching you must be humble; otherwise, your preaching will be only words without spirit and utterly useless”.

196 EP 1473.

197 EP 2879.

198 EP 1360.

What is this humility so emphasized by Calasanz? In 1622 he defines it as “to appear as foolish in the eyes of men, allowing to be led as a donkey”¹⁹⁹. These words remind us the “foolishness” referred to by saint Paul, as well as the revelation offered by God to those who are simple, and hidden to the “wise and intelligent”. This deeply Christian attitude was also essential for piarist ministry, which many contemporaries considered as vile and negligible. The meaning of humility is further developed elsewhere when he compares man’s situation with that of a child of two years old “who is not able to walk two steps without falling ... and always needs the help of God”²⁰⁰. The “self-knowledge”, in which the Saint wants us to be on an ongoing basis, should be understood as consciousness of our limitation, fragility and narrow heart, that always accompany us. Self-knowledge helps us to become more humble, more comprehensive with the others and more grateful to God, who continues to love us with generosity, and more ready to love the others. Calasanz, very knowledgeable of human nature as he was, recommends us to consult and not to be stuck on our own ideas. The authentic humility has nothing to do with inferiority complex, but with knowledge of human nature, ours and others’, and help us to be grateful to God for his gifts. At the same time it makes us able to dedicate ourselves with joy and generosity to the service of God and of the others, though by ourselves an unworthy and “useless tool”.

Humility is also important because it is the prerequisite, the humus, where the virtues sprout from. Calasanz often speaks of humility along with other virtues that he appreciated and are very valuable from a Christian viewpoint, namely: patience, simplicity, inner peace, comprehension, obedience, charity ... There are also many and most important gifts for whose reception we are prepared by humility, as Calasanz teaches in his letters: it prepares us for mental prayer²⁰¹; it enlightens our mind with the knowledge of supernatural realities²⁰²; it makes our work more profitable for the others²⁰³; it pre-

199 EP 130.

200 EP 912.

201 EP 1386.

202 EP 130, 649, 726, 1236, 1325, 1448, 1498, 4557.

203 EP 686, 1817, 2947, 3303.

parens us to receive many gifts from God²⁰⁴, humility is the right road to salvation²⁰⁵, the way to perfection²⁰⁶, the sign of predestination²⁰⁷.

It is therefore not surprising that, in the light of so many and so sublime gifts of God to which humility gives access, Calasanz appreciates it so much (“precious humility”²⁰⁸), and wishes that his religious love it greatly²⁰⁹. To encourage them in this respect, our Father Joseph had no reservations to show himself as example, when “washing the plates” or doing collection “with the bags on the shoulder”. It should also be emphasized how enthusiastically he outlines the effects of such holy humility.

We now offer some texts of Calasanz on humility. Though their reading might seem long, a quiet meditation on them may be useful. Conversion should lead us eventually to a detachment from ourselves, entirely focused on God, with a knowledge and a love that meet all our desires.

- EP 0862: “Holy simplicity is much loved by the Lord, who willingly speaks with those that are really simple ... Close your eyes to the imperfections of the others, thinking to be alone in the presence of God, and scruples will not disturb you, nor the faults of the brothers”.
- EP 0912: “Who reaches this practice of deeming himself as a young child of two years old who is always falling if he is not guided, and will not trust in himself but will always implore God’s help. This is the meaning of that sentence that is little understood, let alone practiced: ‘Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’ Learn this practice and try to reach that great simplicity; then you will really find the truth contained in the sentence that says: God speaks to those who are simple”.

204 979, 2385, 4381, 4392, 4521.

205 EP 1333, 2630, 4225.

206 EP 763, 2646.

207 EP 593, 3011.

208 CC 137.

209 EP 1541.

- EP 0979: “May the Lord enlighten you to take the way of holy humility, that is the safe road through which many gifts and graces of God are found”.
- EP 0984: “Regarding advices that I can send you, the principal is to practice holy humility, by considering yourself unworthy of serving God and his creatures ... If you follow this road of self-knowledge and holy humility you will receive so many favors that you’ll be admired of the generosity of the Lord”.
- EP 1160: “May Your Reverence visit them often and encourage them to be humble and fit for such a high exercise, like the exercise of teaching the children, that the world, our enemy considers so low and vile, but practice reveals valid”.
- EP 1226: “Be diligent regarding patience and humility in order to achieve, also for the benefit of others, the inner peace that is an extraordinary gift that the Lord provides to humble people in this life”.
- EP 1236: “The shortest and easiest way to reach self-knowledge and the rest of the attributes of mercy, providence, infinite patience and goodness of God is to look down and give light to the children, particularly those who are abandoned by everyone”.
- EP 1448: “Try to get them used to holy humility through which we will receive from the Lord a great light to walk smoothly by the ways of the Spirit”.
- EP 1817: “The more one is favored by God with particular graces or feelings, the more there is a need to humiliate oneself in order not to lose them, as they can be lost due to presumption or self-esteem. Let us recognize ourselves as ailing instruments of the Lord, as we rather hinder than support his works”.
- EP 2630: “The more one humiliates for the love of God, the more we love him ... Those with something of pride are removed from the love of God because ‘superbis Deus resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.’”(God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble).

- EP 2757: “Regarding washing the plates, I also have done it, even if I don’t work less than those who are at school, and I beg bread in the streets of Rome, I accompany the students, and I am willing to do it at present”.
- EP 4225: “I warn you that those who due to pride don’t want to learn this exercise (writing and abacus) that is so useful to the Order, the blessed God will not accept them in his company, as they didn’t want to humiliate for his love, as our Lord did for our love”.
- EP 4392: “God gives this grace (light to know) to those who are humble, as the prophet said: He provides the poor with understanding. The more one goes low in self-knowledge, the more God exalts him in the knowledge of invisible and eternal things”.
- EP 4521: “With the special affection that I always had for you, I have constantly asked the Lord to transform you in his great servant, imitating his most holy humility, where you will discover the mysteries that are hidden to wise and prudent people of this world and kept for those who are humble”.

3.2. *The Will of God*

Other aspect of the mystic, of the individual who has experienced the closeness and love of God, is adherence to his will. The own will is not cancelled, but it is increasingly identified with the will of who has been found as the supreme good. This causes a transformation in the mystic’s life and personality. The first manifestation of this result is in the will that changes direction. How is this manifested in Calasanz?

a) Readiness and surrender to the Will of God, its compliance in hardships

The life of Calasanz is entirely focused on the will of God. Since he was in Spain, young Calasanz was obedient to his vocation and God’s service. However, in Rome this readiness is expressed in new ways and his priestly dedication shows heroic traces.

A key issue is the discovery of what he calls “God’s commission”, that he accepts with “great affection”, well aware that “to help the

poor little children is something that pleases God so much.” Hence, he was “determined to die before leaving the enterprise”.

Fr. Berro is a witness of this, as can be seen in the paragraph transcribed below:

“He himself wrote to me in a letter that having found a great crowd of children who due to poverty couldn’t be sent to school by their parents, and that for that reason they were lost in soul and body, dominated by all vices that accompany destitution and idleness, and not even knew the Our Father ... and, on the other hand, as he saw that many of them were highly resourceful and knew that with good education they would achieve very good results, he felt pushed (as he told me) by this extreme need of the poor As he saw that in Rome works of charity did not include a way of helping the poor children he thought that God had entrusted him this work, and trusting in his divine majesty he surrendered to this divine will with such affection that he thought to be doing something that pleased God if he helped these poor little children ... For this reason he decided to open the schools ... And he started from that quarter (Trastevere), as the poorest of Rome, calling them Pious Schools, so that no remuneration would be claimed for, but only God’s glory and the benefit of souls” (Annotazioni, Vol. I, Archivium 21-22 pp. 72-73).

A profound faith led Joseph Calasanz to accept the will of God, both in prosperity and in adversity, “with patience and joy,” well aware that God “loves us more than what we love ourselves.” This is what he says in his letters when he was young, but he repeats it more frequently and with greater emphasis during the great suffering he had to endure in his last years. Let us receive everything as coming from the paternal hand of God, he used to say. And it wasn’t only about accepting something that was imposed; Calasanz often says that his deep desire - even a joy - is that the “most holy will” of God be accomplished. This is the “most pleasant sacrifice” that we can offer to God each day. With that purpose he often prays (and asks prayers) that God give us light to know his will and the grace to do it. To deny the own will and to configure it (put it in *conformity*) with the will of God is one of the desires and recommendations strongly emphasized in his letters, particularly in the last decade of his life. And, with an expression that reminds us Saint Teresa and

Saint John of the Cross, he refers to “an exchange with God of understanding and will;” that is to say, not only to accept the will of God, but to change our mind, understanding and will, for those of God, identifying ourselves totally with him. This is inherent to religious, but is also valid for lay people, as he says more than once. The purity of intention with which he acted and his confidence in God, the most amiable Father, bestowed a great strength on him to overcome any decline and to firmly continue in God’s service.

For a fruitful meditation, let’s go back to some of his own expressions:

- EP 0265: “All things, both negative and positive, should be received from the hand of God for our greater good, which we will discover in the other life, or when in this life we conform to his most holy will”.
- EP 1148: “Considering that everything comes from God’s hand and that whatever I do I do it for his love, as he is such a good and loving Father, I patiently suffer anything that happens, decided to die before abandoning the enterprise”.
- EP 1468: “We should all receive from his paternal hand anything that happens, in particular illness. If we could, not only with patience but also with joy, know that they come through his hands, we would offer him a very pleasant sacrifice. For this reason, I encourage you that, bearing in mind how good the Lord is, you praise and bless him, and joyfully do his most holy will ... This joyful conformity with the Lord is a great perfection in a Christian” (to Mrs. Flaminia Racani).
- EP 1673: “Regarding our matters, we must believe that God leads all things for his greater glory and our greater good, though, shortminded and weak persons with respect to his things, we sometimes take for negative what is good for us and for useful what is negative; may we let the Divine Majesty lead the ship, and let’s receive from his most holy hand all he sends us”.
- EP 4097: “I will pray especially for you, asking the Lord to give you perfect conformity with his most holy will; he

sometimes talks to his servants with words, other times with deeds”.

- EP 4220: “May the Lord provide everyone with his holy grace to know how to do his most holy will”.
- EP 4229: “It is necessary, both in negative and positive events, to conform to the will of God, who commands all the events bearing in mind a highest purpose and our good. It is, therefore, a sign of great prudence to know how to receive all things as coming from his hands, and to suffer them with patience and joy, giving thanks for the honor he provides us doing so”.
- EP 4422: “Everyone should seek to have the heart focused on the blessed God, trying to fulfill always his most holy will”.
- EP 4427: “(The person who is really obedient) will always be a true and perfect religious, as he has exchanged with God intellect and will”.
- EP 4453: “With your letter of the 28 of last month, I received a particular consolation, as I could see in it a true spirit of a religious who conforms his will to the will of God”.
- EP 4458: “Receive everything from the hands of God, who loves us much more that we love ourselves”.
- “Once a notable person came to commiserate with him for the fall of the Religion due to the Brief issued by the Pope. After listening, Calasanz answered with these words: ‘The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’” (*Summarium Magnum* n. 54, par. 27 – Reg. Cal. 38, p. 246).

b) Attention to the motions of the Spirit

Calasanz often talks about “the way of the spirit” as opposed to the way of senses or of the way of sensuality. We must “walk”, “follow” the way of the spirit; when we are straying from that path, we must “return” to it through mortification and prayer. A work as ours cannot hold without such spirit. With the light of the Lord we can easily walk on the way of the spirit until we reach into Paradise. It’s

all about a frame of mind, an attitude that is consubstantial to a piarist who lives higher values, that fill his heart and lead him to live and act differently. Who is not “a man of spirit”, “his thoughts are all in senses.” It seems to be listening Saint Paul talking about the “spiritual man” and the “carnal man”²¹⁰, two different moods of being in the world and of being persons. This is the spirit that Calasanz is aware of having received and wants to transmit to his religious: “How I desire to give you with charity that spirit that the Lord has granted to me. I encourage you, with all my affection, to come to Rome and to be with me for some time, so that I could teach you the narrow way that leads to Paradise, that once learned becomes easy and safe”²¹¹.

In other occasions, however, he directly speaks of the Holy Spirit, as the voice of God that comes to us, touches our heart, inspires us, makes us understand God’s matters and leads us to religious perfection unto eternal happiness. To hear his voice we must be attentive and prepare a place for him through silence and purification of our will, that should be free from attachments to anything but God. His voice comes sometimes from our brothers, including the most humble, whom we must consult. It is very convenient to be alone with the Spirit in prayer and carefully scrutinize his directions. Calasanz often invokes the Holy Spirit asking to be accompanied, to know the will of God, to receive the fullness of his gifts, to be patient in front of outrages, and to be ready to accept the divine will, etc.

The following are the words of Calasanz:

- CC 23: “We must warn the Master of Novices about the following: to discern wisely in each novice the deep inclination or direction of the Holy Spirit who teaches the humble to pray with groans and without words. The Master must make every effort to lead each novice through this way to the summit of perfection”.
- EP 0131: “The voice of God is voice of the Spirit going and coming, touching the heart and passing on; nobody knows

210 1 Co 3, 1-3.

211 To Fr. Giovanni Francesco Bafici, in 1642: EP 3913.

where it comes from or when; it is important, therefore, to be always attentive, so that it won't come suddenly and pass on fruitless".

- EP 1148: "May God give you the Holy Spirit with the fullness if his gifts".
- EP 1448: "Get them used to holy humility, through which they will receive from the Lord great light to walk smoothly by the way of the Spirit".
- EP 2161: "I would like to know if (Brother Ambrose) follows the way of the Spirit or of the senses".
- EP 3198: "Having there many priests, with whom to be frequently advised, I'm sure that the Holy Spirit will show his will through someone ...".
- EP 3761: "All should try to practice the virtue of holy humility if they want to achieve true charity and the holy fear of God, and to correctly understand what is relevant to the Spirit".
- EP 3858: "God knows with what affection I desire that you be assisted by the Holy Spirit, so that talking with him privately twice a day you may learn to lead your soul's ship by the way of religious perfection to the harbor of eternal happiness".
- "The Spirit of God is so sensitive that is only perceived by those who are very attentive and have their soul purified and detached from all things of the world and also from themselves" (Berro, *Annotazioni*, Vol. I, Archivium 21-22, p. 79).
- "He was very devout of the Blessed Sacrament, from which he used to say that he received great lights for the ways of the Spirit" (P. Scassellati, *Reporting Process*, p. 103 – TD 116).

c) Prayer

Calasanz had great interest in prayer. In spite of his numerous activities and responsibilities, he dedicated a protracted time to prayer (in community and alone). He also wanted his religious to attach great importance to it. There is no doubt that prayer helped him to discover the will of God and to implement it with great perfection, for the good of many people. We find in his writings many referenc-

es to prayer²¹², while not a systematic and comprehensive doctrine. We would like to know details of Calasanz' prayer, as they would help us to know better the inner life of our Founder as well as to be guided and encouraged in our own prayer.

It is true that his prayer is often a prayer of impetration/supplication: praying God for his health or for the needs of persons who were close to him and of his acquaintances, for the success of the Order's affairs, for peace and harmony among nations, etc. He often asks the prayers of his students, including those of "the little children, that please God so much"²¹³. Quite frequently he asks God "to manifest his holy will, so that his works give the greatest glory to God"²¹⁴.

The importance attached by Calasanz to prayer is reflected in several ways. The very title of the chapter on Prayer in his Constitutions²¹⁵ emphasizes this interest. In fact, he entitles it *Practice of prayer (De orationis studio)*. And is also significant the time dedicated to it: one hour at dawn and half an hour in the evening before supper for mental prayer in community²¹⁶; vocal prayer in community also twice a day²¹⁷ (after dinner and before retiring to the dormitory for rest); and a pressing exhortation to individual prayer while they remain in their room²¹⁸. Furthermore, there is a great amount of recommendations to his religious to cultivate prayer and to never miss it, and, if a religious misses community prayer he must make it up as soon as possible at an opportune time²¹⁹. His own example should be added to the above, as the biographers say²²⁰.

212 The term "prayer" and equivalents appear about 600 times in his Epistolary.

213 EP 2559 and very often.

214 EP 150, 177, 283, 284, etc.

215 Part I, chapter V.

216 CC 44.

217 CC 47.

218 CC 48.

219 CC 45.

220 "Our servant of God, Fr. Joseph of the Mother of God was much loved by his divine Majesty through mental prayer, not only the mental prayer of our Order – an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening – but also in the room. And he taught it to his religious, often raising his mind towards God, even with external signs of it." (Fr. José Fedele: *Ne probationes pereant*, Page 66).

This emphasis is supported by Calasanz' conviction of the importance of prayer for the life of a Christian, let alone the religious. This is clear in his frequent statements, that as wisdom sentences, are present in his writings: prayer is life and livelihood for the soul, the channel that brings all the graces to the soul, the only way to overcome temptations, if it is absent, there is no fruit for anybody, etc.

These are some relevant texts:

- CC 44: "Every religious Institute without practicing prayer is on the brink of relaxation and destruction ...".
- EP 1085: "May all of us have the possibility of retiring to our rooms to pray alone with God, as a religious without prayer is like a body without soul".
- EP 1086: "Without prayer, nobody can last in the service of God".
- EP 1180: "You should forget of yourself and go frequently to prayer, the soul's sustenance".
- EP 1386: "Mental prayer, life of the soul".
- EP 1410: "Prayer, the channel through which all the graces come to the soul".
- EP 1542: "Last week I wrote to you some things regarding prayer, because without prayer you cannot live in peace with God, as it is so necessary to the inner man as nourishment is necessary to the exterior man".
- EP 1755: "I like your feeling regarding prayer, about which all the saints have said greatest things, and blessed is the person who knows how to pray".
- EP 2160: "The spirit of the religious perfection is the hidden treasure in the area of mortification and of the devout prayer" (To the convent of Las Bernardas in Narni).
- EP 2175: "They will never reap benefit for themselves nor for the neighbor without mortification and devotion to prayer".
- EP 3357: "Prayer is the only remedy against temptations".

Prayer, however, must be learned. Calasanz often repeats it to the Masters of novices: it must be taught with patience and diligence, ensuring an environment of humility and recollection, because if the novices “are not nourished with prayer and spirit, they will become obstacles more than a help for the Order”²²¹. In his letter 2974 he identifies some practical means for this teaching: the Superior must use all his ability to teach the beginners, suggesting, for example, concrete acts and senses of contrition, humility, willingness ... and the most favorable corporal positions. Calasanz knows that the practice of prayer is favored or hindered by some of our conditions. He says this in the Constitutions: “in profound silence and relaxation of body and spirit, kneeling down or in another convenient position...”²²². In his letters he often emphasizes the convenience of an environment of silence and recollection, to avoid having the mind full of *trifles*, to hold an austere life-style, without giving free reign to senses or gluttony, for just as how Esau lost his birthright for a bowl of lentils, “sensuals lose the gift of prayer”²²³.

What about Calasanz’ prayer? What was its content? He doesn’t speak about this directly, but from his writings we can make out significant aspects of his prayer. Here we will note some of the most concrete, leaving for afterwards the most intimate aspects. To pray is for Calasanz ‘to talk with God’: “to talk with God with the mind”²²⁴, “to be alone with God”²²⁵, “a conversation of the inner man that promotes the true presence of God”²²⁶. Regarding the content of his prayer, we can make out something. For example, speaking about mental prayer in community, the Founder left a precious text in n. 44 of his Constitutions, in first person plural: “We must endeavor, following the example of St. Paul, to contemplate Christ crucified and his virtues”. Focusing his meditation on Jesus Crucified, Joseph Calasanz adheres to the most primitive and profound Christian spirituality, that has always seen in the passion

221 EP 556, 1386, 2588.

222 CC 44.

223 EP 2197.

224 EP 557.

225 EP 2475.

226 *Regestum Calasanctianum*, XXVII.

of Christ ‘a love to the end’ and the way to resurrection. Through these “virtues” that he contemplates in Christ, Calasanz offers us a wide range of teachings and attitudes, which actually lead us closer to Christ and to his life-style. Regarding his personal prayer, while “he remained in his room,” it is easy to suppose that he did what he recommended to his religious: “acts of humility, contrition, thanksgiving and others acts inspired by the Spirit”²²⁷.

Several witnesses share their vision of Fr. Joseph while praying:

- “He used to say mass with greatest devotion ... He used to look at the image of the Virgin with so much affection that he remained without moving and seemed to be completely absorbed” (The painter Francisco Gutiérrez, *Reporting Process*, p. 317) TD 67.
- “They said he used to spend a great part of the night praying” (P. Francisco Castelli, *Reporting Process*, P. 458).
- “Before the Blessed Sacrament he was with great devotion and attention; when saying mass, his face seemed to shine with divine love” (P. Francisco Biscia, *Ne probationes pereant*, *Regestum Calasanctianum* 31, 143).
- “He showed an extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Virgin, and was always so united to God and meditating on heavenly things: totally detached from earthly things, faithful to prayer” (D. Juan Félix Fedele, *Regestum Calasanctianum*, 31, p. 216).
- “After prayer his face was red (seeming burnt with fire) ... It is impossible to say in few words how this servant of God loved prayer” (Fr. Pedro Mussesti, *Regestum Calasanctianum*, 85, p. 63-64).

Regarding the affections that Calasanz felt in his prayer, little can be found in his letters that, as we know, were nearly all on practical topics of government. However, sometimes it is possible to gaze at the intensity or fervor of his prayer of petition. For example:

227 CC 48.

- EP 94: “I think you do not pray with due fervor” (To the community of Norcia that received scarce alms from their neighbors).
- EP 4130: “I emphasize the need of a warm and intense prayer for the success of ...”.
- EP 4145: “We all should pray with great devotion that the blessed God inspires these Cardinals a holy resolution for the growth of our Institute for the greater glory of his divine Majesty” (During the serious issues of the last years of his life).

We have a letter of the first years of the Pauline Congregation, where Calasanz expresses himself in more affectionate terms; however, he doesn't speak of himself but of a companion, who had died in odor of sanctity, Fr. Gellio Ghellini. In this letter Calasanz shows great sensitivity to appreciate emotions and affections in his companions. It is easy to imagine that he also experienced them.

- EP 16: “as those who have kept transparence and purity in their lives ... he had reached to pray in such a way that he seemed to have greater satisfaction teaching the little children the love of God and to pray ... And I could write more on his feelings when praying and meditating the passion of the Lord, ad on the gift of tears and the burning zeal for the honor of God. As I'm leaving for Frascati, I'll stop here”.

Regarding the method of mental prayer, or meditation, used by piarists, we know the one contained in the *Common Rites* of the Order. The drafting of this method, inspired in St. Ignatius's though with a different format, is due to Fr. Giacomo Graziani, and approved by Calasanz in 1628. We transcribe the full text that we consider very useful:

“Mental prayer has five parts:

1^a) Preparation: In recollection, we start the preparation, which is remote and immediate. The remote preparation consists in removing all the occasions of distraction (companions, books that are not relevant to our profession, mortal and venial sins, and imperfections). Immediate preparation consists in knowing and assessing the quality of the person whom we are going to deal with, as well as ourselves. As that person is Almighty

God, who is to judge us, and we have offended him so many times; hence we feel fear and reverence. Recalling, however, that we have been invited and called by him to this prayer and that he is present and willing to listen to us as if he hadn't anything else to do, we enter with confidence. Thus humiliated and heartily repented, we claim: I have sinned, have mercy on me.

2^a) Place composition: Nothing else than a mental representation of the place where the mystery happens, as if we actually saw it.

3^a) Petition: Ask God that his will be done, and the things we need. This will be the fruit of our prayer.

4^a) Subject or points of meditation: The intellect meditates on the proposed subject. More importantly, however, is the action of the will, moving the affections and leaving out irrelevant speculations. Desired affections are: love, admiration, contrition, gratitude, compassion, joy, hope, conformity with the will of God, imitation of Christ Cristo. These affections are the principal object of prayer, and not the mere contemplation of the mystery or the scientific speculation on it. We must search the right motivations for the affections, as dictated by the Holy Spirit.

5^a) Colloquium: Finally, the colloquium in three parts: The first is adoration, by which we recognize God as he is, acknowledging our obligations towards the infinite generosity he uses in our regard. The second is thanksgiving, for the graces received from him, focusing on general and particular benefits, both spiritual and corporal, known or unknown. The third is the offering: to offer what we are going to do, think, suffer throughout our life and in particular in the current day, uniting everything to the merits of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints in heaven, as well as of the righteous people on earth" (Regestum Calasanctianum, XIV, 74).

3.3. *Serving others, in particular the least*

Another of the pillars of Joseph Calasanz' spiritual life was serving the neighbors. He greatly appreciated prayer, as we have seen; however, prayer didn't move him away from action. According to testimonies, the 'heavenly matters' in which he always meditated didn't hinder him from being immersed in his works. In the motto that he leaves to the Congregation and is placed at the end of the Con-

stitutions²²⁸ –and so many times repeated in his letters– he clearly expresses the inseparable union between the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbors. His love for God leads him to love the neighbor, in whom he sees God. And his love is made up of works, in which he spends the different stages of his Roman life: as a Christian who helps those who are in need, a teacher who educates children, as a coordinator who establishes and organizes free schools, as Superior General of an educational Religious Order.

a) Valuation... Appraisal... Assessment of piarist ministry with the least

The neighbor whom Calasanz loves and helps is any person in need. We will see below the extent...scope of these words in Fr. Joseph's mind. However, his attention and dedication focused on the children, especially the poor children, in an utterly innovative way for that time. For the children he founds the Pious Schools, a work of God without any doubt as he deems it, whose history and development he desires and hopes it to be for "the greater glory of God"²²⁹. In this he follows Jesus of Nazareth's spirit. "What you did to one of the least of my little ones (*minimis*) this you did to me." (Matthew 25,40). This sentence of Christ is stamped in the Preamble of his Constitutions²³⁰, and Calasanz repeats it often in his letters. He considers that the "poor child" is twice least: as a child and as a poor. The will of God, which he eagerly wants to accomplish, and "the best service of God" materialize for Calasanz in "helping these poor boys"; and is firmly decided not to abandon this work "for anything in the world".

However, the work of teaching the children was not only significant and valuable for him. He deems that it should be also for the Church. This is what he advocates in the famous Memorial to Cardinal Tonti, with which he actually convinces the highest Vatican authorities.

228 "Ad Omnipotentis Dei gloriam et proximorum utilitatem" = To the glory of Almighty God and service of our neighbor (CC 345).

229 He often repeats this, particularly in the most dramatic moments of the last years. See, for example, the letters 3007, 3169, 3217, 3324, 3774, 3816, 3821, 3891, 4071, etc.

230 CC 4.

The appreciation of the teaching of children should also apply to spiritual life, according to Calasanz. In this respect we find in his writings certain statements that could seem exaggerated to someone, but reveal much of his spirituality. It is worthwhile to highlight some of them: teaching in his schools “is the highest action that can be done in this life”; attending school “can be placed instead of prayer, when it can’t be done otherwise”; “sweeping the schools and teaching the Our Father is more meritorious than singing the (liturgical) Hours”; going to schools to help “is worthier before God than praying”; the more one becomes able “to help the neighbor for the pure love of God, the more one becomes like God”; “the work (of the Pious Schools), done with joy, greatly pleases God”.

Let’s read attentively his own words:

- “Many people worked for the offer of the parish (of Santa Dorotea) to D. José; but by no means he wanted to accept this charge and the canonry in the city of Seville, of 1,200 escudos of incomes, as he said that for the parish he would have had to abandon the Pious Schools; and to the Secretary of the Embassy of the Catholic King, thanking the offer, he said: ‘In Rome I found a better way of serving God, helping these poor boys; I won’t leave this for anything in the world.’ It was the Holy Year of 1600” (Berro: *Annotazioni*, tomo I – Archivium 21-22, p. 73).
- EP 0791: “May the Lord gives us all an increasing knowledge of the great good that is done, not only by hindering the boys to do evil, but also by teaching them the holy fear of God ...; so that all together transform this in a great service to God, very useful for the neighbor and to themselves”.
- EP 1148: “Be most diligent in teaching the Christian doctrine and helping the souls, as this is the highest action you could do in this life. This work, implemented with joy, greatly pleases God”.
- EP 2174: “I wish to remind everyone that the school, as it is a work of obedience and also of charity, can be placed instead of prayer, when it can’t be done otherwise. To recall this to someone who is very busy is very good, but it should be taken in the right sense”.

- EP 2646: “May the Lord give you his light to know the truth, as it would be of greater merit for him and for each one (of our religious) to sweep the schools of the children and to teach the Our Father than to sing the Hours”.
- EP 4204: “Go everyday, at least once, to the schools ... You can be sure that doing this only for charity you will gain more merit before God than praying, if it is true what a saint, I don’t remember if St. Augustine, said: ‘qui orat bene facit sed qui iuvat melius facit’ (who prays does well, but who helps does better). This is what I do; even if I’m old, I often go to the classes to help” (To Fr. Provincial of Rome, in 1644).
- EP 4453: “Tell them not to do in the Order as the servant that had a talent and hid it ... Fr. Antiogo has a talent to write, but he would have two if he was willing to have the talent of Abaquis, and all the talents to help the neighbor for the love of God...”.

b) Calasanz cares for any person in need

In his Roman life, Calasanz appears as a man who is entirely dedicated to help his neighbor, any kind of neighbor and in any need whatsoever.

Since his early years in Rome we see him helping people affected by the plague of 1596, and aiding the victims of the terrible flood of 1598. We also see him devoted to works of charity in a more stable way in the several confraternities he joins²³¹: the Confraternity of the Twelve Apostles (1595), to visit hospitals and assist poor families; the Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine (1598), to teach Catechism to boys and girls; the Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity of Pilgrims and Convalescents (1600) dedicated to spiritual and corporal assistance to sick or homeless pilgrims; Confraternity of “Santa Maria del Sufraggio” (1600), to pray for the souls in Purgatory.

Since the foundation of the Popular School (gratuitous) in Santa Dorotea (1597), he is increasingly committed with his schools, where

²³¹ Including several confraternities of spirituality or devotion in which he also participates during those years.

the number of students grow speedily. During the first years he combines the work in schools with the participation in the works of the Confraternities. As the schools grow, Calasanz gradually leaves the Confraternities, though in 1614 he registers in the Oratory of Santa Teresa to cultivate his spirituality. The poor children will be the privileged target of his charitable work. In the early years of the Pious Schools, the poor children are the only to be admitted, but soon Calasanz opens his schools to children “of any status²³². The children, therefore, will be the centre of Joseph Calasanz’ life during the second part of his long existence. He is well aware that this is the main work of charity of our Institute, as he often repeats²³³. While utmost intense, however, it will not become exclusive. Reading his letters, it is surprising to see that the responsibilities of the “Prefect General” or the “Father General” of the Pious Schools often include other persons in need whom Calasanz tries to help. Without forgetting his care for all the Religious of the Order, since he deemed himself “spiritual father” of all of them²³⁴.

It is known, for example, that Calasanz, once General of the Order, visited the families encouraging the love of God²³⁵, visited the sick²³⁶ (and wanted his Religious to do the same²³⁷ when they were free from school²³⁸, helped poor families or families in difficulty²³⁹, was always very prone to give alms to persons in need²⁴⁰, to Mr. Sebastián Previsciano he granted a place where to set a shop for his livelihood²⁴¹, he helped single women to enter a monastery or to get married²⁴², he practiced and recommended hospitality²⁴³, he helped

232 First in Frascati, and afterwards in the other piarist schools.

233 EP 23, 866, 3244, 3673, 4138, 4299, 4454, 4469, etc.

234 EP 3386, 4028.

235 Duke of Poli, *Reporting Process*, p. 54, s. 16.

236 *Reporting Process*, p. 512, s. 17.

237 CC 322 y 324; EP 265, 1235, 1410, 1923, etc.

238 EP 2276.

239 EP 673, 1317, 1319, 1322, 2323, 2646.

240 EP 65, 192, 778, 1201, 1385, 1432, 1805*, 2075, 2369, 2416, 2646, 3175, 4137, 4305, etc.

241 *Reporting Process*, p. 494.

242 EP 229, 801, 824, 1504, 1579, 1591, 2416, 2500, etc.

243 EP 3030.

persons in conflict with the law²⁴⁴, he was pleased if his Religious tried to get people out of prison²⁴⁵, he commanded to host in our house and to help any fugitive from justice²⁴⁶, his room was always open to host seriously ill lay people²⁴⁷, he received visits of many persons in search of counseling or consolation²⁴⁸, he confessed and administered other Sacraments²⁴⁹, he encouraged his Religious to help the associations or congregations of faithful²⁵⁰. These and many other works of charity were practiced by saint Joseph Calasanz throughout his life, besides encouraging and ruling the life of the Order, being always directly in contact with his Religious and with his attention focused on his 35 houses and schools. Not for nothing he had already written in 1621 that the Institute of the Pious Schools “can be considered a compendium of all the ministries, not only because, if necessary, it helps people in matters in which the others (other institutes) support, but because ...”²⁵¹.

Here are some testimonies:

- “He visited all his students when they were sick, and the other sick people when he was called. I know this from my husband, my mother in law and other persons” (Mrs. Victoria Graca Piantanidi: *Reporting Process*, p. 393).
- “His charity was so great that, having encountered some noble families fallen on hard times he helped them asking from others. I know this from the interested whom I don’t name for respect. Reduced to mendicancy, this Father was anxious seeing them in such a state and he used to help them the best he could, with bread, wine, oil and some other needs” (Mrs. Laura Riccia: *Reporting Process*, p. 328).

244 EP 1055, 1201.

245 EP 2917.

246 EP 1843.

247 EP 499.

248 Fr. Francisco Sannazzaro, *Reporting Process*, p. 683, s. 20.

249 Fr. Francisco Biscia, *Ne probationes pereant*, P. 144.

250 EP 274, 2889, 2904.

251 *Memorial al cardenal Tonti*, n. 25.

- “I also remember that, in times of Urban VIII of holy memory, a Knight (Count Malatesta)... had been blamed for some crimes and all his goods were seized and his family (mother and three daughters) reduced to extreme poverty... they went to Fr. Joseph, who gave them food until they turned to a better situation” (Fr. José Fedele: *Summarium magnum*, n. 34 – Reg. Cal. 38, p. 168).

Of course, all these activities and responsibilities demanded from Saint Joseph Calasanz a great effort and many difficulties, as he himself acknowledges, though always undergone with great spirit and total fidelity to the will of God.

- EP 0578: “I cannot answer Fr. Gio. Stefano nor Fr. Bernardino because I’m too busy at present” (January, 1627).
- EP 2229: “Fr. Genaro writes to me, but now I cannot answer because it is too late and I’m busy with many other letters” (May, 1634).
- EP 2237: “I don’t write more because I’m alone and too tired; to the others I will write only to answer urgent matters”.
- EP 1433: “I’m so busy that I couldn’t read the testament”.

3.4. The ideal of the “mixed life”

The specific way in which he wanted to combine prayer and works is reflected in his famous form of “mixed life,” that the Founder wanted for his Religious.

In religious environments it had become usual to place in the highest level of appreciation a life that is devoted to prayer and to contemplation of the divinity. As if our target as human beings should be to dedicate all our time and energies to the Being from whom we have received the existence, and to be in his presence in order to know him better and praise him ever more. This has been called “contemplative life”: a life primarily devoted to pray, to meditate and to praise God. This is the most reasonable and worthy action we, as intelligent creatures, can perform in front of our Creator; and is also our greatest good, because absolute truth and beauty reside in him. Also in Christian environments we find this way of thinking, maybe due to the influence of Platonism.

However, Jesus Christ changed this perspective. With his example and his doctrine he placed love in the first place, which includes helping our neighbor. This is the meaning of the parable of the Last Judgement, reflected in chapter 25 of the gospel of Matthew. And during his public life, Jesus spent his days teaching, healing, hosting sinners and emarginated people.

Moreover, our corporal nature does not allow us to neglect material requirements. Nor our social nature allows us to ignore our brothers' needs. All this leads to discover the value of action, especially the action in favor of brothers in need. Increasingly often there are Christians who devote their energies to help needed people. In the early Church there were already persons who dedicated time to assist widows and orphans. In the Middle Ages there are hospitals and hospices that emerge with the desire of imitating Christ who heals sick and abandoned people. Shortly afterwards there will appear some individuals who will take over as their mission to preach to the ignorant people, emulating Christ and the Apostles. In the Renaissance there are Orders and Congregations of active life that proliferate with a strong dedication to the dissemination of the kingdom of God through a variety of ministries. The love of God led them to be devoted to the service of their brothers. With God in their hearts and service in their lips and hands or feet. In this way, many men and women have tried to match the best of the "contemplative life" with the best of the "active life", imitating Jesus Christ who during the night cultivated intimacy with the Father and during the day he preached and made present the kingdom with his deeds.

Throughout modernity, "contemplative life" remains as a sign of the absolute value of God, but action and service become increasingly visible. This results in a new language, such as "to be contemplative in action", "to transform life in prayer", "to transform work in prayer", etc., with which it was intended to reflect the ideal of getting life and action to be transformed in prayer, because everything is made by God and in his presence. In the effective service to the neighbor, the love of God becomes evident and increases. The ideal of these Christians is, therefore, to live deeply united to God and truly committed to their brothers.

The expression "contemplative in action", long applied to saint Ignatius, has been also applied to numerous persons of our recent

Sanctoral. Saint Joseph Calasanz founded the Order of the Pious Schools, undoubtedly an active life institution. However, he emphasizes that Piarists are a “mixed life” Order, as it had to combine the characteristics both of active and contemplative life. Martha and Mary shall go together, Calasanz repeated to the Piarists. He thus wanted to unite in his religious what was specific in the Jesuits and the best of the Discalced Carmelites, exemplifying in these two Institutes that he knew very well the characteristics of both kinds of religious life. How did he imagine this kind of life lived by his religious? The following texts help us to understand what the holy Founder intended for the Piarists:

- “If it has been given to those with a general or specific ministry of only active or contemplative life, why should it be denied to those with both ministries and who live a mixed life, which is more perfect?” (*Memo-rial to Card. Tonti*, n. 26).
- EP 1573: “Regarding Brother Pedro, called the Modenés, ... tell him to serve God with an active life, but not to forget if he can some contemplative life... As the Prophet David recommends: Works of mercy during the day, and praises and thanksgiving during the night”.
- EP 2475: “I greatly praise the fact that with one or two companions you retire to an isolated place for spiritual exercises, only with God. Mary and Martha will thus be together”.
- “Besides divine contemplation, he had time for works of mercy on behalf of the neighbors ... Prayer and action were mutually supportive” (Fr. Pedro Mussesti, *Vita Breve*, Cap. VII, p. 16).

3.5. Mystical experiences of Calasanz

It is not easy to know these aspects of Joseph Calasanz. He was always very discreet regarding his intimacy, and had a profound and sincere humility. His intense activity, and perhaps his temper too, didn’t allow him to write a spiritual autobiography, as Saint Ignatius de Loyola, Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint Therese de Lisieux, etc., did. So we have to carefully track his writings and listen to the testimo-

nies of persons who knew him more closely. In them we will seek to find, and sometimes to have a feeling, of extraordinary experiences of this man who so eagerly sought the will and glory of God, and so faithfully and so selflessly served him, in his privileged, the poor, until the last moment of his old age.

There is no doubt that Joseph Calasanz lived a very intense *theological life*. His faith, hope and charity were extraordinary, and permeated all his existence. So, if according to many scholars, mystical experiences are the fruit of a theological life and its usual continuation ..., it must be given as proved that Calasanz underwent such experiences. However, we'll try to discover these experiences directly in the life of the Saint, some of which we have been able to guess in what we have already outlined.

a) A "different level" life

This is a feature that experts in mystical phenomena use to emphasize. The mystical experiences that some individuals have undergone led them out of the ordinary way of feeling and reacting. They start to see the world and life in another way. They have felt God's presence with such intensity that everything and every event of this world change their value; these are relativized with respect to the absolute value of what the mystics have experienced. The sense of their life and personality is changed.

This phenomenon appears in Calasanz. He often speaks of "the great difference between spiritual and earthly goods", of "a great treasure that is hidden", of "a treasure that few persons know", of "the invisible and eternal things that we should discover and would give us great peace", ... His reactions are different from those of most of the others, including his religious: his lofty perspective, his attitude towards positive or negative events, his unwavering peace ...peacefulness, his unlimited charity, his continued confidence in God, etc. However, notwithstanding this vision of things, Calasanz never drew his attention from the practical issues of his schools and communities, which he always dealt carefully. His letters are full of concrete comments, advices or commands with the purpose of ruling his Order and works as best he could. This is the way in which he understands to accomplish the will of God, who inspired him to create the Institute of the Pious Schools. However, his background

values and his objectives are not those that usually people have. He always breathes such a wonderful inner peace, strong hope and excellent charity, that it clearly appears he lives in a different level.

Some of his expressions confirm the above:

- EP 736: “I emphasize as much I can that if you want to deal successfully with these issues, ... try to be in good terms with God, on whom all our good relies ... Doing this, you’ll find inner peace, a great treasure”.
- EP 1127: “The Lord not always leads his servants according to human prudence; for this reason, few find the hidden treasure, though many are called to search it”.
- EP 1367: “... religious perfection is the hidden treasure of the Gospel. When it is found ... one leaves all the earthly things and tries to keep it, as something that exceeds all earthly things”.
- EP 3088: “I will pray for you every day in the Mass, that the Lord enlightens your mind so that you may know the great difference between spiritual and earthly goods”.
- EP 4885: “Y will beseech the Lord that he give you an increasing light to know and love the invisible and eternal things, that God contains in himself”.

b) Enlightenments and special knowledge

Calasanz often speaks of enlightenments and of knowledge about God and higher realities. He refers to an “inner light”, a “holy and true light”, an “increasing light.” A light that “leads to know the truth”, that “discloses the mysteries that are hidden to the wise,” that “leads us to the knowledge of supernatural things and of the attributes of God,” that make us aware of “the invisible and eternal things in God,” that provides us the knowledge of “such a great mystery as the Eucharist;” and helps us, of course, to “walk smoothly on the way of the spirit,” “to serve the Lord and our neighbors in a better manner,” and to “make progress in perfection”.

There is something, however, that prepares us as a prerequisite for the reception of this gift, namely the “holy humility,” or “self-knowledge,” the “knowledge of our inner enemies and own miseries”.

In the process of beatification of venerable Glicerio Landriani, who died in the odor of sanctity when he was a novice of the Pious Schools, Calasanz witnessed on his behalf with these words: “He left all the comforts ...; which he did due to the great faith and interior light that the Lord had granted him.”²⁵² Joseph Calasanz also left many things ... And it is easy to imagine that he too had been favored by a “great interior light”. This is, indeed, the testimony of Fr. Francisco Castelli, who joined the Order as a lawyer and became afterwards Provincial and General Assistant, when sharing an amusing anecdote of Saint Calasanz: “If I wanted to note down what the Lord has sometimes communicated, I would have had to write too much”.

If we must believe what the documents say, we ought to acknowledge that Joseph Calasanz enjoyed an extraordinary knowledge of God and his mysteries, as a result of a special light received by the Holy Spirit. A profound knowledge, full of admiration and taste, that made him live with great love and peace, even in the midst of the great troubles and setbacks that he had to undergo throughout his life as leader of the Pious Schools. A deep and vital knowledge, with a special understanding of and closeness to God, that filled his soul with love, peace and energy.

What Calasanz writes to Fr. Carlos Cesario in 1630 is to be read with particular attention: “Knowledge of God is such a great science that even a small portion of it exceeds all human sciences ... Knowledge enables the growth of divine love.” This presupposes the existence of authentic personal experiences: Calasanz is aware of his growth in the knowledge of God, and of the fact of having grown at the same time in the love of God. All this is lived by him as the most valuable thing on earth, from which he receives a joy and happiness that compare with heavenly happiness or “bliss”.

In the life of Joseph Calasanz we see several aspects that are characteristic of contemplation: a profound and intimate knowledge of the divine reality, beyond an intellectual knowledge; great admiration and amazement for what he discovers, that is more valuable than anything of this world; great pleasure and joy, as a taste of the

252 *Regestum Servorum Dei* 41, p. 35 (TD 116).

joy in heaven; love and total attachment to God and his will. Bearing in mind the inner peace that overwhelmed his life, and the testimonies of several witnesses, we can imagine that his protracted prayer was lived by him with peacefulness and inner rest, that are characteristic experiences of contemplation.

See below some texts of Calasanz and of some witnesses:

- EP 1167: “sweeping the schools with humility ..., greatly pleases God. Through this he often gives great light to advance in the practice of perfection”.
- EP 1236: “I’m very sorry for what you express in your last letter, which is not the fruit of humility, because otherwise you would understand that the shortest way to reach self-knowledge and the attributes of mercy, prudence and infinite patience and goodness of God is to look down to the children, in particular to those who are abandoned by everyone. This is an office that the world deems so low and vile that nobody wants to get down to it, but God gives a hundredfold, in particular if this entails persecutions and tribulations, in which, if received with patience from the hands of God, we find a hundredfold of spirit. Few know how to practice this doctrine, so few receive the hundredfold in spiritual goods” (letter written in Spanish to Fr. José Frescio, en 1629).
- EP 1339: “Self-knowledge and the knowledge of our misery and in particular of our ingratitude towards God after having received so many benefits is a good start to spiritual life; if you practice this knowledge with diligence as you say in your letter, you can be sure that over time you will be rewarded in this life with a particular knowledge of God, that is such a great science that even a little portion of it exceeds all human sciences ... And the knowledge of God beatifies man to the extent of his growth in the divine love after his growth in the divine knowledge. I encourage you to have this knowledge as your first concern, after which the Lord will give you the rest of things that the world not even imagines”.
- EP 4285: “I will pray and ask the Lord to give you greater light to know and love the invisible and eternal things that the blessed God contains in himself”.

- EP 4392: "I will ask the Lord, as I did before, to give you the true light to know the truth of the invisible things, that God has prepared for all those who imitate him in most holy passion. Through his passion they will reach the knowledge and loved of these things".
- EP 4521: "Imitating in your intimacy his (Christ's) most holy humility, where you will discover the mysteries that are hidden to wise and prudent people of this world and kept for those who are humble".
- "Regarding mental prayer, he often told me confidentially that the meditation on devout matters and on the Holy Scripture provided him with a great number of ideas and feelings. Talking about the sermons. of a good preacher and the concepts he developed, it was said that they had certainly been provided by the light of prayer; he (Calasanz) engaged in the conversation and let go this comment: 'If I wanted to write down what the Lord sometimes has communicated during my prayer; I would have to write too many things'." (Fr. Francisco Castelli, in the *Reporting Process*, p. 460).
- "He was very devout of the Blessed Sacrament, from which, he used to say, a great light is received for the ways of the Spirit" (Fr. Camilo Scassellati, *Reporting Process*, p. 103).

In these expressions of Calasanz there are clear elements that scholars identify as characteristic of the "illuminative way;" for example: "to be exalted to a (deeper) knowledge of the attributes of God," to receive "the true light to know the truth of heavenly things," "a knowledge of God that beatifies man," "very devout to the most blessed Sacrament from which one receive a greatest light." Therefore, it doesn't seem an exaggeration to say that from these autobiographical manifestations it can be inferred that our Saint had experienced the second degree of the mystical ascension, called "illuminative way."

c) Fruits of the Holy Spirit

In the tradition of the Church much has been said about gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit maintains and makes grow the Christian's life.

The gifts are skills that help us to understand better God's Plan and to readily follow his inspirations to serve the others. The existence and distinction of the different gifts is supported on the text of Isaiah (11,2-3), where the Messiah's qualities are mentioned. The number seven means fullness.

"The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory"²⁵³. This list, based on Galatians 5, 22-23, includes twelve fruits according to the Vulgate, though a comprehensive listing is not meant at all. These twelve are: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, chastity and self-control. The fruits of the Holy Spirit accompany the life of all the Saints. They are like jewels in the life of a person. But in each saint there is a different emphasis on one or the other according to their personal vocation and characteristics.

In Saint Joseph Calasanz many of these fruits are emphasized in his biography. This can be seen in the different "ballots" or judgements of the members of the Commission on the virtues of the Servant of God Joseph Calasanz, in the process of his beatification. For instance, Andrés Pieri summarizes his valuation with these words: "the admirable conformity to the will of God, the rare serenity of spirit, the undefeated fortitude, the illustrious obedience, the eminent and prodigious humility, the sublime hope, the burning and splendid charity, the vigorous forbearance". Three of these members (Galiart, León and Lambertini) explicitly compare Calasanz with Job in the Old Testament²⁵⁴. We now approach the Saint's writings and the testimonies of those who knew him closely, to discover these precious moods of being and acting that developed in the life of Calasanz, by the action of the Holy Spirit, that he decided to follow faithfully and carefully:

Peace, forbearance:

Calasanz was, undoubtedly, a man of peace: he loved and desired it profoundly, and he sought it by all means and in all places.

253 *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* (Catechism of the Catholic Church), p. 414.

254 All these testimonies are reflected in Severino Giner: *El proceso de beatificación de san José de Calasanz*, p. 340.

The great amount of mentions of peace in his writings is amazing. He is interested in **socio-political peace**. It is interesting to note that even when he was dedicated to his schools, he often mentions wars or conflicts between States: in Genova, Monferrato, Venice, Ferrara, Parma, Savoy, the Empire, Flanders, France, Germany, “the Grand Turk,” etc.²⁵⁵. We often read news, comments and prayers related to these conflicts. He desires and prays for a “universal peace” in Italy, in Europe, in Christianity, among Christian princes, in the Church, in the Order...²⁵⁶. He refers to a situation of “peace and peacefulness that pleases God very much”²⁵⁷; a peace for which he will not omit to do what he can do: “I will not omit to do my duty, because I only desire union and peace for these men who govern”²⁵⁸. In other occasions he speaks of peace among piarists and the externals: with the Theatins, the Canons of Frascati, the lay people of Cesena or Chieti, the Jesuits²⁵⁹.

And with a particular insistence he begs and desires peace, harmony and unity within the Order, between the different houses, within each community ... It is interesting to hear his prayers, recommendations and reflections on peace and unity, as we know how he had to face and manage protracted and complex disturbances in the Order in the issue with the Operating Clerics, the Claimants, and the, the intrigues and disturbances of Fr. Mario. It is useful to read his writings in this respect to discover his feelings, the reasons he submits to his religious and the way he faces them: “Rather than being focused on the building, try to ensure peace and union in that house”²⁶⁰, “my will is that all be united in holy peace; they will so... please the Lord”²⁶¹, “then the community is a representation of Paradise”²⁶², “try to put in practice the advice of Saint Paul to cope with

255 See, for example, EP 497, 831, 1690, 1750, 1873, 2576, 2684, 3045, 3259, 3761, 4049, 4090, ...

256 EP 1060, 2882, 3370, 4049, 4080, 4149, 4176, ...

257 EP 1664.1.

258 EP 1708.

259 EP 573, 888, 1708, 1958, 3931, 3997,

260 EP 866.

261 EP 1459.

262 EP 1524.

each other's imperfections, to live in holy peace, which I would like to give you with facts more than with words"²⁶³, "for anything in the world should you break off relations among yourselves or with the lay people. Finally, I recommend peace and union among yourselves, as Christ recommended it to the apostles"²⁶⁴, "I would like you to live in holy peace, as is appropriate to Christians, let alone the Religious"²⁶⁵, "I received your letter ... with great consolation, and I see that in that house they live in peace and union"²⁶⁶.

This is a value (exterior peace, in its different environments) that Calasanz appreciates very much, for which he cares and prays: "I beg it always"²⁶⁷, and commands his religious to pray for it "with the Blessed Sacrament exposed"²⁶⁸, and in the "ongoing prayer"²⁶⁹. Calasanz qualifies this peace as "holy"²⁷⁰, and "worth more than anything in the world"²⁷¹.

We should, then, see in Joseph Calasanz not only the brilliant man who discovered the value of education "from an early age," the tenacious man committed to create and disseminate such schools, a leader who guides many people and schools, a man tempted perhaps by results and efficiency ..., but also the charismatic man who, at the same time that he discovers the importance of education (or perhaps as part of it), he discovers the importance of peace among people, beyond many other values that we often try to achieve or defend, even at the expense of peace.

See below some other texts of the Saint:

- EP 0557: "It is better to own six steps of ground in peace and without disappointment on the part of anybody than twenty steps with the dissatisfaction of only one person".

263 EP 2036.

264 EP 1958.

265 EP 2118.

266 EP 4462.

267 EP 36.1.

268 EP 1060, 1086, 1195, 3871, 4019.

269 EP 4043.

270 EP 1070, 2118, 3667, 3761, 3972, 3990, 4964.

271 EP 2090.

- EP 0866: “Be diligent with regard to the building, but above all regarding peace and union in the house, and that schools be attended with great charity”.
- EP 1246: “Try to be all in holy union. The superior shall be superior in charity, patience and spirit, and keep everyone in peace as a father”.
- EP 3088: “I would tell that it is better to have little in peace and God’s grace, than many things with disturbances and restlessness”.
- EP 3517: “Be in peace and holy charity so that lay people can bear example”.
- EP 3748: “I saw what you have written, and I really pity them; Fr. Giacomo was sent there due to extreme necessity, and only God knows when he will have the religious modesty and prudence to keep peace in himself and in the others”.
- EP 3990: “In our Religion we need Brothers, Clerics and Priests, as all of them constitute one body; nobody should say to the other: I don’t need your work, but each one should work with holy peace according to his talents and for pure love of God”.
- EP 4145: “The things of Religion are to be dealt with without contradictions, if they are to reach their purpose in peace. Each one should express his opinion and obey the orders of the superiors”.

However, we must also focus on another aspect of peace: **the inner peace or peace of the soul**, that Calasanz lived in such a profound, constant and joyful manner, that even today we admire. He, the *Job of the New Testament*, who had to cope with serious issues that for years threatened his beloved work, and even destroyed it, not only he did with patience and fortitude, but also with an admirable inner peace, that only could come from a special action of the Holy Spirit. He refers to it as “inner peace,” “peace of the soul,” “true peace in the soul”²⁷², “peace and quiet here, with greater awards beyond”²⁷³.

272 EP 736, 1226, 4320.

273 EP 4123*.

Calasanz expresses appreciation for peace with different words: “it is a great treasure”²⁷⁴, “an extraordinary gift”²⁷⁵, “I appreciate it more than the house of Frascati and many others”²⁷⁶, I deem a “great servant of God”²⁷⁷, who maintains peace, the Lord “usually grants it to his elected”²⁷⁸.

According to Calasanz, peace is accompanied by other virtues which render it possible. He mentions some of them (underlining added): “with diligence in being *patient and humble*... because God grants it to those who are humble in this life”²⁷⁹, in order to live in peace and quiet, “it is necessary to know *how to overcome the passions*”²⁸⁰, “it is necessary to pray to the Lord that he may grant us more and more patience”²⁸¹, we must have “the religious *modesty and prudence* that are necessary to keep peace in ourselves and in others”²⁸², it is also necessary to have “a great *strength of mind* suffering with patience everything for the love of God”²⁸³, we should understand “in such an occasion, the happiness promised by God to those who *suffer injustices* for the zeal and honor of the glory of God”²⁸⁴.

How did Calasanz live this peace? How should it be lived? Calasanz understands it this way: “it should not be lost by any event, no matter how serious”²⁸⁵, not moving away from it “in negative or positive cases”²⁸⁶. We know that, besides worries and works inherent to the foundation and maintenance of his schools (whose number was dramatically increasing) and his duty as Superior General, Calasanz had to face in the last fifteen years or so of his life very seri-

274 EP 736.

275 EP 1226.

276 EP 1059.

277 EP 2457.

278 EP 4320.

279 EP 1226.

280 EP 3860.

281 EP 2362.

282 EP 3748.

283 EP 3858.

284 EP 4426 (written to Fr. Berro, on November 1646).

285 EP 826.

286 EP 2457.

ous problems...challenges moved by some of his own religious or by very powerful individuals in society and in the Church. However, he lived these years with a profound inner peace. Referring to these inner experiences, Calasanz mentions in his letters “consolations” and “joys”²⁸⁷, as gifts with which the Lord rewards who suffer for his cause. It is clear enough that he had the virtues he deemed necessary to enjoy peace. It is easy to imagine that all this was grounded in personal experiences of Calasanz, as we read in a letter written by Calasanz in 1629 and in a testimony of Fr. Vicente Berro:

- EP 1148: **“I don’t like the word ‘affliction’. Nobody can be more upset than myself, as from so many parts I receive reasons of serious afflictions; but considering that everything comes from God’s hand and that whatever I do I do it for his love, as he is such a good and loving Father, I patiently suffer anything that happens, decided to die before abandoning the enterprise, and so I get rid of any affliction and melancholy”** (To Fr. Castilla, in 1629).
- **“He also said once: Nobody knows how sweet it is to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ, particularly when with only one word God has warned. I know a person, he added, who suffered for ten or even fifteen years with patience great tribulations because God had told him before only one word. What a great consolation with only one word whispered in the heart!”** (Berro: *Annotazioni*, Vol. I, Archivium 21-22, pp. 152-153).

These are two significant texts in the biography of Saint Joseph Calasanz. The first is an extract from a letter addressed to Fr. Castilla (Juan García), on July 7, 1629. Fr. Castilla was sick and he felt afflicted or depressed. Calasanz tells him that he didn’t like the word ‘affliction’. Adding something of great interest: “Nobody can be more upset than myself, as from so many parts I receive reasons of serious afflictions.” The issues with the “Operating Clerics” were starting and the papal visitation presided over by Mgr. Séneca was beginning to manifest effects of concern; not to say about the unpleasant issue

287 EP 1996, 2079.

raised by Esteban Querubini in Naples. However, Calasanz “puts up with patience ... and expels any affliction and melancholy,” while he feels strong and firm, “decided to die rather than to leave the enterprise.” According to Calasanz, these attitudes of patience, fortitude and resolution result from his considerations on God, “a good and loving Father.” However, in the testimony of Berro, a similar attitude results from “a word that God has pronounced in his heart;” a word that has filled his heart of “consolation” and of “sweetness in suffering for Christ.” If we must believe Fr. Vicente Berro, who knew him very well, Calasanz not only became strong due to the consideration or meditation on God’s goodness (which could also be true in the case of Fr. García), but he had also received a particular and very special grace “from God speaking in his heart,” in a direct and transforming communication, as mystical experiences use to be. Its effects show something that is extraordinary: “with patience he suffered most serious troubles” (and with joy, as we will see below).

Doesn’t all this remind us the “prayer of quiet” mentioned by Saint Teresa?: “a gifted peace and quiet”, “invading the whole being”, where “all powers rest,” and where “Martha and Mary go together.”

Before concluding this paragraph, we wish to say some words on **patience**, a virtue that is close to peace and that can be considered its cause and effect. In the life of Calasanz, patience appears as one of his most visible virtues, a likely fruit of his natural fortitude and of the grace of God. Not without reason, in his beatification process, one of the examiners, Cayetano Merati, speaks of “the miracle of his undefeated patience”²⁸⁸. Here are some other texts on it:

- EP 0826: “I encourage you... not to lose your inner peace due to any event, however serious, but to keep always your heart calm and united with God; the greater the tribulations the more you have to pray, because the Lord uses to calm down the soul’s storm” (To Mrs. Angélica di Falco, from Naples, in 1628).
- EP 1996: “May the Lord reward you with spiritual goods and, in particular, with such a great patience that tribula-

288 Severino Giner: *El proceso de beatificación...*, p. 340.

tions be transformed in consolations” (To Mrs. Angélica di Falco, in 1633).

- 3910: “I hope in the authority that says ‘for those who love God all things work together for good’. This is my hope regarding the present issues” (To Fr. Scassellati, during Fr. Mario’s generalate, in 1642).
- EP 4123: “Knowing that those who are ruling now have removed you from your office, I cannot do anything else than encourage you to have patience, showing fortitude and humility as a good religious”.
- “Penalties received and patiently undergone until his death ... didn’t disturb him at all; on the contrary, he used to tell me that he enjoyed dying in the Cross of tribulations as our Redeemer” (Mrs. Laura: *Reporting Process*, p. 336).
- “I know that he had practiced the virtues, and in particular the virtue of patience and tolerance regarding the difficulties he had, while I was out. When I came back to Rome in 1648 I found him alive and I spoke to him ... I found him so patient in that tribulation and so adhered to the will of God that it seemed it didn’t affect his person. This left me greatly edified.” (Duke of Poli: *Reporting Process*, p. 45).

Consolation, joy, happiness, bliss

Another fruit of the Holy Spirit that Calasanz lived with intensity and on an ongoing basis, notwithstanding the serious challenges he had to face. Calasanz often and with different words refers to this state of mind, to this anticipated happiness. It is clearly a very positive and satisfactory state of mind, that provided him strength to continue to work in the midst of so many adversities and caused such an admiration in those who knew him.

He actually describes it in different ways: “greatest pleasure”²⁸⁹, “inner consolations that exceed all earthly ones”²⁹⁰, “consolations that

289 EP 1586 (March 1631): “... be obedient, and you will feel very well”.

290 EP 1662 (August 1631).

exceed all the goods of this world”²⁹¹, “true happiness”²⁹². All this he writes after the above letter addressed to Fr. Castilla, in which he had confessed “nobody can be more upset than me, as from so many parts I receive reasons of serious afflictions.” Moreover, we know that those reasons of affliction did not decline in subsequent years, but became much more serious. However, in Joseph Calasanz those “tribulations become consolations”²⁹³, “any single thing becomes easy”²⁹⁴, and he goes on with his ministry “joyfully”²⁹⁵. It is clear that throughout his life he experienced what he had written at the beginning of his religious life in his constitutions for all his religious: “To prevent the religious from forgetting such great pledge” (CC 96).

Many of these expressions appear to be advices, guidelines or teachings for other persons that Calasanz cares for with paternal zeal. But it wouldn’t be reasonable to think that what he taught others wasn’t practiced by him. Some texts seem to have an autobiographical tone. As, for instance, when he writes to Mrs. Claudia Taultina, from *Quieti*: “If my age should allow it, I would like to go personally to share with you some aspects of spiritual life in which the soul is granted greater consolations that exceed all the goods that can be found in this world”²⁹⁶, or in the letter to Fr. Alacchi: “The more one is favored with some graces or particular senses, the more one should be humble for the sake of not loosing them”²⁹⁷; or in November 1646, to Fr. Berro: “I dislike the fact that in these occasions you don’t understand the joy (bliss) that God promises to those who suffer slander for the glory of God”²⁹⁸. Which are these “graces or

291 EP 3779 (November 1641).

292 EP 162, 3828, 4426.

293 EP 1996 (March 1633).

294 EP 800 (March 1628): “For the love of God everything should seem easy, because love renders easy everything”.

295 EP 91: “Try to be joyful; if you unite patience and joy, you will do meritorious works”; EP 128: “Put all your diligence in teaching the Christian doctrine and helping the souls, the most sublime work that can be done in this life. This work, if done with joy, pleases God very much”, y EP 35, 196, 1360, 1468, 4115.

296 EP 3779 (November 1641).

297 EP 1817 (June 1632).

298 EP 4426 (November 1646).

particular senses” referred to in the letter to Fr. Alacchi? What kind of *passivity* is the one he experiences when “one is granted greater consolations” or when “one is favored?”.

The frequent use of superlatives when he talks of these experiences, given that he is so modest and discreet by nature, leads us to think in the intensity of extraordinary graces granted by God. As we know, the mystics often use superlatives and hyperbolic expressions to suggest something for which they don’t find adequate words.

If we also pay attention to what the witnesses of the process of canonization had to say, it is clear that all this has been lived by Calasanz in an extraordinary way. See below some relevant texts:

- EP 1662: “No ancient philosopher ever knew the real happiness and, what is worse, few, not to say very few among Christians, know it, because Christ placed it on the cross. While in this life it is hard to practice, it includes goods and internal consolations that exceed all earthly ones” (August, 1631).
- “He used to say sometimes that he couldn’t understand how there were persons with so little love of God that they easily offended him ... He also said that who truly loves God considers everything easy, and what is hard becomes soft; there is nothing so bitter that doesn’t become sweet with the love of God; and with prayer we learn to love God” (Mussesti: *Vida Breve* – Reg. Cal. 85, p. 21).
- “When he was taken to the Holy Office at midday and by the public streets ... when he came back I approached him to comfort him; laughing, he told me that in tribulations we needed to have patience and receive everything from the hands of God; and he started to comfort me and to tell me to have patience in the tribulations ... He was so serene in his tribulations that I couldn’t distinguish if he was happier with evil or with good things; I think he rather enjoyed more with tribulations than with successes” (Illustrious Mr. Tomás Cocchetius: *Reporting Process*, Reg. Cal. 30, p. 183).
- “Penalties received and patiently undergone until his death ... didn’t disturb him at all; on the contrary, he used

to tell me that he enjoyed dying on the Cross of tribulations as our Redeemer” (Doña Laura Caetani: *Reporting Process*, p. 336).

- “In all these things (of the government of Fr. Mario), the servant of God never mourned, by writing or by word, but always said: let God act, let’s try to know and follow the will of God, prayer should be our refuge and our consolation” (Process *Ne probationes pereant*, p. 102).
- Due to its autobiographical importance and its relevance, we partially repeat a text already quoted: “He also said once: Nobody knows how sweet it is to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ, particularly when with only one word God has warned. I know a person, he added, who suffered for ten years.... What a great consolation with only one word! (Berro: *Annotazioni*, Vol I, Book 2, *Archivium*, nn. 21-22, pages 152-153).

It does not seem an exaggeration to consider as a spiritual miracle the fact of living not only with inner peace, but with joy and happiness, enjoying the supreme consolations that were similar to the beatific vision (“bliss”, as he calls it). Such was the life of Calasanz during his last fifteen or twenty years. We don’t know how God acted in him, what experiences or revelations he granted him, but we find the effects of a wonderful personal transformation. Hence, it seems clear that the action of the Holy Spirit had to be very strong and close, because only he can work such wonders.

In order to value better all this, it may be useful to know the chronology of some of the main events that caused worries and sufferings to Calasanz in the last stage of his life:

Outstanding dates in the “Via Crucis” of Calasanz	
October 1625	Starting of the Apostolic Visitation of Msgr. Séneca, who dies few months after
Autumn 1627	General Assembly: Approval of the “Operating Clerics”
September 1628	The Commission of the Apostolic Visitation drafts its Decrees, unexpectedly critical and restrictive for the Order
Autumn 1629	Scandal of Cherubini in Naples
1630-1633	Memorials of Religious to the Holy See: complaints against the rapid expansion and other alleged defects of the Order
Autumn 1631	General Assembly (substitutes the General Chapter that cannot be held due to the plague); it decides not to accept new foundations without the Pope’s consent
January 1632	The Pope appoints Calasanz “General Minister, during lifetime”. He is 74 years old
Autumn 1634	Some Operating Clerics pressure to be ordained priests, against what was established. Other issues with the Operating Clerics
Autumn 1637	General Chapter: reluctant attitude; suppression of the Operating Clerics.
1638	The Claimants: some Brothers claim to be considered as Clerics
January 1640	Fr. Mario discovers “Faustina’s case”. Difficulties in his community life
September 1640	Obedience to Fr. Mario sent to Narni. The Vatican orders his return to Florence. Serious community issues. The Vatican defends Fr. Mario
April 1641	General Chapter: a more positive attitude and a serene environment
December 1641	Fr. Mario is appointed Provincial of Tuscany
Agosto 1642	Calasanz and his Assistants are taken prisoners to the Holy Office
January 15, 1643	“In causa Patris Marii” Decree: orders the suspension of the General and prescribes an apostolic visitation to the Order
March 4, 1643	Starting of the Visitation: Ubaldini visitor; suspension of the General

May 9, 1643	Ubal dini is substituted by Pietrasanta who starts to govern with the help of Fr. Mario
September 1643	A “Special Cardinal Commission” is appointed
October 1, 1643	1st Session of the Commission
November 10 1643	Fr. Mario dies. Appointment of Querubini as Superior of the Order
March 10, 1644	2nd Session of the Commission
July 18, 1645	3rd Session of the Commission: it decides to replace Calasanz as General
March 16, 1646	Innocentius X signs the Brief “Ea quae pro felici”: disintegration of the Order
March 17, 1646	Oral communication of the Brief
April 20, 1646	Calasanz receives the printed Brief

Kindness, meekness, gentleness, modesty, simplicity

These are other fruits of the Spirit that are highlighted in the life of Calasanz, during his administration as General of the Pious Schools. Though he had a strong and firm character to achieve his objectives, and in spite of the serious issues caused by persons within and outside the Order after the success of his work in the first decades, Calasanz appears as an extremely kind, meek and modest person during the last stage of his life. This doesn't mean that he didn't defend by all means the work he had created and that, according to his deep conviction, was a work “provided for by God.” This appears clear in his relationships with the others, including his enemies.

This is reflected in his writings and in the testimonies. The first belongs to Fr. José Fedele, who was Provincial in Naples and in Rome, and afterwards became Superior General of the Order. His statement was made when he was 63 years old. The other statement belongs to Fr. Pedro Francisco Salazar, a Neapolitan of Spanish origin, who was chosen by Calasanz to found the Pious Schools in Sardinia.

- “Calasanz enjoyed a unique serenity, being far from any act of stubbornness, so obedient and open with everyone,

that he seemed made all for all, adapting to the qualities and requirements of all the people. I know this because I lived with him for so many years” (Fr. Fedele: *Proceso Ne probationes pereant* – Reg. Cal. 33, p 214v).

- “When he heard something inconvenient, he externally showed great displeasure and at times he warned and punished. However, with the exception of offenses against God, he was very tender and kind with everyone...” (Fr. Salazar: *Reporting Process* – Reg Cal. 31, p. 250).

Both witnesses, well acquainted with Calasanz, testify that he was kind, open and compassionate. Far from the image that we would have expected of a clear-minded and firm organizer of enterprises. But it doesn’t mean that he was lacking energy to correct what was wrong, in particular when the glory of God was at stake. This is the style of the saints, who know how to combine apparently opposed aspects.

How did the Saint value the different aspects of this kindness so admired by those who were close to him? He often recommends the local and provincial Superiors to treat their subjects with “paternal kindness”²⁹⁹, “with all kindness”³⁰⁰, “using with everyone the same kindness”³⁰¹, and “tolerating the imperfections of the subjects”³⁰², “being well with everyone, without breaking up with anybody and assigning each person what he is able to do best”³⁰³. This does not alter the fact, as he warns “that sometimes with some people kindness should be accompanied by severity”³⁰⁴, having “with someone kindness and exhortations, and with others the required rigor”³⁰⁵; however “try always to be patient and to gain obedience through kindness rather than through rigor”³⁰⁶.

299 EP 899, 2828.

300 EP 2797.

301 EP 1713.

302 EP 899.

303 EP 1847, 3654.

304 EP 1396.

305 EP 3196, 3654.

306 EP 1191.

To govern with meekness is even established institutionally in our Order, as the Founder states. This meekness means “tolerating with patience anything, and responding with charity and meekness, changing good for evil”³⁰⁷, which should also appear in the way of rebuking and even in the way material issues are managed³⁰⁸. This meekness and kindness is reflected in the Constitutions of Calasanz and in his appointments of Provincials. See below some texts:

- CC 283: “Likewise, the Superior General must appoint Provincials who must govern them rightly imitating the charity, meekness and kindness of our Lord and not as tyrants but as model shepherds tending the flock, guiding the subjects to perfection more by example than by words”.
- EP 169.1 y 396.1: “When governing, try to be meek and kind as our Redeemer, and surrendering completely to your subjects try to promote their perfection more by example than by words” (Form used by Calasanz for the appointment of Provincials).

Meekness and kindness are mentioned by witnesses in the Process of beatification, and are confirmed by his own words as can be seen below:

- EP 1332: “Hold (community) meetings, in order that everything proceeds smoothly”.
- EP 1361: Regarding some “diabolic meetings” held by some young piarists, he says: “For the grace of God, I solved this with excessive mildness”.
- EP 1567: “Don’t accept them to Profession; put them away with great mildness”.
- EP 3695: “encourage the holy observance, with mildness and charity”.

Calasanz often speaks also of modesty, that he wishes to see in the students, let alone the religious; there is also a “religious modesty”

307 EP 86.

308 EP 1840, 2932.

that should never be missing in our religious³⁰⁹. Usually he seems to understand modesty as composure, externally good conduct, even control of the eyes. But often he relates it also with poverty³¹⁰, mental prayer³¹¹, obedience³¹² and with several other virtues³¹³, not subject to anger³¹⁴ or pride³¹⁵.

Calasanz often speaks about simplicity, even with eagerness. The Italian term he uses is “semplicità”. And most of the times he refers to the virtue of “simplicity”, qualified as “holy”: it is united with truth³¹⁶, purity of intention³¹⁷, humility and poverty³¹⁸, and is accompanied by kindness³¹⁹ and religious perfection³²⁰, is required for obedience³²¹, and is helpful for neighbor’s service³²². God is pleased with those who are simple and he willingly speaks with them³²³. On the other hand, simplicity is typical of our Order³²⁴.

In some occasion, however, Calasanz speaks about “semplicità” in a negative sense. In this case it should be translated as “simpleness,” meaning a lack of discretion/prudence and care, both in the administration of the house or the management of affairs³²⁵.

If Calasanz recommends and desires “holy simplicity” so much that it seems reasonable to think that he lived it to a great extent. As Fr. Fedele says:

309 EP 688, 723, 1053, 1245, 1831, 2148, 2572.1, 3799, 4101, etc.

310 EP 2543.

311 EP 1386.

312 EP 2210, 2581.

313 CC 21, EP 1934, 4000.

314 EP 2600.

315 EP 3509.

316 EP 823, 2608, 3801.

317 EP 586, 1928.

318 EP 2577, 2802.

319 EP 4575.

320 4028.

321 EP 3055, 3147.

322 EP 392, 3853.

323 EP 912, 862.

324 EP 2802, 2677: “In our Religion we must live with holy humility and simplicity, and pride must be persecuted and punished”.

325 EP 3119, 3241.

“Great lover of truth, very mild in conversation ... He never said lies ... nor deceived anybody” (Fr. José Fedele: *Summarium Magnum*, n. 50 – Reg. Cal. 38, p. 231-232).

Hope, confidence

Since the beginning of the Pious Schools, Calasanz excelled in confidence and hope in God. This is the only reason to explain his perseverance in a work marked by poverty and targeting the poor. However, these virtues exceeded all human limits during his last years.

The “supreme poverty”, which he considered so significant for his Institute, couldn’t be imagined without a great confidence in God, which Calasanz saw confirmed by his experience after the long history of the Pious Schools. As he says so clearly to Fr. Alacchi in 1633:

- EP 1961: “If we do this exercise (gratuitous schools) I deem it a great grievance to the Divine Providence... not to have faith ..., having experienced for so many years the Lord’s care for us. Blessed be the Lord”.

Calasanz was not naïve, and had also a great ability to see the right side of everything and to hope in its positive development. This was his approach, for instance, in the early years of Fr. Mario Socci as Provincial³²⁶. Though his spiritual motivation was already clear: “I hope in God’s mercy, that everything will be fine”, “everything should be seen as coming from the hand of God.”

However, Calasanz’ hope has an extraordinary manifestation during the dramatic events of his last years. It is true that to keep up with this hope Calasanz uses human means such as the value of his work, acknowledged by many people³²⁷; the arrangements in search of the support of influential individuals (Imperial Court, Court of Florence, the King and Parliament of Poland ...) ³²⁸; recommenda-

326 EP 3824: “Don’t doubt in doing what has been commanded (by the Sacred Congregation of the Religious); because I hope Fr. Mario will settle things ...”; see also EP 3841, 3842, etc.

327 EP 4341, 4348.

328 EP 4379, 4495, 4569.

tions to religious to facilitate the reconstruction³²⁹. But it is quite clear that the final basis of his hope is God and his mercy, who will not leave aidless so many children in need: “so that nobody can say ‘the children asked for bread and there was nobody to provide it to them.’” Below are some expressions of Calasanz, and we imagine his faith and emotion they were written by him, in particular after knowing the Brief regarding the destruction of the Order.

- EP 4193: “In a few days the Congregation of the Deputies will be held ... As our hope is in God and not in men, we will be praying for his greater glory” (4-6-1644).
- EP 4267: “Our matters are going on as usual and when I see that things are going on different as expected I have more hope in the remedy. With the grace of God, I’m convinced that things will proceed in favor of the Institute” (12-5-1645).
- EP 4276: “I do not lose the hope of obtaining (the faculty to admit novices) as soon as possible, confident in the blessed God and in her most pure Mother” (17-6-1645).
- EP 4309: “I will never lose the desire of helping the Institute, with the hope of seeing it secured again, based on the words of the Prophet: ‘be constant and you will see God’s help on your behalf’” (18-11-45).
- **EP 4344: “At this time, 12 p.m., the Secretary of His Eminence, the Pope’s Vicar, has arrived. He has issued the Brief that contains ... However, don’t worry, because we expect that with the help of the Lord everything will turn out for the best In the meanwhile, let’s be united” (To Fr. Novari in Nikolsburg, the day in which the Brief of destruction of the Order was made known in S. Pantaleon: 17-3-1646).**
- EP 4368: “Our enemies have succeeded with great favors to have the destruction of our Religion through the Brief

³²⁹ He recommends them, for instance, to remain united, to have patience and prudence, to keep the religious observance and, above all, to attend diligently the schools (EP 4492).

.... However, here we have a strong hope ‘in spem divinam contra spem humanam’ (with divine hope against human hope), and we are determined to maintain the Institute until God sends the remedy” (28-4-1646).

- EP 4451: “Here we are hopeful that, exhausted all human means, the Lord will find the way to maintain our Institute; first, he wants to test the constancy of some subjects” (13-4-1647).
- EP 4454: “We are all with great hope that the blessed God will support our Institute, that is based only on the charity of teaching particularly the poor young people” (26-4-1647).
- EP 4456: “We need to increase our courage with the hope of the divine remedy, because it is a great grievance to the divine goodness and providence not to hope until the end; encourage the others to have this true faith and hope in the blessed God” (27-4-1647).
- EP 4459: “Here, up to now the hope in the remedy is growing based on the mercy of the Lord that timely will find the necessary remedies” (11-5-1647).
- EP 4549: “It is true that we have visible, powerful and countless enemies; but we hope that the blessed God will grant us his grace to overcome anything” (17-5-48).
- “On August 22, 1648, he said confidently to Fr. Vicente (Berro): ‘Tell everyone to be devout of the Holy Rosary, that contains the life, passion and death of our Redeemer; and not to doubt, not to doubt that everything will be settled’ (Berro: *Historia breve*, p. 21).

It is a theological hope, indeed: “based on the mercy of the Lord” and “on the words of the Prophet;” otherwise, “it would be a great dishonor to the divine kindness and providence”, “once exhausted all human means.”. According to Calasanz it’s all about “true faith and hope in God”.

It seems that we can, therefore, conclude that such a hope that strengthens “when things go worse”, a “divine hope against all human hope (in spem divinam contra spem humanam)” that

has the effect of a “spirit determined to reach the end,” “while I have breath;” such a hope that is at the same time calm, without a glimpse of bitterness or criticism or desire of revenge ...; such a hope cannot come from a personal temper nor of logical reasoning but from a special grace of the Holy Spirit. A hope that is furthermore nourished by prayer³³⁰ and supported also by the protection of the Mother of God³³¹.

In this regard, we cannot overlook the narrative of reliable witnesses on the intervention of the Virgin Mary to confirm the holy Founder in his hope regarding the future of his work (an event that seems to be confirmed, as we will see later on). It’s about an apparition or allocution of the *Madonna dei Monti*, at the end of his life, who would have come to crown and reward the supernatural hope that Calasanz had kept so heroically during the last years. On the other hand, this event matches with Fr. Berro’s words in *Historia Breve*.

Forgiveness, magnanimity

We are all aware that to forgive is an obligation of all Christians. But it is not easy, in particular when one has been victim of serious and unjust evils. Other virtues or attitudes must be present to render it psychologically feasible, including charity and magnanimity.

Calasanz has been victim of serious and protracted persecutions and intrigues, that eventually destroyed his beloved and appreciated work.

In his ordinary life we already notice that Fr. Joseph was inclined to forgive, and that he recommended this in his letters with great fervor. His attitude was based on the forgiveness we receive from God and on the teachings of Jesus Christ; but it seems that it goes beyond ordinary forgiveness. Let’s see some cases in different stages of his life:

- EP 0086: “It is good to suffer with patience anything and to respond, with charity and meekness, doing good for evil” (September, 1621).

330 EP 4193, 4492.

331 EP 4276.

- EP 1629: “Let’s put aside hatred and persecutions, because as we forgive our enemies, God will forgive us” (June, 1631).
- EP 2593: “We need to forgive anything for the love of God, and even for the good of the Religion, and to love sincerely who has opposed us, because this is the law of Christ, Our Master, and we need to pray for them” (in 1636).
- EP 2646: “The perfection of true virtue consists in suffering defamation and slander from those whom we have done good, and in being ready to make greater goods in their benefit for the love of God. This must be our direction” (in 1636).
- EP 3339: “Accept this advice of mine as Spiritual Father, and go to Fr. Provincial and Fr. Pedro Francisco. Kneel down, ask pardon to each other, and forget it” (1640).
- EP 4178: “Regarding the broken box, forgive the responsible, even if further clarification should be required” (1644).

However, where we notice a particular forgiveness, typical of persons who live in a higher level – the level of the Spirit of God – is regarding individuals who had damaged him and his work more seriously. Not only he doesn’t hold rancor towards them, but he also takes care of them, he defends them and tries to help them even tenderly. Below are some events reminded by the testimonies:

When he is taken prisoner to the Holy Office, Calasanz goes praying that God would forgive Fr. Mario, for whose intrigues and lies he was subject to such a humiliation.

“In the evening of the same day in which he was taken to the Holy Inquisition he told me that he received everything as a special grace of the blessed God ... and that he had asked God to forgive Fr. Mario” (Don Ascanio Simón: Reg. Cal. 28, p. 59).

Regarding the performance of the Visitor Pietrasanta, who during three years decided over the life and future of the Order, his attitude is not of complaint or criticism, but of respect and even of defense. And when he has to explain the situation of the Order – regrettable indeed –, he speaks with sensitiveness, sharing rather than condemning:

- “I can assure that our venerable Father Founder never spoke of Pietrasanta but well, excusing all his actions. And when somebody persisted to complain against him, our Father rebuked him strongly with displeasure because not everybody felt as him” (Berro: *Annotazioni*, Vol. III, Archivium 24, p. 110).
- EP 4131: “It is really true that Fr. Mario, with the favor of the Counselor of the Holy Office, governs and commands the Religion according to his own judgement, against the opinion of many religious, and commands as he wants, even with the signature of the Visitor”.

After the Brief of destruction, Calasanz continues to pray for all those who had damaged his work:

- For the Pope (Innocentius X) “he had always a particular remembrance before God, especially in the Holy Mass and in his devotions, asking God to grant him happiness and blessings in this life and in the other ... I remember that in many occasions he said: ‘After praying for my soul and for the Religion, I always remember to pray for Msgr. Albici, the Counselor, Fr. Pietrasanta the Visitor y Fr. Esteban” (Berro: *Annotazini*, Vol. II, Archivium 24, p. 213).

This attitude of forgiveness shines in a more admirable way is on the occasion of the illness and death of his three main enemies: Mario, Pietrasanta and Cherubini. Unexpectedly, the three passed away before Calasanz, who did his utmost to assist and honor them:

When, a few months after being suspended from Superior General, Calasanz knew that Fr. Mario was seriously ill, he sent him a message saying that he would like to visit him. But Mario, who at the time resided in the Nazarene College, answered him that there was no need for him to worry³³². Calasanz, then, asked Fr. Pedro Casani, who had given the habit to Mario, to assist him, which he did till Mario passed away.

³³² Fr. Caputi shares that in the effort of reconciliation with Fr. General, Fr. Mario sent to him a note, saying: “Father General, I feel bad, and if I have offended you in something I beg you pardon. Mario de San Francisco” (Giner: *San José de Calasanz, maestro y fundador*, p. 982).

On May 6, 1647, Fr. Silvestre Pietrasanta, S.J., passed away due to an unexpected complication suffered after a surgical intervention. The funeral was held in the Church “del Gesù”, because he lived in that community. Calasanz made known to the Rector of Saint Pantaleon “that he would like to have a funeral mass the next morning for his soul, as well as all the masses our priests used to celebrate, and all the suffrages provided for our Superiors”. As some were opposed, he told me (continues Fr. Berro): “They don’t understand how God is pleased when we do good to those who did evil to us ... I said mass for his soul and I have always prayed for him in this last period, with my greatest affection, because in sufferings it is silly to look at second causes and not to God who sends them for our greater good”³³³.

With Fr. Esteban Cherubini, who had sided with Fr. Mario and had caused so much damage and discredit to the Order, Calasanz’s forgiveness becomes a paternal attention. This could be seen when, after Mario’s death, he was appointed Superior General of the Order. The refusal on the part of the Religious was so great that Cherubini “fearing some serious evil, he went to the room of our Venerable Father Founder, who defended him, and finally he was received as Superior. He also wrote to me and to others asking us to recognize him as Superior, as he too called him such. Moreover, he told me that every day he said a special prayer for the spiritual health of Fr. Esteban, and several times a day”³³⁴. After the issuance of the Brief of destruction, Cherubini was disappointed because he wasn’t appointed Rector of the Nazartene College, as he desired and expected. He was left alone by the Religious, until Fr. Scassellati accepted him in the Nazarene College. But soon he became ill “of the worse leprosy”. And there we see Calasanz making all efforts to accompany and to provide consolation and aid to Fr. Esteban. Fr. Berro tells this in detail:

“In certain occasion he told me: ‘Poor soul, poor soul; may God forgive him the evil he has done and may he grant him the grace of repenting and doing penance. Let us commend him to God; it is a great charity to pray for him ... To save a soul is something that pleases God so much’. He used to say these things with such a feeling that moved us all.” “On January 5, 1648, after

333 Berro: *Annotazioni*, Tomo III, *Archivium* 24, pp. 109-110.

334 Berro: *Annotazioni*, Vol. III, *Archivium* 24, P. 112.

lunch he told me: Fr. Vicente, let's go to visit and help Fr. Esteban. And we went walking to Saint Pantaleon and then to the Bazarrene College ... Entering in his room ... he said to him: Father Esteban, how are you? The sick man awoke and answered with great joy: 'Father General, help me, I feel very bad'. And he asked him publicly to be forgiven. The Founder blessed him and encouraged him to make acts of contrition and to hope in the divine mercy ..." (Berro: Annotazioni, Vol. III, Archivium 24, pp. 113 y 115).

The heart of Calasanz was made of this stuff: forgetting the evil he had received, wishing to help who was in need, trying even to excuse the evil done, and always providing signs of affection and of paternal care. No rancor, arrogance or resentment whatsoever, even if seriously injured in so many ways. A heart like the heart of God, who only desires the return home and the salvation of all his children, whatever they might have done.

Charity, compassion

Charity appears in all the lists that reflect the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Not without reason, since it is the "greatest" virtue, the most sublime gift, according to Saint Paul.

In section 3.3 of Part II, we have seen the works of charity that Calasanz performed, the practical achievements of his love for the others. Now we would like to focus on how our Saint lived that charity in his spirit; that is to say, what feelings, what experiences accompanied his external and so admirable works.

In general, with the term "charity" Calasanz refers to our love for our neighbor. The term is frequently accompanied by adjectives that show his great appreciation and even veneration for this virtue: "holy charity"³³⁵, "truly Christian charity"³³⁶, "perfect or pure charity"³³⁷, "of greatest merit before God"³³⁸, "only way to reach Paradise"³³⁹. This charity leads us to "tolerate each other"³⁴⁰, to

335 EP 1477, 3711, 4537, 4570.

336 EP 4202.

337 EP 3930, 4138.

338 EP 4082, 4137.

339 EP 4570.

340 EP 1477, 2045, 4082.

keep “united”³⁴¹, to “help each other”³⁴², “to work with diligence at school”, to confess and “lead young people on the right road”³⁴³. Therefore, it applies to the children, especially the poor, to companions, to the sick and the departed³⁴⁴, and to those in whatsoever need. A charity that should reach everyone³⁴⁵, temper corrections to be done³⁴⁶, put kindness and meekness in our relationship with others. Superiors should excel for their “paternal and fraternal charity”³⁴⁷. But this charity must come from the heart, because it contains inner affection towards persons referred to³⁴⁸.

Charity is, therefore, a benevolence feeling towards the others, towards all those who surround us, that moves in us an attitude of continued support to the others, both in ordinary situations and especially in cases of serious need. The purpose of living in the Order is to help the development of these sentiments of benevolence and to favor the implementation of this attitude to the highest perfection possible. All this suggests that Calasanz lived in his spirit that charity that he practiced and so eagerly he recommended. There are plenty of manifestations in this regard, including the following:

- CC 1: “In the Church of God, Religious Institutes, guided by the Holy Spirit pursue the perfection of love as their genuine goal through their specific ministry. Likewise our Congregation is determined to accomplish it through the specific apostolate entrusted to it by his Holiness Paul V, of happy memory, Vicar of Christ on earth”.
- EP 1640: “I’ll ask prayers from many people, to obtain that this matter succeeds well if it is for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty, to which I feel moved and pushed by charity”.

341 EP 3711, 4116, 4537, 4570.

342 EP 4060.1.

343 EP 225, 866, 3055, 3244.2, 3673, 4454.

344 EP 4406, 4567.

345 EP 3217, 3230, 4064.

346 EP 2340, 3166, 3216, 4538.

347 EP 3164, 3166, 3264, 3698.

348 EP 3164, 3912, 4299, 4387.

- EP 3164: “The more you show a spirit of charity and humility to those who don’t have it, the more you will act according to your office of father and brother, and will give pleasure to God ...” (To the Rector of Florence, 1639).
- EP 3913: “I’m writing a letter to Fr. Juan, in which I tell him with paternal affection how much I desire to communicate to him with charity that spirit ... and I encourage him with all my affection ...”.
- EP 4299: “Teaching the poor, our Institute embraces them with charity”.
- EP 4570: “I encourage everyone in holy charity and union, the only way to go to paradise” (July 25, 1648).

Calasanz appears forgotten of himself, led by a great love for the others, looking for their good with all the means available. All his interest was focused there in a natural and spontaneous manner. It came forth from his heart that was possessed by the Spirit of God. This charity, that is so present and effective in the life of Calasanz, has his source and pattern in the love for God, as he says explicitly³⁴⁹ and will be developed later on.

One of the sentiments...feelings that accompanied the works of charity of Calasanz is concretely reflected in the **compassion** that he says to experience before the needs of different persons. The emphasis placed in the Calasanctian epistolary on this so noble and humanizing feeling is really striking. It is clear how Fr. Joseph of the Mother of God, so strong and austere towards himself, has a heart that is very sensitive before the suffering of the others. This may be perhaps one of the keys to understand the whole life of Calasanz in Rome. It must have been a powerful driver in his soul, that led him to consecrate himself fully and definitely to help the persons in need; a compassion that enhanced his charity. Also in this he tried to imitate God, as “compassionate and merciful,” “clement and compassionate”³⁵⁰.

349 EP 3628, 4297.

350 Ex 34,6; Sal 86,15; 103,8.

Calasanz feels and expresses compassion, and even “a great compassion,” for lay people who are in need for different reasons: due to a father’s death³⁵¹, to debts and economic hardship³⁵², imprisonment³⁵³, war³⁵⁴, etc. He often says that he feels compassion for particular situations of his religious: sickness³⁵⁵, material requirements³⁵⁶, relaxed conduct³⁵⁷. He feels compassion as well for the Superiors, when they face difficulties with their subjects³⁵⁸. However, he also emphasizes that Superiors must show compassion towards their subjects when these have problems or do not behave well³⁵⁹; moreover, he teaches local and provincial superiors that they should be compassionate when having to punish or rebuke someone³⁶⁰.

Some of the following texts show the compassionate heart of Calasanz:

- EP 0931: “Regarding Brother Biagio, I’m very sorry for his illness ... I wrote that he be sent here with other two or three convalescents to be treated with care, because I feel compassion for them”.
- EP 1189: “I have received many letters in which I see how things are going on in that house and, in particular, regarding Brother Lucio who is so relaxed...and I feel compassion for him”.
- EP 1317: “Mrs. María didn’t receive anything from Cardinal Borghese... She wants to come back to Rome ... She came several times to ask me this favor. The poor lady is in great need and I feel compassion” (A Frascati, 06-02-1630).

351 EP 673.

352 EP 1036, 1317, 1319, 1385, 1432, 1805*, 2075, 2323, 2646, 3175.

353 EP 1055.

354 EP 3123.

355 EP 931, 2276, 3774.

356 EP 380, 3531, 4273.

357 EP 111, 355, 540, 657, 1093, 1189, 2148, 2218, 2267, 3039, 3300, 3367, 3386. In several cases he even says that he feels “great compassion”.

358 EP 562, 2270, 2449, 3587, 3848, 3989, 3998.

359 EP 2340, 2439.

360 EP 1427, 2340, 2439, 3039.

- EP 1427: “Fr. Jaime, whose great zeal I believe in, but I would like it united with prudence, patience and compassion”.
- EP 2340: “Fr. Provincial has a great spirit of observance and rigor ...; but it should be tempered by compassion”.
- EP 2439: “The Superior should be higher than the subjects in patience, charity, humility and in the other virtues, and should have compassion towards the subjects when they are in fault, and correct them kindly”.
- EP 2646: “... I would write to your mother to comfort her. God knows in which state she is. Moved by compassion, seeing that she suffered so much the cold temperature, I bought for her a worn dress” (13-09-1636).
- EP 4209: “Hoping that God will settle things regarding our Institute when and how he wishes. It’s up to us to ask him with insistence to have compassion of the poor who are under our care” (A Palermo, 23-07-1644).
- EP 4273: “I don’t write any more because my compassion for these so beloved brothers (who had come from Germany and to whom he could no longer give an aid) is too great” (03-06-1645).
- “He was distressed seeing them suffering and he helped them the best he could” (Mrs. Laura de la Riccia: *Reporting Process*, p. 328).

d) Presence of God

We know that God is present in all the Creation supporting it in its being or existence; and we believe he is particularly present in those who love him, as Jesus Christ has promised: “anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”³⁶¹. And we know also that the saints have been distinguished for their great care to do God’s will and to follow Jesus’ teachings. On the other hand, it

361 John 14, 23.

seems to be a characteristic of the mystics to have a special awareness of this presence. As a matter of fact, some scholars define the mystical experience just from this trace. We recall some of their definitions: “it is an experience of the presence of God,” (J. Tauler) “it’s a direct knowledge of the presence of God,” (B. McGinn), “it’s an experience and awareness of the close union of man with God”, (Juan Martín Velasco) “The soul perceives that it is next to God” (Saint Teresa of Jesus).

How did Calasanz live the presence of God?

In his letters we see how Calasanz appreciated the awareness of the presence of God, and how eagerly he recommended it to his religious. Here are some of his phrases or from witnesses: “we should always be in the presence of God”³⁶², “never lose sight of the presence of God”³⁶³, “never abandon the memory of the presence of God”³⁶⁴, “to be in a continued presence of God”³⁶⁵, “in all his actions and discourses he had always God in front”³⁶⁶.

In other places, maybe taking in consideration our limited natural capacity of concentration, he encourages us to try to remember God frequently. Thus he recommends his religious: “try to talk often to God in your heart”³⁶⁷, “Try to remember often during the day Christ and his virtues”³⁶⁸.

This awareness of the presence of God had a great ethical and religious value for Calasanz: it helps to raise in the faithful the reverence and adoration to God’s Majesty, our intention is purified, our virtues of love, hope, humility, obedience and others revive, and it helps us to make correct decisions in our daily life, etc. He says it in different ways: “we should humiliate in the presence of God”³⁶⁹, the value of our works depends on their value in the presence of

362 EP 912.

363 To the Rector of Campi – *Reg. Cal.* 28, p. 24.

364 *Common Rites*, p. 12.

365 P. Armini: *Ne probationes pereant* – *Reg Cal.* 96, p. 193.

366 P. Bisci: *Ne probationes pereant*, p. 144.

367 EP 649.

368 CC 44.

369 EP 1385.

God³⁷⁰, “if our decisions are made in the presence of God we would perceive his favors for our material and spiritual life”³⁷¹.

There is no doubt that Calasanz experienced in himself this great ethical and religious value of the presence of God, of which he speaks so much. The living awareness of the presence of God, which seems to have been continuous or almost continuous in him, actually marked his existence, as it is proven in many occasions throughout the different stages of his life, particularly at the end. However, we cannot fail to pose another question: besides being an utmost important ethical and religious instance, was the presence of God a mystical experience in Calasanz? In other words, did he live it as a joyful and transforming encounter with God? Was it a direct or quasi immediate perception of God acting in the deepest part of his being? With the words of Ghislaine Lafont³⁷², was it all about an effort of Calasanz for keeping in the presence and remembrance of God, or rather a gift he received which entailed the “awareness of the divine presence in his soul,” while leaving reason and senses free for ordinary...regular requirements?

Bearing in mind Joseph Calasanz’ way of being, and the fact that he didn’t leave any autobiography, we shouldn’t expect from him any explicit manifestation of a mystical experience of the presence of God. However, we could find some evidence in this regard. We quote here some expressions that seem to reflect very special experiences that filled his heart with joy and happiness, accompanied by a deep affection towards God, while, on the other hand, with his reason he continues to attend to routine tasks (underlining added): “Try to... teach with such an *affection* as if God was seeing you”³⁷³, “never abandon the memory of the presence of God, and don’t stop raising ... inner *sighs* ... and exercise in *affectionate* acts of virtue”³⁷⁴, “remember *in a lively manner* that the *most pure eye of the living God* is looking at you”³⁷⁵, “the

370 EP 2360.

371 EP 2903.

372 Quoted in Parte I, 7.1.

373 EP 1937.

374 Common Rites, p. 12 – *Reg. Cal.* 14,74.

375 Common Rites – *Reg. Cal.* 14, 74*, p. 47.

religious ... should be attentive to the *conversations* of the inner man, as this is thre *real presence* of the Lord³⁷⁶, “he often taught me to develop a *Paradise* in my room³⁷⁷. “Charity *burnt* in him ceaselessly, whereas in all his actions and discourses *he had always God present as the only object*, to whom he addressed all his operations³⁷⁸. In the same direction we should imagine his fervent devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which his companions bear witness to.

To his religious he recommended with insistence to live well aware of the presence of God, as something most important and helpful... useful. See some texts below:

- EP 0649: “Try to deal often with God in your interior, as every religious should do”.
- EP 1298: “If you deem this pilgrimage (to Holy Land) an occasion for the forgiveness of your sins and for helping your neighbor ..., the Lord will be always in your company, particularly if with great patience and humility you walk in the presence of God and of human beings” (To Alacchi).
- EP 4028: Regarding the charges against Calasanz of having opposed the government of the Provincial Fr. Mario: “Nor Your Reverence nor any other person has ever seen anything like this, but rather the opposite. And I encourage Your Reverence and all the others to walk on the path of the Lord with holy simplicity and religious perfection, as I, as a true Spiritual Father, desire to all. And I say this in the of God, who is the truth” (2-8-1642).
- “The teaching he used to provide to me often, to make a paradise in my room, imagining Christ and the Blessed Virgin, on the one hand, and the Apostles and the Saints, on the other, recommending me to make acts of humility in secret ... “. (Fr. Camilo Scassellati: *Reporting Process*, p. 103-5, super 9).

376 Qualities of a true religious - *Reg. Cal.* 12, 27.

377 Camilo Scassellati: *Ne probationes pereant*, p. 66, super 9.

378 Fr. Bisci: *Ne probationes pereant*, p. 144.

- Like Fr. Scassellati, Fr. Armini shares the same thing, extending the devotions recommended to him by Calasanz: "... to be in continuous presence of God and to make (in this imagined paradise) acts of love, faith, hope and other religious virtues" (Fr. Alejo Armini: *Ne probationes pereant*, - Reg Cal 96, p. 193).
- In these exercises (of prayer), ... don't ever forget the memory of the presence of God, nor omit to raise your mind to heaven with ejaculations and intimate and silent sighs, not to be heard by those who are close, and practice several affectionate acts of virtue" (*Common Rites*, p. 12 - Reg. Cal. 14,74).
- "When you awake in the morning, raise your mind to God" (*Common Rites*, en Reg. Cal. 14, 74*, p. 4).
- "Once the exercises start at school, each teacher should remember that the most pure eye of God is on him... (*Common Rites*- Reg. Cal. 14, 74*, p. 47).

e) Love of God and union with him

The love of God and to all those whom he loves is the ultimate end of any Christian life. However, love is not static, something that one has or has not. It's a deep experience, in which the most inherent energies of a person are concentrated, called to emerge...blossom, grow and develop until its highest perfection, which in this life will never be complete. We Christians know very well that this love only can blossom and grow as a gratuitous gift of God himself. Love leads us close to God and unites us with him, who is the highest object of all our desires. We are, therefore, speaking of the most wonderful work of God in human beings. He has loved us first and created in us the potential of loving him in order to be united with him and to be partners of his own life. In this mystery of love our existence must be introduced if we really accept his love and respond to it.

From a very young age Calasanz corresponded with a love that reached levels of extraordinary excellence. In Rome, his love of God became gradually purified and his love for the others reached degrees of heroic generosity. Of his love for the others we have already given numerous demonstrations in this book. Now we want to focus on his love of God and on how did he lived it. We know that

the love of God and for one's neighbor are inseparable, and one implies the other if they are authentic. We know also that the source of any love is in God, in the love he first had for us, and in the love he sowed in our heart.

For Calasanz, the importance of love was very clear. From the first line of his Constitutions he makes clear to his religious that "true purpose of our Institute is to pursue the perfection of love"³⁷⁹, which will be exercised through the teaching and education of the children. When addressing the topic of the Vows, core of the religious life, he again reminds that they are a more adequate or straight road to reach "the top of perfect charity, which is the bond of perfection"³⁸⁰.

However, before we move on, it is useful to note that Calasanz terminology on this subject is quite accurate and specific. Indeed, the term "charity," used by the Saint quite frequently, refers almost always to the love for our neighbor³⁸¹, as we have already said speaking of charity as a fruit of the Spirit (Part II, 3,5c). The term "love," in contrast, refers nearly always to the man's love of God; it seldom refers to God's love towards us or to love for the neighbor. It also places the love of God and for the neighbor in a direct relationship³⁸², and sometimes he equates love and charity³⁸³. He thus replicates St. John's teaching: "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen"³⁸⁴.

So, having already spoken about charity understood as love for the neighbor, we now wish to reflect what Calasanz lives and teaches about the love God has for us and about the love we feel towards God. Love is the result of an encounter between God and man,

379 CC 1.

380 CC 95.

381 In few occasions he refers to God, when he quotes at the same time God and the neighbor. For example: "I would be glad if there were a good correspondence between ...; it would be a sign of charity towards God as well as towards the neighbor" (EP 4297).

382 For instance: "because love makes easy the work, especially when our love of God is reflected in the neighbor" (EP 2859).

383 EP 2630.

384 1 John 4, 20.

which implies all our person. As Benedict XVI says: “Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the “yes” of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love.” (*Deus caritas est*, 17).

God's goodness... kindness

What we intend to say when speaking of the gratuitous love of God for us, is rendered by Calasanz with the expression “God’s goodness”, which appears often in his writings, nearly always accompanied by adjectives or terms that indicate his deep acknowledgement of this goodness or love of God.

He calls it “divine goodness,” “immense goodness”, “infinite goodness”, “most holy goodness”. Sometimes he refers to “his paternal love,” “a Lord so good”, “God’s pious hand.” Another expression found more than three hundred times in his letters is “Blessed God...Good Lord” (Dio Benedetto, Iddio Benedetto), which entails both veneration, adoration, gratitude, confidence, affection... Calasanz places all his hope and confidence in such a good and kind God, and he feels “infinitely forced to love him.”

Let’s read some of his texts:

- EP 0007.3: “Most gracious Lord, I confess that I am infinitely forced to love you above all things for your immense love ... I offer myself completely to your service ... to thank all the benefits you have granted to me up to now with so much love ...” (Prayer prepared for the “ongoing prayer” of the students).
- EP 0008: “As the blessed God has called Your Paternity” (24-06-1616).
- EP 0729: “If there is any precept in virtue of holy obedience, by the present I remove all of them, with the hope that in the future you will do everything for the love of such a good Lord”.
- EP 3875: “Strongly hoping that the divine goodness, ... will not disappoint”.
- EP 4252: “It is not relevant to expect the help from men, who often and easily fail, but from the pious hand of God, who will support his work” (January, 1645).

- EP 4270: “By his mercy, God will be our Protector now and always, and will bless us in his most holy goodness” (mayo 1645).
- EP 4456: “...a great grievance to the divine goodness and providence not to hope until the end” (April, 1647).
- EP 4540: “I ask the Lord to show Your Reverence and the other members of your community his paternal love ...” (April, 1648).
- EP 4572: “I greatly praise your availability to serve the blessed God in our Institute, to which you are called by the blessed God” (30-07-1648).

This is how Calasanz’ God looks like, as the “only object” of his existence. Such a vivid and evangelical image of God, so closely reflecting Jesus’ “Abba”, leads us to think in a special gift of God, that has been received and carefully cultivated by Calasanz in his protracted meditations on the infinite and tender love of God in Jesus Crucified. This love of God has raised in Calasanz such a great love in return that led him to dedicate his whole life with enthusiasm to serve God, particularly in his least and privileged children.

Love of God

Calasanz is quite clear in that his love is a response to God’s love for him. But, how does he feel and lives his love of God? His practical and efficient character is also reflected here.

Firstly, he often refers to it as “holy”³⁸⁵, because it leads us close to God and it helps us to become saints; it should be reflected in deeds: helping our neighbor³⁸⁶, teaching and educating “according to our Institute”³⁸⁷, being humble and poor, leaving all the external goods³⁸⁸, doing everything for love³⁸⁹, suffering the adversities³⁹⁰.

385 EP 27.1, 581, 663, 727, 826, 837, 967, 1100, 1339, 2291.

386 EP 3039, 4251.

387 EP 866, 1647, 1672, 2800, 2860, 3041, 4439.

388 CC 95.

389 EP 729.

390 EP 82, 4364.

Love helps us to overcome “self-love, so opposite to the love of God” and to purify our intentions. And “heaven is not reached but by the way of love.” Love should grow every day: he often prays “for the continuous growth of his holy love”³⁹¹. Love departs from the goodness of God or from Christ’s love in his passion. Hence, the better we know it the more will it grow in us, filling us with joy. It is important, and of a significant autobiographical value, what he writes in 1630 to Fr. Carlos Cesario: “the knowledge of God beatifies man according to his growth in the divine love.” This letter (EP 1339), mentioned above in section 3.5,b of Part II, discloses the deepness of Calasanz soul, showing how his frequent meditation led him to an increasing knowledge of God, which in turn raises in his heart an increasing intense and pure love, that filled him with such an extraordinary happiness that he deems it an anticipation of the happiness in heaven. Such an experience may well be identified with the traditional expression of ‘beatific vision’: a vision or knowledge that fills with love and happiness. This experience is fully reached in heaven; the mystics achieve it already on earth.

Let’s read some of the expressions of the Saint:

- EP 790: “May the Lord grant you a continuous growth in his holy love”.
- EP 1672: Encourage Brother Alejandro to teach with joy what he knows, as he does it only for the love of God”.
- EP 2630: “You will go to paradise only if you love, and according to the degrees of love or charity such will be your glory. The more you humiliate for the love of God, the more you love him, and the more you become poor for the love of God, the more you’ll show your love for him”.
- EP 2859: “My great consolation is to know that Your Reverence is always in the schools ... May all of us understand how meritorious it is to educate the children, especially the poor”.
- EP 3724: “... If he accepted this mortification with the spirit with which I send it to him as Spiritual Father, he would

391 EP 247, 581, 663, 727, 790, 826, 837, 867, 1100, 2291.

benefit for the virtue of humility and to overcome self-love, that is against the love of God”.

- EP 4445: “I feel that Your Reverence should try to purify your intention reducing it to the love of the Lord, from whom you will always receive greater light”.

Union with God

Love leads us to the union with God, the highest target for a human being. Man is called to this target, which provides him the highest dignity³⁹². All the saints have excelled in a deep union with God, that the mystics experienced in a very particular way. How did Calasanz live it? To what extent did he live it, what degree did he reach? Those who are attracted by his charism would like to know the answer to this question. But it is not easy, as he didn't write any spiritual autobiography nor was inclined to manifest his intimate experiences. Fortunately, we have reliable witnesses who externally came to know something regarding this matter.

Several witnesses refer with great admiration what they had observed in the life of Calasanz: his “continuous recollection”, which suggests that “he was speaking with the Supreme Good on a steady basis,” “intent to the contemplation of divine matters,” “united to his Divine Majesty in all his actions,” half an hour “with joined hands and his head up towards heaven,” completely absorbed, “he was always united to God, as usual”. All this leads us to think in the “infused or supernatural recollection” referred to by Saint Teresa. It doesn't seem to be a forced recollection but a gift of God who made him fall in love. These are some texts of the witnesses:

- “If the soul, as S. Bernard says, is where it loves more than where it lives, based on the continuous recollection of the Venerable Servant of God we can say that his soul was continuously engaged with the supreme good, which he loved at the highest degree” (P. Alejo Armini - *Reg. Cal.* 96, p. 192 – TD 73).
- “I was saying the prayers of the recommendation of the soul and he recited them with me. I told him: don't get

³⁹² See *Gaudium et spes*, 19.

tired, I'll say the prayers and you just listen. He answered some words that I don't remember, but I remained comforted and also confused as I saw him united with his Divine Majesty in all his actions" (Fr. Vicente Berro: *Vida Breve*, p. 24 – TD. 72).

- “Once he was talking with me about perfection. Suddenly, he joined his hands and remained in that position for half an hour... When he turned back from something like a sweet dream and saw me still there, he was annoyed and told me: ‘You are still here?’” (P. Francisco de S. Carlos - *Reg. Cal.* 28, p.43 – TD).
- “As usual, he was united with God and meditating on heavenly things: completely detached from earthly things, always in prayer ...” (Don Juan Félix Fedele: *Ne probationes pereant*, p. 216, super 28 – TD 72).

We also find in the Saint's writings a confirmation of these testimonies. The first is found in the Constitutions, which he drafted as a standard and ideal of life for his religious. It's about the ideal of the mystical union with Christ, that St. Paul says he personally lives and also Saint Joseph Calasanz seems to have lived: “he must endeavor to put aside all affection toward relatives and friends and convert it into that of the Spirit. He must love them only with that love which well-ordered charity requires. He must remain united with Christ our Lord and live only for Him and please Him only”³⁹³. And referring in the same Constitutions to the spirit of the vows he mentions the religious “desiring to be united with God”³⁹⁴.

There are also similar expressions in his epistolary, notwithstanding its practical purpose, as it points to the administration and good functioning of the houses and persons of the Pious Schools. A significant example is the letter addressed to Fr. Apa, of Florence: “As for the renovation of the vows ..., as Spiritual Father desiring the perfection of all the children...sons of the Order, I would like for all of them a magnanimous spirit to serve God and to be united with

393 CC 34.

394 CC 95.

him through charity and love³⁹⁵. Thus, we see that Calasanz deems charity towards the neighbor and the love of God as the means to live united to God. And he wanted that everyone had such a great spirit and desire. In another letter, addressed to one of the women he directed, Mrs. Angélica Falco, he says explicitly: “Try to keep always your soul united with Christ³⁹⁶. According to Calasanz, this sponsal and intimate union with Christ makes fruitful his life with abundant “good works.” Related to the desire of an increasing intimate and sponsal union with Christ is to be understood another of his statements in which he says, regarding the death of a person: “even if more worthy of envy than of compassion³⁹⁷. Fr. Bandoni confirms this referring to “his sentiment and desire of finally reaching and enjoying God’s vision in Paradise³⁹⁸. It is good to remember other recommendations and desires that appear often in the letters of Calasanz, in which he refers in different ways to the union with God, as for instance: “to talk with God and with the Holy Trinity,” “don’t stop staring at God...not to stop looking at God,” “devotion in pronouncing the words of the Mass,” etc. It’s all about an intimate and penetrating union, which he receives with profound humility, and that fills him of joy and gratitude.

Is this the special union mentioned by the mystics in the final stage of their approach to God in the so called “unitive way?” In Calasanz it is indeed a very deep and intimate experience, that made him enjoy God and his perfections, gave him great peace, transformed his life and personality, led him to be completely dedicated to do God’s will, and – according to the witnesses – to moments of rapture ... Taking into consideration what has been said above about the presence of God, the enlightenments or knowledge received, the joy and consolation experienced even in very hard circumstances ..., it seems reasonable to conclude that Joseph Calasanz enjoyed a very special and profound union with God, in the style of those considered mystics.

395 EP 4028.

396 EP 3987.

397 EP 499.

398 Regestum Calasanctianum 28, p. 7).

It should be noted, however, that even if his ideal and recommendations were definitely focused on the union with God, Calasanz is well aware that not all the religious have achieved such degree of perfection. For this reason, he also recommends the Superiors to deal with each religious according to each one's situation, especially if they were still in the "purgative way"³⁹⁹.

For a better knowledge of Calasanz, we provide some other texts:

- EP 912: "If you take in consideration the things we imagine all day long, you will be aware that you can't walk two steps without falling, that is without turning our sight far from God and towards the creatures ... This is the meaning of the sentence, not so much understood and less practiced: 'unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'. Learn this practice and try to reach that great simplicity, and you will find the truth of the sentence: 'God speaks to the simple'".
- EP 2249: Regarding Fr. Octavio, it is good that he desires perfection in everyone. But in this matter, the Superior must teach according to the capacity of his subjects: at the beginning, easy things, then more difficult things, and at the end perfect things, as the purgative way is not so perfect as the illuminative way, nor this is so perfect as the unitive way. He would like everyone united with God always" (Al P. Graziani, 1634).
- EP 2954: "Learn the inner reverence with which the words of the Mass are said, when we speak with the blessed God and with the Most Holy Trinity. They cannot be pronounced only with the mouth and with little devotion, but with the heart" (To Fr. Fedele, 1638).
- EP 3669: "I'm glad for the priestly ordination in Bisignano of the two religious you have sent. Teach them to talk with devotion with the Eternal Father and with the Trinity ..." (To Fr. Berro, 1641).

399 EP 2215.

- EP 3987: “The Lord who didn’t give you corporal children will be pleased to give plenty of spiritual children, that is to say the good works that you will do with the spiritual union of your soul with the blessed Christ, your Spouse” (To Mrs. Claudia Taultina).
- “So great was his love of God that he would have liked that everyone had the same feelings and desires that he had...; speaking of this he often cried, repeating the words of St. Paul: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.” (Fr. Jacobo Bandoni en 1652 – *Reg. Cal.* 28, p. 7).
- “Act of love: What can I give you, my Lord, for so many benefits you have done for me, in particular for having died on the cross for me? I wish to give a gift of love. I’m pleased with your omnipotence, your beauty, your wisdom and infinite goodness. I appreciate you will more than any other good; and not to go against it, I’m prepared to die one thousand times” (Prayer written by Calasanz for the ‘ongoing prayer’ of his students – Quoted by García-Durán, *o.c.*, p. 108).

f) Configuration with Christ

Among Christians, the person of Christ is absolutely central: he is the authentic manifestation of God⁴⁰⁰, through him we obtain the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation⁴⁰¹, through him we go to the Father⁴⁰², in him we achieve fullness...⁴⁰³ It is not strange, then, that all the saints have had a lively relationship with Jesus Christ, and have desired to replicate in themselves the icon of Christ, albeit this configuration or replication has only been achieved in certain degree and under certain aspect for each one. This is also reflected in

400 “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14, 9).

401 “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1: 14); “and through him to reconcile to himself all things” (Col 1,20)

402 “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14, 6).

403 “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2, 9); “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4, 13).

mystics, in some more than others, or in some aspects more than in others. Indeed, in the various types of mysticism that we know there are different emphases, and even different entry points and various ways to reach union with the Absolute or with God. As we have seen in Section 5, of Part I. Calasanz' references and approach to Christ are clearly highlighted; indeed, his spirituality has a strong Christological bias, without excluding other accents that are also significant in him. We now focus on the Christological experiences of our Saint, on how he approaches the figure of Christ.

*Meditating in Christ crucified for a deeper knowledge...
understanding*

In the first place, we notice the importance that Calasanz attributes to the meditation of the Passion of Christ: in his Constitutions he says "We must endeavor ... to contemplate Christ crucified and his virtues"⁴⁰⁴. And in his letters he emphasizes the same idea: the Passion of Christ "is the true book in which we should all study," "Christ, the blessed Crucified, is the object of our intellect," "if we deeply reflected on the passion of Christ, any mortification would seem utmost light," and we would find "infinite spiritual treasures," as well as "the knowledge that fits each state", and we would also know better "the truth of the invisible things" and would love them more. The meditation or contemplation of the passion of Christ would help us to understand that our sufferings "are not comparable with those of Christ" and would raise in us an increasing love and desire of "corresponding to the great sufferings that Jesus underwent for us"⁴⁰⁵. All this leads us to understand the great importance attributed by Calasanz to the Passion, "so that it seemed he had it impressed in his heart:" it is the most impressive manifestation of the love that God has for us, and raises in us the desire of corresponding with all our life to such love; and he refers to a life like the piarist's, that is subject to fatigues and requires a great humility. The importance attributed by Calasanz to the mysteries of the Passion of Christ leads him to "greatly desire" that they were made known to all the students of his schools.

404 CC 44.

405 EP 81, 247.

However, in the spirituality that Calasanz wants for his piarists not only the passion of Christ is present, notwithstanding his emphasis on it. Other mysteries of Christ also appear. This results from a tradition introduced by Calasanz and in force in piarist communities until not long ago, consisting in the practice that during the community meals somebody, kneeling down in the centre of the refectory reminded “the true way to go to heaven,” namely: “the Passion of the blessed Christ” (during the Ordinary Time), “the holy Resurrection” (in Easter), and “the Nativity of Christ” (in Christmas).

Here are some of his texts:

- EP 1563: “I’ll try to send as soon as possible two books of the exercises of Fr. Don Sancio and six or eight books of Kempis de imitatione Christi in vernacular ...; but the true book which we all should read is the passion of Christ, which grants wisdom according to each person’s state”.
- EP 2219: “I have seen what you have written, and I’m sorry for you; I encourage you to be patient, that it won’t last long. When you ask alms, think that you are following Christ with the cross, though your cross cannot be compared with the cross of Christ, carried for our love”.
- EP 2646: “If we deeply reflect on the passion of Christ ... any mortification would seem utmost light and we would even seek it; but selfishness hinders such a great good. May the Lord grant you light to know the truth”.
- EP 2921: “I think God is granting you the occasion to use your intellect for its object, that is to say, the blessed Christ Crucified, where infinite spiritual treasures are hidden for those who detest the tastes of the senses and loves those of the spirit”.
- EP 3920: “I greatly desire that the exercise of teaching the Christian doctrine be diligently introduced in the public church for the young people, and that in all the schools the students learn the mysteries of the passion of Christ printed in Rome, as well as the little book of the spiritual exercises with the acts of faith, hope, humility and contrition, for the small children to learn them. Be careful and diligent in this”.

- “When I came from the Novitiate, I used to go to see him and to receive his blessing, and the first thing he used to ask was if in the way I had accompanied Christ to Calvary... and he started to talk about the passion, so that he seemed to have it engraved in his heart” (Fr. Francisco de S. Carlos, - Reg. Cal. 28, p. 43).
- “Fathers and Brothers, remember the Passion of the blessed Christ, as there is no other way to go to heaven⁴⁰⁶. On Easter and during its Octave we should say: the Resurrection of Christ. At Christmas and during its Octave: the Nativity of Christ” (Reg. Cal. 14, 74).
- “Tell everyone to be devout of the Holy Rosary, that contains the life, passion and death of our Redeemer” (Berro: *Vida breve*, p. 21 – Confidence of Calasanz to Fr. Berro, on August 22, 1648).

Following Christ in fidelity

Calasanz shows a great desire to follow Christ, which he lives as “a special grace of the blessed God.” He repeats it often, particularly regarding his “way to Mount Calvary,” though we have seen that his following includes also other aspects of the life of Jesus. In this way he walked to the Holy Office when he was taken prisoner, according to a friend of his, or when he persevered in “serving and suffering whatsoever for his love”, when he was wounded.

This is his desire for all the piarists too: that they be true disciples and followers of the Lord. Writing to the Visitor of the Pious Schools of Sicily in 1635 he says: “Look at their words and actions to see if they are followers of Christ;” “Christ is the door,...” and we should get in through this door; Christ is also “our Master” from whom we must learn. We must follow Christ “when he carries the cross”⁴⁰⁷. For the Founder, the life of a religious is obedience and surrender to Christ the Lord. Moreover, it’s about a hearty and resolute...deter-

406 The text reflected by Fr. Berro and that reached to us, says: “Remember, Fathers and Brothers, to imitate the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true way to heaven” (*Annotazioni*, tomo I, ch. 27 - *Archivium* 21-22, p. 100).

407 EP 2219.

mined adherence to Christ, as the only Lord of his life and the only object of his love.

- CC 34: “Therefore, he must endeavor to put aside all affection toward relatives and friends and convert it into that of the Spirit. He must love them only with that love which well-ordered charity requires. He must remain united with Christ our Lord and live only for Him and please Him only”.
- CC 95: “follow Him faster in body and spirit”.
- CC 103: “Religious must become used not to consider the person whom they obey but rather who is for whose sake they obey all Superiors: Christ our Lord”.
- EP 247: “... to correspond to all he suffered for us...”.
- EP 1662: “No ancient philosopher ever knew the real happiness and, what is worse, few, not to say very few among Christians know it, because Christ placed it on the cross. ...”.
- EP 2336: “If you do not humiliate you will never enter the door..., as Christ said ‘I’m the door’. See in their words and actions if they follow Christ, and, as Superior, show them the way to reach Christ the door” (To Fr. Alacchi, visitor of the Pious Schools of Sicily).
- EP 3888: “The blessed God ... will help the young people of that Novitiate, and as Christ himself was Master of humility, you also should try to teach this virtue to the youngsters, having Christ as Master and Your Reverence as repeater”.
- “In the evening of the same day in which he was taken to the Holy Inquisition he told me that he received everything as a special grace of the blessed God ... and that he had contemplated Our Lord Jesus Christ carrying the cross to Calvary” (Don Ascanio Simón: *Reg. Cal.* 28, p. 59).

Imitating Christ, in conformity with him:

Calasanz also uses the category of the imitation of Christ, not understood as an external imitation but in his attitudes, virtues and ways of acting. He considers that Christ taught us more with his deeds than with his words. And he has seen that many get soon

tired of this, so he says that the imitation of Christ “is the hidden treasure found by few people,” and that “those who walk in the narrow path of the imitation of the blessed Christ are few”⁴⁰⁸. We need “spirit and fervor to imitate him,” though our smallness will keep us always far from the model. In this imitation, the Ministers and Rectors of our schools should be the first.

- CC 0044: “We must endeavor in profound silence and relaxation of body and spirit,... to contemplate (scire = deep experiential knowledge) Christ crucified and his virtues”.
- EP 1466: “greet him for my part and encourage him to imitate Christ, the true treasure found by few people”.
- EP 2921: “Let us pray to the Lord that he mayo grant us spirit and fervor to imitate him as possible”.
- EP 4392: “I will ask the Lord, as I did before, to give you the true light to know the truth of the invisible things, that God has prepared for all those who imitate him in most holy passion. Through his passion they will reach the knowledge and loved of these things”.
- “We encourage and ask...all the Ministers to remember they occupy the place of the Lord who being so rich he became poor to enrich his children, and suffered hunger, thirst, heat, cold, weariness... scourges, thorns, nails, spear... gall and vinegar... dying naked on a cross: wishing to imitate him in carrying the cross we need to be humble as the Emperor Heraclitus and abandon the royal garments of self-love ...” (Exhortation of Our Holy Father to the Superiors – *Reg. Cal.* 47).

Such imitation entails the surrender of one’s life for love and to the end, as Christ on the cross, and the practice of the virtues he practiced during his earthly. Which virtues did the holy Founder of the Pious Schools have in mind? To answer this question maybe it is useful to recall what Antonio Cordeses teaches in his *Itinerario de la perfección cristiana*, that Calasanz used to recommend and to

408 EP 3673.

give. Indeed, in chapter 7 of the 5th day he outlines the “Way of meditating the virtues of Christ,” and in the following chapters he develops some of them, in particular: humility, meekness, obedience, poverty, chastity, patience, abstinence, prudence, justice, fortitude, clemency, charity. We know well how Calasanz recommended to his piarists several of these virtues, especially those that the piarists most need for the education of the poor children: charity, humility, poverty, patience, abnegation to bear the struggles of each day, etc. Through this sincere and profound imitation or replication of the “virtues” of Christ we will reach, with the grace of God, to replicate in us the figure of Jesus, to be like him who is the perfect image of the Father. Every Christian is called by God to replicate the image of his beloved Son.

Seeing... Gazing Christ in the least

When speaking about Calasanz’s configuration with Christ, another aspect comes forth of one who was able to see the serious shortcomings of so many children of his time, seeing in them the figure of Christ calling for help. Or seeing himself as Christ, the Master, welcoming and teaching the children. This aspect is clear and strong in Calasanz’s writings.

In the frequent statements in which he speaks of the relationship between the children and Christ, there is a sort of scaling up towards an increasing identification with Christ. Indeed, we first find the statement that “what is done for them (the poor children) it is done for the blessed Christ.” He goes on saying that “the poor represent Christ.” And he reaches a true identification with Christ when he states that “what is done for a poor child is received by Christ personally;” moreover, we give alms “to Christ in the poor;” “we do good to the poor, or better said, to Christ in the poor;” we eagerly desire to “serve God in his members, the poor.”

The background of these statements is the evangelical parable of the last judgement (Matthew 25), where Christ praises and rewards who have practiced charity towards those who are affected by various requirements: the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, the prisoners. In n. 4 of his Constitutions, Calasanz quotes the vers. 40 of chapter 25. It is clear that among those mentioned by Christ Calasanz saw all those who were deprived of education. Thus, to those

deprived of food, clothes, country or family, health, freedom and honor, our Founder equated all those who were lacking education, as the poor children of his time. The children of the wealthy people used to have education, but the poor families were not able to provide their children with education, due to the lack of means or culture. The lack of education caused other, both material and spiritual, poverties. For this reason Calasanz appreciated so much human and Christian education of the poor children, and decided to help the smallest of the little ones, the “least”, as they are called in the gospel⁴⁰⁹.

We may ask ourselves how did Calasanz live this personification of Christ in the least. Was it only a conviction supported by the pure faith in the gospel? Or a moral imperative supported by compassion? In his writings we don't find great reflections, nor poetical or mystical visions on the poor children. We do find a great number of manifestations of affection, appreciation and paternal care for them and for their education. In the Memorial to Cardinal Tonti we find a precious plea in favor of this education, in which he shows his appreciation and enthusiasm for it. We likewise find in his overall writings some attitudes that we wouldn't expect from a priest with a degree in Theology, namely such an enthusiasm for educating poor children, a passionate defense of those charity schools, a total and irreversible dedication to this work, a deep satisfaction for such activity, etc. Would it be arbitrary to suppose that in the origin of such a particular vocation Calasanz had a special experience, even mystical, related to those ragged children that he saw in the streets of Rome? Biographers suggest something of this sort when they refer to those voices that they say that were heard by Calasanz: “Look, Joseph, look”. What was that experience really about? Could it not have been something like the encounter with Christ experienced by Saint Teresa of Calcutta while assisting an agonizing sick

409 It should be noted that there is another text (Mark 9: 37 and par.) where the identification of the children with Christ appears directly: “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” But these texts are in the context of simplicity or humility that enable to understand and accept the mysteries of the Kingdom. Calasanz has also incorporated this evangelical appreciation of simplicity, and he often refers to it when speaking of humility, so necessary for a Piarist ... (See, for example, EP 912).

person?⁴¹⁰ Maybe Calasanz saw or encountered Christ among those abandoned children. If that was the case, some important aspects of our Saint's life and spirituality could be explained. For instance: his continuous reference to Christ when he speaks of the poor children, the veneration he felt for them, the total and unconditional dedication to their cause, his devotion to the suffering Christ, etc.; even the somewhat radical tone he uses to encourage his religious not to reject poor children.

These are some of his literal expressions:

- CC 4: "And since we profess to be authentic Poor of the Mother of God, we shall never look down in any way on poor children but with great patience and love we shall try to enrich them with every good quality, especially in view of the words of the Lord: "What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me".
- EP 2249: "for the service of the poor students, who represent the person of Christ".
- EP 2441: "If they considered that what is done for a poor child is received by Christ, I'm sure they would be more diligent".
- EP 2812: "Regarding the acceptance of poor children, Your Reverence is acting saintly, because our Institute has been founded for this purpose. What is done for them, is done for the blessed Christ. This is not said regarding wealthy people" (To the rector of Florence, 1638).
- EP 3041: "Try to learn what you don't know to serve the poor, or rather, Christ in the poor".
- EP 4454: "... our Institute, which is based on charity towards the poor young people, so that it can't be said 'the children

410 Teresa of Calcutta left this prayer, that fit so well with the sentiments of Calasanz: "Oh, my Lord, let me always see you in the person of the sick and that, serving them I serve you. Grant me, oh Lord, this vision of faith, and my work will never become monotonous. Dear sick, you are most dear to me because you represent Christ. What a great privilege to have the possibility of serving you! Lord, may I be sensitive to the dignity of my high vocation and to the great responsibility that it entails. May I not be unworthy of it, due to hardness of heart, lack of kindness or patience" (Quoted by W. Kasper: *La misericordia*, p. 149).

asked for bread and nobody provided it to them’...We are eager to serve God in his members, the Poor, so that we can listen these words: ‘What you did to one of the least of my little ones this you did to me.’ If we have this true faith, God will respond for us” (To Fr. Cavallari, April 26, 1647).

- EP 4465: “Your Reverence could and should use your talent in favor of many poor children, who represent the person of Christ” (To Fr. Balzanetti, 1647).

Important are also Calasanz’ statements on the purpose for which the schools had been founded, that is “charity towards the poor young people, so that it can’t be said that ‘the children asked for bread and nobody provided it to them’.” Compassion and charity towards the children in need are, therefore, the main drivers of all the work of Calasanz. In the persons in need he sees Christ whom he serves, supported by the very words of the Lord.

Lack of education will always be one of the most harmful deficiencies of human beings. However, education should include the various facets of a person. We know that nowadays many children and adolescents lack a spiritual and religious education. In science and technology environments, personal and transcendental aspects are too often left aside and forgotten, with a great impoverishment in their most important and critical aspects. If in the early Modern Age Calasanz deemed education “in Christian piety and doctrine” a priority (though not exclusive)⁴¹¹, how would he emphasize nowadays moral and religious education?

g) Events or extraordinary phenomena

We know that the so called “extraordinary mystical phenomena” are not a criterion to judge the sanctity of a person, not even to ensure the existence of mystical experiences. Among Christians, the only criterion is clearly charity, or the love of God and for the neighbor. A charity that should manifest in deeds.

Regarding Saint Joseph Calasanz, we know that he had an extraordinary charity for the others, a “heroic” charity, according to the

411 CC 5: “It will be, therefore, the mission of our Institute to educate young boys in the fundamentals of reading, writing, arithmetic, the Latin language, and especially piety and Christian Doctrine”.

traditional terminology, as well as other virtues of the Disciples of Christ. It is just this what the Church's authority carefully analyzed and solemnly declared afterwards.

We also know, through the history of spirituality, that these extraordinary phenomena, or some of them, have appeared in the life of mystics, of persons who had an intimate experience of God, who have perceived the presence and action of God without mediations. However, these manifestations are not necessary. There are many saints, even canonized, including mystics, in whom these manifestations or extraordinary phenomena are not known.

Our question is if Saint Joseph Calasanz had such mystical manifestations. His early biographers wanted to highlight the mystical aspect of our Founder narrating a great number of this kind of extraordinary manifestations. These stories were generally supported on narratives of direct testimonies (many of them certified them in the process of beatification), as our Saint didn't write any spiritual autobiography.

Which are, then, the main data provided by biographers and witnesses?. Their narratives must be taken with caution. If they really seem reliable and the facts are confirmed, we will take them as a further proof, though not required nor sufficient *per se*, of the mystical life of Saint Joseph Calasanz.

Visions related to saint Francis of Assisi

In the context of the devotion of Calasanz to Saint Francis of Assisi three visions have been transmitted, related to the difficulty of gaining the jubilee of the Porziuncola of Assisi, the marriage with the three ladies, the encounter with lady Poverty.

Regarding the two first visions, we focus on two witnesses most qualified: the bishop of Potenza, Mgr. Buenaventura Claver, and Fr. Vicente Berro:

Bishop B. Claver was a Conventual friar of the community of the Twelve Apostles in Rome, with which Calasanz had a great friendship and acquaintance. Buenaventura joined this community about 1631 and there he knew Calasanz, with whom he had a good relationship. In 1646 he became bishop of Potenza, in South Italy. When Calasanz died, Fr. Caputi wrote to him asking news about Calasanz. The bishop sent a handwritten report with his signature but without the date. Fr. Caputi

asked a new report saying that he had lost the previous. Mgr. Claver repeated the report adding some other news. And sent it in two copies, dated on September 27, 1658. The three documents are kept in our general archive of Rome, with the stamp and signature of the bishop⁴¹².

Report of Mgr. Claver, regarding the apparitions:

“While I was one day in Saint Pantaleon of Rome sharing with him some personal feelings, he (Calasanz) told me in confidence that in Assisi, where he had gone once to gain the Plenary indulgence in the feast of August 2 in Saint Mary of the Angels, Father Saint Francis appeared to him twice: once he married him with three ladies who represented the three Vows of Obedience, Chastity and Poverty; and the second time he showed him the great difficulty to gain the indulgence. And he told me that he didn’t know how to explain these apparitions, though he understood them thanks to the enlightenment he had received”.

Fr. Vicente Berro also relates these two visions. In his narrative he refers to Mgr. Claver’s testimony, adding some information, which leads us to think that he knew the facts from other sources. These are his words:

“I know that he went several times to visit the Madonna degli Angeli in Assisi, on the day of forgiveness, on August 2. Though the exact date is unknown, it was before leaving the habit of secular priest.

When he was in contemplation ... he saw Father Saint Francis who with seraphic charity and heavenly wisdom showed the great difficulty for gaining the plenary indulgence, and he taught him the way to receive it, infusing such a light in his intellect that our Don José understood perfectly well the message but couldn’t explain it with words....

... I don’t know if the same day or year of the first vision, or in some other time, the Seraphic Francis (appeared to him) accompanied by three heavenly Virgins... supporting our Calasanz. The Seraphic Father approached him and explained to him the mystery, saying: these Virgins are symbols of holy poverty, angelical chastity and perfect obedience. And that he had come to marry him with them ...

412 See Adolfo García-Durán, o. c., pp. 131 y 132, Notes 627 y 628. See also S. Giner: *San José de Calasanz*, p. 382, Note 119.

These apparitions are certified by Msgr Friar Buenaventura Claver, Conventual, Bishop of Potenza, in the Kingdom of Naples, as something shared by Our Holy Founder Joseph, confidentially” (Vicente Berro: Annotazioni, tomo I - Archivium 21-22, pp. 89-90).

Regarding the third vision (encounter with lady Poverty) we also have several testimonies, which differ in the circumstances but not in the substance.

The substance is: an encounter of Calasanz with a lady dressed very poorly and crying; when Calasanz asked her why she was crying she answered “Father Joseph, I am lady poverty, and all fly away from me;” and she told him that she wanted to marry him.

But the circumstances change: for Castelli, this happens in a dream, in which the three ladies appear to him, and the next day he has the revelation of its meaning in St. Francis’ Wounds Church; for Berro, the lady that cries appears alone in the church of S. Andrea della Valle or in S. Dámaso; for Caputi, in an alley, when Calasanz was accompanied by Fr. Castilla; for Talenti, the apparition of the lady starts in a dream, and the next day it becomes clear in a vision he had in St. Francis’ Wounds Church.

Here are two narratives:

- Fr. Vicente Berro: “Don José Calasanz was doubting whether the imposition of a strict poverty in the Congregation could damage the Institute of the Schools, and on the other hand he eagerly desired to be completely supported by the Divine Providence and detached from any interest to be able to help the poor in the best way in his Institute. In this perplexity he prayed fervently to the Lord. One day he was in the church of S. Andrea della Valle, or in S. Lorenzo in Damaso (as Fr. Casani or Fr. Otonelli told me) meditating on this point, when he saw a venerable Lady, beautiful but poorly dressed, who started to talk to our Calasanz, saying that she wanted to be his wife. He answered saying that he had never thought in getting married and that, being a priest, he couldn’t get married. She said: I’m the worthy wife of priests, as I am the Evangelical Poverty, and I want to be your wife. Don José understood the message and acknowledged what God wanted from him. In

obedience, he decided to take the narrowest way of poverty ..." (V. Berro: *Annotazioni*, tomo I - *Archivium* 21-22, p. 88).

- Fr. Francisco Castelli: "Once he shared with me a secret, that had happened while he was sleeping. Three ladies appeared to him, and one was crying. He asked her why she was crying. Still crying, she answered: I am poverty; everyone flees away from me. He offered himself to help her, and he seemed to hold her in his arms. When he woke up he didn't understand the sense of the dream, and was ashamed of having held her in his arms. The same day or the day after, while he was praying the Lord revealed him the meaning. It was the feast of the Wounds of St. Francis (17 of September). When he entered the church, where he had gone for the indulgence and forgiveness, he received a clear revelation that the lady who was crying was Poverty, and the other two were Chastity and Obedience. He thus remained comforted and encouraged to follow on" (*Reporting Process – Reg. Cal.* 30, p. 453).

Regarding the place and the meaning of these events in the life of Saint Joseph Calasanz, we follow the interpretation of Fr. Giner⁴¹³, as it seems more reasonable:

- They could be three inner visions of Calasanz, within a contemplative prayer.
- Each one could have happened in different times and circumstances: the first one (difficulty regarding the jubilee), on August 1599, during his pilgrimage to Assisi, towards the end of his second conversion's process; the second one (the marriage with the three ladies), in 1613-1616, when he was deliberating about founding or not a Religious Congregation; the third one (encounter with lady Poverty), in 1615-1617, when he was deliberating about imposing supreme poverty to all the members of the Pious Schools⁴¹⁴.

Finally, we can say that before these multiple and essentially consistent testimonies of reliable persons, it does not seem sound to

413 S. Giner: *San José de Calasanz*, p. 383.

414 We know that the Lucchesi resisted to assume poverty, and perhaps even Calasanz had some doubts, as Fr. Berro suggests.

doubt the truthfulness of these inner visions and auditions. On the other hand, these events indicate that Calasanz had already some mystical experiences when he was founding the Pious Schools, between 47 and 60 years old.

Ecstasies or raptures

A great number of witnesses speak of ecstasies or raptures, levitations, irradiations of his face ... Some are so concrete and narrated with so many details and conviction that it is difficult to question them. What can be concluded with certainty, besides other considerations, is that when our Saint was praying or saying mass he was so concentrated that his faculties were completely absorbed in the object of his prayer. It had to be, then, an authentic contemplation that caused such effects in him and such impressions in those who observed him. What kind of contemplation was it? Which objects or persons was he contemplating? We cannot know it because he didn't write his spiritual experiences. But we can imagine that it wasn't only a fruit of his own efforts, but an infused contemplation, a gift of God which he sometimes received. In his writing we find some clear indications on the object of such contemplation: the person of Christ and his mysteries (his love and surrender, his presence and closeness, his patience and mercy ...), the Most Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary, along with the "spiritual goods," "the heavenly realities," "the treasures that God prepares for us," etc. were certainly present because he mentions them often in his letters. All this accompanied by a great joy or inner happiness, as it also appears often in his letters. Nor we know how old he was when he had these experiences or gifts. However, there is strong evidence that they belong to the stage of full maturity and old age of the Saint. And they seem to have been rather frequent or not too rare.

Here are some testimonies⁴¹⁵:

- "Every morning he said Mass with great devotion ... I have seen him many times, before and after Mass, in a corner of the church, concentrated on God, with tears on his face and with a special brightness" (D. Dionisio Micara: *Summarius Magnum*, n° 8, § 53).

415 Other testimonies in Bau: *Biografía Crítica*, pp. 245-255.

- “When he spoke of the Virgin he used to remain in ecstasy, with his eyes towards heaven” (Abbot Francisco Litrico: *Sum. Mag.*, n° 9, § 54).
- “When he spoke of his hope and desire to enjoy God in the vision of Paradise, tears fell from his eyes” (Fr. Jacobo Bandoni: *Sum. Mag.*, n° 27, § 14).
- “Once he was talking with me about perfection. Suddenly, he joined his hands and remained in that position for half an hour... When he turned back from something like a sweet dream and saw me still there, he was annoyed and told me: ‘You are still here?’” (Fr. Francisco de San Carlos: *Reg. Cal.* 28, p. 43).
- “I know that the Saint was endowed with supernatural gifts, such as ecstasies, predictions, visions... And particularly with ecstasies. I saw him once in rapture and elevated a palm from the ground. It was in the Oratory of Saint Pantaleon, in front of his room. That year I lived in that community. The servant of God walked about in the Oratory saying the Rosary with great devotion. I stayed looking at him during a quarter of an hour... Finally, when he was close to his room, I saw him elevated a palm from the ground, and he remained in that position for the time of a Miserere. I went to call some other religious, but when I came back with some of them, he was walking again. During that levitation I saw him well, with his head lifted and his eyes raised to heaven” (Fr. Agustín de San Carlos: *Sum. Mag.* N° 29, § 6).

The audition or apparition of the Madonna dei Monti

This apparition or audition is also well documented. It happened short before his death, when he was terminally ill, and when the Order of the Pious Schools had been dissolved and at risk of extinction. The shrine of the *Madonna dei Monti* is in Rome; in times of Calasanz it was very famous and Fr. Joseph used to go there frequently.

There are two major witnesses regarding this event: Fr. Francisco Castelli and Fr. Camilo Scassellati. Both deposed in the Reporting Process a few years after the Saint’s death. Their statements are the following:

- Fr. Scassellati, on June 9, 1651: “While I was in our Father’s room, two or three days before his death, Fr. Francisco Castelli, his former Assistant, was near his bed encouraging him not to fear death. Fr. Joseph, with a clear voice and confidentially, told Fr. Francisco: ‘yes, indeed, I must be confident, because the Blessed Virgin has promised me her help’. I was surprised and I asked Fr. Castelli by signs what did he mean, because I thought he could be delirious. Fr. Francisco asked him what he meant and Fr. Joseph with a clear voice said: ‘I must be confident because the Most Holy Madonna dei Monti has promised me her help’. I know he was very devout to that image and I have heard that every Saturday he went to visit it and, as religious, whenever he could” (*Reporting Process*, p. 111).
- Fr. Castelli, on April 30, 1652: “I think that his hope in the Virgin was present in our conversation in the last days of his life. I went to visit him some days before his death and I told him: ‘Father, I wonder you want to leave us’. He answered: ‘I am in the hands of God; may his Divine Majesty do his will’. I said: ‘Anyway, Your Paternity will surely land on your feet’, and he said in low voice and confidentially: ‘The answer was yes, indeed, the Virgin has told me this; to be happy and not to doubt’. How is that, I asked, wishing to hear again what he had said. And he repeated slowly: ‘The Virgin (*Madonna dei Monti*) told me to be happy, and not to doubt’. I wanted that the other Father who was with me could hear these words. I knew afterwards of his great devotion to the *Madonna dei Monti*” (*Reporting Process*, p. 449).

The words of the Virgin seem to be ascertained.⁴¹⁶ How happened? We don’t know. But it fits in perfectly well with his devotion to the Mother of God, and with the almost desperate situation of his work. From this event we can infer his great devotion and intimacy with the Virgin Mary, a real mystical gift.

416 According to Fr. Caputi, Fr. Joseph would have revealed this event also to other persons, namely to Frs. García, Berro, Morelli... (See S. Giner: *San José de Calasanz*, p. 1104).

4. Conclusion: Calasanz, a mystic in action

We have seen how strong was the presence and union with God experienced by Calasanz, as well as his experience regarding supernatural realities since before founding the Congregation of the Pious Schools. He was in a continuous communication with the Holy Spirit, whose motions he followed very carefully; he eagerly recommended prayer and recollection, which he practiced in such a way that those who saw him remained amazed and inflamed; it was for him “a greatest pleasure,” “paradise on earth,” “a treasure above all the goods on earth,” “true happiness”, a “bliss” comparable with the heavenly bliss. He even enjoyed suffering with Christ on his way to Calvary.

We have also seen him in rapture or ecstasy, and how God and the Blessed Virgin made him know their will in a direct way.

Finally, we have seen Fr. Joseph who seemed to live at the level of supernatural realities, enjoying God’s peace and love, notwithstanding external challenges.

According to the classical description of the spiritual life stages, we find in Calasanz features indicating the so called purgative, illuminative and unitive ways, quoted by him in his letters⁴¹⁷, and the transformation that the Holy Spirit operated in his person ... We can even have an insight of the “dark night” he suffered through so many misunderstandings and failures.

Regarding the most recent category of the “Theopatic state,” we also find some signs of it in our Saint. For instance, we see his person completely permeated by God who enlightens, supports, leads and transforms him; we see him practicing the filial abandonment in the hands of God, “such a good father;” an abandonment that reflects his passivity regarding God’s actions in his soul. And we also see that at the same time he could follow the development of his daily duties. This harmony between his inner and external life, that characterizes the Theopatic state, was lived by Fr. Joseph in an admirable way. In him, Martha and Mary reached to be in perfect har-

417 For example, in EP 2249.

mony. In this way he could live with great quiet all his situations, both positive and negative. The life of Calasanz reflects that he was permeated, supported and led by God. So that with his qualities and activities he became an instrument of God for redeeming the children from poverty and sin, and for helping many other persons in their material and spiritual needs.

We can, therefore, conclude that Calasanz was an active life mystic, a “mystic in action,” as Scholars call today this kind of persons, who have so collaborated in the cause of God and in the coming of the reign of God. Calasanz has progressively discovered God, developing an increasing love for and union with him. And at the same time he gradually discovered the needs of his brothers. Of those affected by the plague and those damaged by Tiber’s floods. Above all, in the crowds of children abandoned in the streets of Rome he discovered another world, the world of the sons of God who were suffering, and he showed solidarity with them. He loved God and his “least” ones with all his heart and dedicated his whole life to help them. He started feeling that he was sent to take care of the poor children: “the poor committeth himself unto thee”⁴¹⁸, and eventually he “served Christ in the poor,” as he often repeated and wrote.

He was a mystic, in profound and constant union with God, whom he greatly enjoyed on earth, and he was a man of action who sought remedy to the evils that grip so many human beings, particularly the poor children.

Our Calasanz did not write a treatise on mysticism, nor he shared his intimate experiences (with the exception of some hints in response to his children questions when he was old); but he wrote many letters (about 12,000), almost all of them referred to his mission towards “the least.” His heart beat both for God and his children, his mind focused on supernatural realities as well as on the needs of God’s favorites.

Among the different kinds of mystics that history has granted us, Calasanz is certainly listed among the “active life mystics”, and, more specifically, among “mystics in charitable and apostolic ac-

418 Ps 10-H, 14.

tion.” God led him towards his brothers in need and his brothers led him to God. However, as not always it is easy to place a mystic under a single particular category, according to Charles A. Bernard, it seems that Calasanz could be also listed among those “in conformity with Christ.” Such was his interest in contemplating “Christ Crucified,” so strong his commitment to imitate “Christ and his virtues,” and so great the transforming effect of all that in his life and personality that we can well conclude that his charitable and apostolic mysticism also entailed the imitation of and the configuration with Christ, his “blessed Christ”⁴¹⁹.

May all the followers of Calasanz approach this kind of life that our Founder lived and the fullness he reached. May our heart vibrate with a tender and strong love of God and with a great and generous charity towards our brothers. And may we know how to unite so perfectly as Calasanz these two loves. Our existence would then be very fruitful and at the same time gratifying. In love we will find our joy, and in solidarity we will reach or fullness, because we will be like God, who is love.

419 To better understand the kind of mysticism lived by Saint Joseph Calasanz it is useful to read at least the descriptions of F. Ruiz Salvador and of Ch. A. Bernard, as summarized in Part I, 5 of this writing.

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