

PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIAN APOSTLE

In Light of the Regnum Christi Charism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Christ’s final words to his followers were: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations...” (Mt 28:19). Making disciples is the lasting fruit that God wants every one of his children to bear (“I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last” Jn 15:16). This is the mission, given by Christ himself, that gives direction and meaning to everything a Christian does.

To be a disciple is to be someone who has discovered that his **mission** in life is to love Christ, serve people, and build the Church; it is to be someone who has joyfully embraced that **mission** and identified his life with it.

Because the mission comes from Christ, only Christ can bring it to fruition. The fruit we bear as Christians comes from our cooperation with his grace, but his grace is the initiator and force behind it. We are junior partners in his great endeavor of building the Kingdom. He is in charge, but he has chosen to depend on our collaboration, on us doing our part.

What exactly is our part and how do we fulfill it?

The *Portrait of a Christian Apostle* (“apostle” comes from the Greek word meaning “sent” – someone who has been sent on a mission) brings together in one, unified vision the characteristics of a healthy, fruit-bearing Christian apostle, in light of the Regnum Christi charism. These characteristics apply equally to an individual, a team, a section, and the Movement as a whole.

The *Portrait* can be used as a guide in the early stages of formation as well as a chart for periodic check-ups to insure healthy growth.

II. THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN APOSTLE

A Christian apostle can be likened to the mustard seed from Jesus' parable:

"The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches" (Mt 13:31-32).

Just as a tree as roots, a trunk, and fruit-bearing branches, so the Christian apostle can be described as having three dimensions:

- rooted in *core convictions* (know God's love)
- stabilized and directed by *practical principles* (live God's love)
- and matured through *apostolic action* (spread God's love)

1. FIRST DIMENSION: ROOTED IN CORE CONVICTIONS (*Know God's love*)

What are the core convictions?

A core conviction is a deeply held belief, an idea about which you are firmly, passionately convinced. These convictions become the *motive force or inspiration* behind everything you do in life and the *clear lens* through which you see yourself and the world around you.

A Christian apostle has *eight* core convictions:

1. God, my Father, loves me with an eternal love
2. Because I love God, I love his will above all else
3. My only passion is Christ, who "loved me and gave himself up for me"
4. Because I love Christ, I carry out my mission in the Church
5. Because I love Christ, I build the civilization of Christian justice and love
6. Because I love Christ, I lovingly embrace my vocation to *Regnum Christi*
7. I have one life and it is short; I am bound for eternity
8. Mary, my Mother, accompanies me, inspires me, and sustains me

All these convictions are tied together by love. Having experienced God's personal and determined love through Christ, we are moved to want to love him in return. This personal friendship with Christ, loving him and loving all that he loves, is the motor for everything else; it is the sap that gives life to the whole tree.

How are the core convictions applied?

These core convictions color everything we do; they touch every decision, every reaction, and every moment of our existence.

Because they are drawn from the Gospel, they correspond to the truth about God, ourselves, and the world. Keeping them fresh, therefore, will keep our lives rooted in the truth and our hearts and minds united to the vine, which is Christ himself: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

Our prayer commitments are directed towards continually nourishing these convictions so that they continue to grow and keep our friendship with Christ real, alive, and dynamic. These commitments and activities include:

Daily:

- On rising: morning offering of the day to God, and your examen to prepare the day
- Ten or fifteen minutes of personal meditation
- Eucharistic Celebration and Communion if possible
- Angelus
- One mystery of the rosary in honor of the Blessed Virgin
- Ten-minute gospel reflection except when there is a homily during Mass, or the team does the Eucharistic hour together
- Visit to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist or a spiritual communion
- Prayer for vocations from the prayer book
- Five-minute examination of conscience at the end of the day (daily balance)
- Our Father, Hail Mary, and Creed before going to bed

Weekly:

- Eucharistic Hour of adoration and reparation
- A sacrifice for vocations

Biweekly:

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation, if possible

Monthly:

- Monthly Retreat

Annually:

- Triduum of renewal or spiritual exercises; renewal of your commitment to God in the Movement

2. SECOND DIMENSION: STABILIZED AND DIRECTED BY PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES (Live God's love)

What are the practical principles and how are they applied?

Practical principles are guidelines that help us channel the love and passion we have for our mission. They give order and direction to our desire to fulfill Christ's command, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." That desire is constantly intensifying as our core convictions grow deeper.

The core convictions are the roots of our Christian life, but for them to bear fruit, they need to be channeled intelligently through the trunk and out to the branches. The practical principles provide a sturdy, dependable way of doing just that.

Once again, the unifying factor is love. These principles help us channel our love for Christ; they help us live it out passionately and fully, in a way that will last.

All these practical principles are assimilated gradually, under the action of the Holy Spirit, and through being involved in various formative and apostolic activities.

There are *seven* practical principles:

1. Work effectively

Love always demands giving the best of oneself for the good of the beloved. Therefore, our efforts to grow closer to Christ and to bring others closer to Christ should be channeled intelligently. Taking into account concrete circumstances, we should always try to choose whatever means will have the deepest, widest, and longest-lasting impact.

The Holy Spirit sent St Paul to Rome, the capital of the Empire, where his preaching could have the most influence in spreading Christianity throughout the civilized world: "Next night, the Lord appeared to him [Paul] and said, 'Courage! You have borne witness for me in Jerusalem, now you must do the same in Rome.'" (Acts 23:11)

Applying this principle means investing one's time and effort in whatever will yield the best results (deepest, widest, longest-lasting), whether in one's own spiritual life, family, parish, work, apostolic action... We always seek works with the most breadth and depth of impact.

2. Work person-to-person

Jesus called his Twelve Apostles by name. He lived and worked with them for three years. Their relationship with him wasn't generic, and neither is ours. Every person's relationship with God is unique; it is a friendship based on love, and this has to be reflected in the way we carry out our mission as Christ's apostles.

Philip the Deacon got right into the Ethiopian Eunuch's chariot and spoke to him face-to-face about Christ – it wasn't enough for the Eunuch to read the scriptures on his own (Cf. Acts 8:26-39).

Applying this principle means that our efforts to bring others closer to Christ must always respect their freedom and the pace at which God wants to lead them. The way we serve others should always reflect Christ's own love through its gentle, sincere, and personal attention: "... learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29)

3. *Live in and as a team*

Jesus wasn't a Lone Ranger. He chose Twelve Apostles to be his closest companions and collaborators. He has chosen to save the world through his Church, through a community in which individuals are necessarily interdependent. This is Christ's approach, so it must be ours as well.

Teamwork insures that individual strengths are maximized and individual weaknesses are shored up. It assures that individuals learn from each other and grow in virtues like humility, fraternal charity, patience, compassion, and self-control.

The Holy Spirit directed Peter to go and preach Christ's message to the Jews, and he directed Paul to preach to the Gentiles: "...the gospel for the uncircumcised had been entrusted to me [Paul], just as to Peter the gospel for the circumcised..." (Gal 2:7). Both had a crucial role, but neither was complete without the other.

Applying this principle means admitting one's limitations and working with others, not in spite of them or in competition with them. It touches apostolic action as well as spiritual and intellectual growth.

4. *Regnum Christi makes demands and presupposes conviction*

Jesus exhausted himself in order to fulfill his mission, "...for there were so many [people] coming and going that there was no time for them [Jesus and his Apostles] even to eat" (Mk 6:31).

Until everyone knows and loves Jesus Christ perfectly, there will always be more work to do. The Christian apostle is always looking for new ways to serve Christ better, to serve others better, and to serve the Church better.

When St Paul first went to Athens, he took advantage of local customs to preach the gospel. He went to the Areopagus, the outdoor forum that held ongoing public debates, and engaged the Athenians in a discussion about Christ. He even used the example of one of their own religious monuments (a monument to the "unknown god") in order to explain who Jesus was (Cf. Acts 17).

This principle is applied in every sector of one's life. Whenever a problem or a need is encountered, the Christian apostle treats it like an opportunity to

grow by finding a creative solution; whenever a failure or mistake mucks things up, the Christian apostle gets right back up again and starts over; whenever an opportunity presents itself, the Christian apostle analyzes it to see how to capitalize on it for the sake of the mission.

This principle involves striving to avoid a passive, response-only mentality. Love reaches out actively. In this sense, taking the initiative is the perfection of Christian obedience.

5. Mobilize: work, mobilize and support

Time is a limited resource. To take full advantage of it requires intelligent planning: setting goals, identifying the steps needed to achieve them, and organizing resources to take those steps. Because of this reality, this principle encapsulates all of the previous ones. By working, one responds to the most basic duty in fulfilling the mission given by Christ. Through mobilizing, members involve others, marshalling support, and projecting them in a way that helps them to share in the responsibility for this mission. And by supporting others, members encourage and build up those who are involved as collaborators, fostering initiative and empowering them to experience Christ in this special way.

Jesus could have saved the world through his own efforts, choosing to independently redeem humanity and transmit the teachings of the Father. Instead, he established his Church to assist by enlisting the help of twelve collaborators who he would live with, mentor, and send forth (after his ascension into heaven) to make his Father's will a reality (Mk 3: 13-19).

6. Be flexible

God is the protagonist in the Christian mission; we are just his junior partners. He will work in ways that we don't anticipate, and so we always have to remain docile and flexible.

Peter was led by the Holy Spirit to baptize non-Jews and abrogate the Jewish dietary laws – something that struck the first Christians (all of whom were Jewish) as scandalous. It took a lot of convincing and discussion to accept this initiative of the Holy Spirit (Cf. Acts 10).

This principle is applied in every moment and activity of a Christian's life. Docility to the Holy Spirit will always fit in with the other practical principles, but you can't predict what exactly it will demand of you. It involves cultivating an attitude of attention to the Holy Spirit, a habit of generosity, and a spirit of self-sacrifice.

7. Integral Formation

In order to grow to full maturity as Christians, we have to let God's grace work in every sector of our lives: spiritual, intellectual, moral (character), and

social. Here as always, Jesus is our model. In him, we are children of God, and every aspect of our lives should reflect God's wisdom and nobility. This requires an ongoing effort on our part to develop to the full all of our talents and capabilities.

St Paul was able to speak with Jews and Greeks, high-ranking Roman officials and slaves. He could adjust to any situation or hardship and turn it into an opportunity to build the Kingdom of Christ. He was as well-rounded as he was holy: "I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too. I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything anywhere... For the weak I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost..." (Phil 4:12 and 1Cor 9:22)

Applying this principle means faithful seeking one's own integral development, but also seeking that of others. We strive to bring Christ's redemption to every person, and to the whole person.

3. THIRD DIMENSION: MATURED THROUGH APOSTOLIC ACTION (Spread God's love)

What is apostolic action?

The core convictions provide the nutrients, the sap for whole tree, while the practical principles are the channels through which those convictions are put into practice – the trunk through which the sap flows. Apostolic actions are the fruitful branches of the tree, the specific activity by which we bring others to Christ and bring Christ to others, fulfilling in concrete ways Christ's command: "Go and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19).

Apostolic action is essential to the life of every Christian. It proves the authenticity and vitality of our faith. As St James puts it: "Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead...I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds..." (James 2:17-18).

Like a tree's fruit, which buds, blooms, and is fertilized, then germinates and grows, apostolic action – helping others become Christ's disciples – takes time, involves various processes and elements, and can take many forms.

How is apostolic action applied?

Apostolic action follows Christ's example and the image he gives us in the Parable of the Sower. It involves finding and preparing good soil, sowing the seed of the Gospel, and tending its growth for the harvest.

Although it can take many forms, apostolic action always involves three overlapping steps.

1. First, we reach out to others, meeting them where they are.
2. Second, we help give them a deeper experience of Christ. This can be either a spiritual experience (retreat, Christian Life Group, prayer meeting...) or the experience of doing good for one's neighbors or for society as a whole (going on a mission, doing a service project, helping in an apostolate...).
3. Third, we invite them to follow Christ more closely, to commit themselves more fully to Christ and his mission.

John the Baptist gathered disciples around him, told them about the coming Messiah, and then sent them to go after Jesus (Cf. John 1).

Philip, one of the first Apostles, experienced Christ himself, then went and found his friend Nathaniel (reaching out), told him what he had experienced (gave a deeper – in this case a first – experience of Christ), and then told him to come and meet Christ himself (invitation to follow Christ more closely): "Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see'" (John 1:45-46).

Three Arenas of Apostolic Action

1. Personal testimony. Regardless of the specific apostolic actions and activities we engage in, the single most important way of being a Christian apostle is through our personal testimony.

Christians should be so full of Christ and his virtues in the way they think, speak, and behave that their mere presence is an instrument the Holy Spirit can use to bring others closer to Christ. Without a Christ-like personal bearing, even large-scale and flashy apostolic endeavors will be barren. We can only help others encounter Christ by being more like Christ ourselves.

This is what it means to be the yeast that Jesus described in the Gospels – wherever a Christian is, there is the transforming power of the Christ: "The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through" (Mt 13:33).

2. Family and friends. The second arena in which this action takes place is one's circle of family and friends.

The Christian Apostle is always *reaching out* to those closest to them in order to help and encourage them, to bring them closer and closer to Christ.

We can always strive to *give them a fresh experience of Christ's love* through praying for them, through the example of our own discipleship, and through involving them in activities that serve others.

Participation in this work of the Church can give them a deeper experience of Christ (“In so far as you did this do one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” [Mt 25:40]) and help them discover their mission in life.

In different ways and at opportune times, we can *invite those closest to us to follow Christ more closely*, whether that means going to confession as a family, going on a family mission trip, inviting a close friend to a retreat, or simply having a conversation with a cousin who is estranged from the Church.

3. A particular apostolate. The third arena in which apostolic action takes place is in the commitment to become partially responsible for a particular apostolate. Apostolates are ongoing activities where all three underlying steps can happen systematically.

The goal of all apostolic action is to “make disciples of all the nations” out of love for Christ. Making disciples requires following the three steps of apostolic action: reaching out to individual people, giving them a deeper experience of Christ, and – when the time is right – inviting them to follow Christ more closely.

Since every person is unique, with a unique personality, a unique combination of interests and talents, and a unique vocation, every person’s path of finding and following Christ is also unique.

- Everyone needs to be *reached out to* in an appropriate way – you don’t offer free food to the wealthy or an expensive Roman pilgrimage to the poor.
- Likewise, each person’s *experience of Christ* will mature in a different way. Some will encounter Christ more easily through serving their neighbors, others through spiritual activities, still others through intellectual or cultural activities.
- Finally, *inviting each person to follow Christ* more closely should also be done in accordance with how the Holy Spirit is acting in that person’s soul. This step will always involve inviting the person to take on some responsibility in the apostolate: to become a member instead of just a participant in a program, and then to become an organizer and not just a member, and then, if the signs of a vocation are there, to become a member of Regnum Christi. That process of taking on more responsibility, of become an authentic disciple of Christ, can happen more or less slowly, and in any number of ways.

III. THE SPIRITUALITY OF REGNUM CHRISTI MEMBERS

66 By spirituality we mean a way of living the faith. A spirituality offers concrete ways to grow and mature in our relationship with God and to respond to our own Christian vocation.

67 The Regnum Christi Movement proposes to its members a spirituality whose main elements are drawn from the Gospel and which set a very high ideal of Christian life. Each member is invited to interiorize and live this spirituality in his own state and condition of life, until reaching the measure of Christ's fullness. For the holiness to which God calls us in baptism is nothing other than reproducing in ourselves the spiritual and moral face of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

68 By living the spirituality of Regnum Christi, recognized and approved by the Church, its members benefit from its means of sanctification and apostolate, and can experience the joy of building the Church and serving people by responding generously to their vocation.

1. A SPIRITUALITY ROOTED IN THE FATHER'S LOVE

69 The spirituality of a Regnum Christi member stems from a deep experience and conviction, namely God's eternal love. An overflowing love that is at the origin of the creation of man and the cosmos, which he placed at man's service.

70 God's love is also his decisive response to man's sin, which is the denial of love. A persistent and faithful response of love by which God does not abandon wayward man but full of pity seeks him out and offers his embrace as the Father rich in mercy, —an embrace which in his infinite kindness is also full of loving motherly tenderness, "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

71 This indescribable love became tangible in a historical and concrete way in the unfathomable mystery of the mission and Incarnation of the Son of God, and it reached unimaginable extremes at the time of his passion, death and resurrection. Regnum Christi's spirituality stems from the intimate experience of God's love revealed in the person of Christ.

72 The experience of God's love is at the center of the Christian life. Only God's love can provide an anchor for the gamut of man's realities, allowing him to live with meaning and confidence. God's love is the point of departure and the only valid motivation that allows man to see his Christian vocation through to the end.

73 The Regnum Christi members' vocation and mission consist in assimilating the reality and dynamism of this love, which is both sublime and concrete. It means knowing, living and spreading it until God's love reaches every human being.

2. A CHRIST-CENTERED SPIRITUALITY

74 The spirituality of Regnum Christi, being a Christian spirituality, is centered on the person of Christ. Full of conviction and enthusiasm, the Movement presents the person of Christ as the supreme model, standard and inspiration for their Christian life to the men and women who approach its spirituality. It exhorts them to know him, love him, follow him and make him known to others. These four aspects of our relationship with Christ are the points of reference that shape the members' life, giving them a precise fundamental orientation toward holiness and an enthusiastic impulse to do apostolate.

a. **Knowing Christ.** Our first spiritual need is to know Christ more, to the point of attaining a deep experience of his person and his love. Therefore, it is not a knowledge based exclusively on academic study, but rather an interior knowledge, that comes from faith and love. It is knowledge based on experience more than theory, knowing more with our heart than our mind. It is not a feeling –though it doesn't exclude feelings and is grateful for those that are helpful– but the gift of self. The optimal places to receive this experience of Christ are prayer, the sacraments and in particular the Eucharist, the Gospel, and the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ's life, especially his Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection.

b. **Loving Christ.** Love is the natural consequence of knowing Christ. A *genuine love* that shows itself not only in our words and desires but above all in our decisions and behavior. A *personal love*, in so far as it implies a deep and total relationship, from heart to heart. A *passionate love* because it touches the inmost fibers of our entire being in such a way that Christ becomes the passion of our lives. A *faithful love* because it is a love that must be renewed and deepened every day, a love that must gradually mature and grow strong through the trials of life.

c. **Following Christ:** Following Christ relates to the doctrine that the life of grace is a participation in the divine life itself. As Christians we do not follow a Christ who is external to us but rather a Christ in whose divine and filial life we participate. The Christ we follow is not only out in front of us, but in his infinite goodness he also follows us and seeks us out until he finds us, to pick us up like lost sheep and guide us as our Good Shepherd. Not a merely historical but a living Christ, more present to us than our innermost self. By means of the life of grace, we are united to Christ like the branch to the vine and his life is manifested in us.

Granted, the life of grace entails our constant battle against sin. However, the life of grace is much more than the mere absence of grave sin. The life of grace demands that we imitate Christ that we be coherent with his presence in our soul by acting and behaving as Christ himself would, that we identify with him so that we think as he thinks, feel as he feels, love as he loves, and live as he lives. Following Christ in this way is a superhuman task. The Holy Spirit alone can bring this about, since only he can stamp the image of Christ on each soul. But to do so, the Holy Spirit needs our human cooperation. He needs us to allow ourselves to be shaped by his expert hand, allow ourselves to be guided and driven by the powerful wind of his wings.

d. **Making Christ known.** We cannot reduce our relationship with Christ to something individualistic, directed only toward our own salvation. The Movement's spirituality includes the deeply held conviction that every person needs to meet Christ's redeeming love. Hence, Regnum Christi members strive to be witnesses

before all people of his love. Making Jesus Christ known makes us heralds of the core message of the Gospel: love. A love received, experienced and valued as a pledge of salvation in this life and in the next, and which at the same time drives us to promote solidarity with everyone, especially those who suffer greatest need.

75 As an essential part of this Christ-centered spirituality, the Movement instills in its members a true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which consists in the worship of God's infinite and merciful love for all people expressed in Jesus Christ. We show this devotion through the exercise of two virtues, meekness and humility. Christ embodied these in an eminent way during his life and he himself told his disciples to imitate him in them. Part and parcel of our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is also our ability to offer ourselves generously to spread Christ's love to everyone by word and deed, trying to be for others an image of Jesus' merciful face.

76 A Regnum Christi member has to commit himself heart and soul so that the experience of Christ's love becomes the decisive factor in his life. "Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. It is true, as the Lord tells us, that man can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. *Jn* 7:37-38). Yet, to become such a source you have to drink over and over from the first and original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart the love of God flows (cf. *Jn* 19:34)."

3. A SPIRITUALITY INSPIRED BY THE SPIRIT

77 As he drew to the end of his earthly life, Jesus promised to send man the Consoler, the Spirit of love that would lead them to the whole truth. The Holy Spirit is the main, supernatural agent behind every work of holiness and apostolate in every person and in the entire world. He is the one sent by the Father and the Son to continue the work of redemption through the Church. Regnum Christi, with the whole Church, acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is the guide and author of holiness, the one who enlightens man's heart, strengthens him in his weakness and makes his apostolate bear fruit that lasts. And we invoke him as Father of the poor, Giver of gifts and the light of man's heart.

In addition, the Holy Spirit is the one who raises up new movements and ecclesial communities as a response to the spiritual needs of each age of history, with its challenges to evangelization. The Regnum Christi Movement acknowledges the Holy Spirit as the source and origin of her very life and spirituality, the One whose initiative it was to give birth to her in the Church, and the One who drives, guides and shapes all her sanctifying and apostolic activity. She also acknowledges him as the builder of her unity, which is essential to the effectiveness of her apostolic mission and which bears witness to the love and joy that the Holy Spirit instills in the hearts of believers.

78 Bearing in mind this truth of faith, the Movement offers its members a spirituality animated by the Holy Spirit and open to his powerful action. It invites them to increase in their lives their faith in and love for the third person of the Blessed Trinity, and to be docile and faithful to his inspirations so that, enlightened and strengthened by his grace, they will walk faithfully the path of God's will and, following Christ's example, live their Christian vocation to the full in the practical living of love.

4. A SPIRITUALITY IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

79 The Movement's spirituality sinks its roots in the Church's spirituality. The Church is Mother and Teacher of Christ's disciples whom she instructs by preaching the Word, tenderly nourishes with the sacraments and guides to the Father's house by her pastoral action. She received a twofold mission from Christ her Founder: "to give life to her children, and to teach and guide them—both as individuals and as nations—with maternal care."

80 The Church as Christ's Mystical Body gives Regnum Christi members their true identity, their authentic filiation and the purpose of their existence. As children and members of the Church, they share in her responsibility for the mission she received when God placed in her the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church's Shepherds are the successors of the apostles and as such have the mission of teaching, sanctifying and governing with Christ's authority. Therefore, in full cooperation with the bishops, our members strive to build up the Church by means of their own holiness and by extending her influence in the world. They do so by the witness of their Christian integrity, their apostolate, and by actively participating in secular enterprises with a gospel spirit, thus making the Church present and active everywhere and in every situation, where she is called to be the salt of the earth.

81 One of the principal elements of the ecclesial spirituality of the Movement is our adherence in mind, heart and will to the Supreme Pontiff, overall Shepherd of the Church. Our adherence to the Pope springs from our faith in Christ's words as he announced to Peter that he would be the principle of the Church's unity, and its visible and lasting foundation, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," (Mt. 16:18), entrusting to him the keys of the Kingdom to determine what is best for her life and mission. This conviction of faith is the motive behind our prayer for the Vicar of Christ, our acceptance of and interest in his teachings, our filial and reverent submission to his decisions, our enthusiastic and active support for his initiatives, and our respect and esteem for his person.

82 The members of the Movement ought to have these same attitudes toward all bishops as successors of the apostles and witnesses of the divine and Catholic truth.

83 Additionally, the members of the Movement are grafted into the life of the local Church to which they belong, recognizing in it the embodiment of the Church universal. Especially, they cooperate actively in their parish life: by participating in its liturgies, especially Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation; by generously supporting their parish priests in their needs and projects; and by placing all their effort and apostolic initiative at the service of the local Church, following the directives of their bishop and parish priest.

84 Regnum Christi rejoices in the diversity of charisms with which the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, and it seeks to contribute to the increase of ecclesial unity. Therefore, it encourages its members, rooted in our charism, to foster support, esteem and cooperation with the other movements and ecclesial realities that work in the Lord's vineyard.

Furthermore, it instills the conviction that those who are united by baptism and the

common commitment to follow Christ, as branches of one Vine must reflect the fullness of the Gospel of love by building up the one Body of Christ.

85 Regnum Christi also takes to heart the call of the Second Vatican Council and the Roman Pontiffs to reestablish the visible unity among Christ's followers. Hence, it exhorts its members to constant prayer, hope, and respectful dialogue and in a special way, to an exquisite charity and cooperation in seeking the common good.

86 The promotion of new vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life is one of the most valuable contributions that members of the Movement make to the Church. Aware of the urgency of praying "to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest", they offer continuous prayer for the increase of those vocations that imply a special dedication to God and neighbor. They actively take part in the Church's initiatives in this area, and they welcome and support as a special gift from God the vocations that he sees fit to raise up in their own families.

87 For Regnum Christi members, the activities and events convened by the Pope or the Bishops such as the World Youth Day, Family Encounters and such, are a golden opportunity to express their faith, love and adherence to their Pastors, and an opportunity to intensify ecclesial unity with other Church movements and institutions.

5. A SPIRITUALITY ROOTED IN CHARITY

88 "Love is the watershed of history, from the moment Jesus, the Word Incarnate and second Person of the Blessed Trinity came to the world to love and teach us to love." Regnum Christi adopts as the core of its spirituality Christ's new commandment, "love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn. 13:34). Inspired by the witness of the first Christians who lived charity with the tang of Gospel novelty, Regnum Christi wants always to put charity forward as the essence of Christianity, so that today too the world can say of Christians and learn from them, "See how they love one another!"

89 Without charity there is no true piety or virtue, since charity is the soul and essence of every virtue. Likewise, charity is the seal of authenticity of every apostolate since it contains all the evangelizing vitality of Christianity, like an uncontainable force driving us to serve all people, especially those suffering most need. "There can be no true Christian holiness in a Christian life whose essence is not living charity."

90 An additional and fundamental reason to live charity is the mystical identification of Christ with my neighbor. Faith teaches us that by becoming man Christ has mystically united himself with all humanity, in such a way that if we do not love those who are or could become part of Christ's mystical Body we do not love Christ himself.

91 We express charity in the Movement through a deep sense of solidarity. As in the

dogma of the communion of saints, its members recognize that they are united in a special way with all the members of the Church in faith and love, that they share the same lot in Christ and are bound in solidarity with each other in their spiritual and material needs. It requires humility and self-detachment in imitation of Christ crucified to live this virtue, but it is the path to the new life brought about by Christ with his Resurrection.

92 Scripture says of the early Christian community, "They were of one heart and one mind" (Acts 4:32). The Movement aspires to be a united family within the great family of the Church. A family made up of many members where no one ought to feel left out, where each one is called to contribute the gift of his own self and his availability to build unity in love, modeled on the Church. There, if one member suffers all suffer with him, and if one is honored, all share in his joy. Therefore, charity must be the Movement's true "family resemblance"

93 Our exercise of charity comprises our thoughts, heart, words and actions. It involves the generous and constant practice of a wide range of virtues such as warmth, respect, service, mutual support, and sincere and fraternal esteem. It also requires us to bear our brother's burden, praise his talents and virtues, share in his successes and failures, and when necessary prudently, nobly and firmly to defend him. And since our heart is the true source of our intentions and actions, we must seek to have a kind heart in order always to think and speak positively of others.

94 Charity in speech is one of the most beautiful and fruitful expressions of charity, and it consists in showing our love in the way we speak. Not speaking badly of others can never be enough for a Christian. We must rather strive always to speak well of them, praising whatever good there is in them, highlighting their virtues and achievements, never unnecessarily mentioning their limitations and defects so as to create a climate of esteem toward them, increase their good name and allow them the better to develop all their potential. Likewise, he must make sure to safeguard his neighbor's good name by believing all the good we hear and only the evil that can be seen.

95 For its part, slander is one of the sins that most destroy charity. It is a genuine cancer for our Christian life. Due to an evil inclination we have—be it envy, human respect, vanity, self-love, revenge, rancor or rashness— we easily speak ill of others and what's more, we even justify this behavior. Guarding our tongue is a very serious spiritual commitment in the daily plan of a Regnum Christi member, as St. James warns us "If anyone does not sin with his speech, he is a perfect man" (Jam. 3:2). Slander is an especially grave sin against charity and against our neighbor for it seriously damages his reputation and is radically contrary to the spirit of Christ and his Gospel. Similarly, detraction is also a sin to be rejected and avoided by every means since, even though the negative matter or facts might be true, it also has the sad consequence of gravely injuring the reputation of individuals or of institutions.

96 As in every family, selfishness and individualism are the enemies of our unity and charity. Individualism is a deeply rooted tendency in the human person that makes us want to satisfy our own desires and achieve our own goals by our own devices, independently of or in open opposition to the good of others. In contrast, St. Paul presents Christ as one who did not seek his own good but stripped himself of his

divine privileges and gave himself up for all people. Christ's example sets a high standard of detachment and renunciation of our self-centered individualism, and it represents the fundamental attitude that best defines the Christian lifestyle.

6. A MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

97 The centrality of Christ and his love, which is the very heart of the Movement's spirituality, leads us to another highly important characteristic, missionary dynamism.

98 God the Father, moved by love, sent his son into the world to save mankind. Christ in turn sent the apostles to the ends of the earth to preach the joyful news that God is love and the time of salvation has come.

99 The Church faces the permanent challenge of effectively passing on this Gospel to each new generation. Filled with Christ's charity, she too feels the urgency of fulfilling her missionary mandate, of bringing the Gospel to every person, overcoming all the boundaries of time, culture and place.

100 With the Church and rooted in the Church, Regnum Christi shares in this mission, seeking to bring God's love to the heart of every man and woman. Therefore, the Movement's spirituality is strongly marked with a deep missionary sense. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1Cor 9:16) must always echo in the heart of every Regnum Christi member. Each one has to be a flame that sets Christ's love ablaze in his surroundings. Christ needs arms! Christ needs feet! Christ needs tongues! The apostles of the Kingdom must offer theirs unconditionally so as to work for the interests of Christ and his Church.

101 The mission stems from a deep, personal experience, —your living and life-changing encounter with Christ. The apostle extracts not only the content but also the certainty and enthusiasm of his missionary activity from this encounter, which he matures in faith, nourishes in hope and gives life to in love. More than structures and programs, the mission needs men and women who have experienced God's love in their own lives and feel called to work tirelessly to proclaim and extend his Kingdom using every licit and good means until Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of men and societies.

102 The Movement proposes the example of St. Paul as the model of a missionary to help its members better understand this trait of our spirituality. He defined himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (2Cor. 1:1). He traveled extensively, he was tireless in his journeying, he preached in the Jewish synagogues, he organized small groups of Christian converts from Judaism and paganism. He also preached the Gospel from house to house, systematically approaching individuals. The strength of his proclamation and his tenacious formation of new disciples and missionaries became the key to the true success of his mission. All this, however, could only come from a vivid experience of Christ that took place for him on the road to Damascus. This encounter radically transformed his life and definitively infused him with an astonishing apostolic zeal.

103 The mission has two additional conditions. Each member of the Movement must

allow himself to be permeated by Christ's love for each person, the source that inspires every vocation and mission in the Church. And each one with the power of the Holy Spirit must be able to love every person with the very heart of Christ. Only thus will our surrender take on the same characteristics as Christ's: total, generous, unselfish, seeking only the good of those we serve.

104 The Christian mission is not easy. Normally, we are enthusiastic, generous and dedicated as we begin. Nevertheless, it can happen that gradually the difficulties, failures and the apparently slow pace discourage us and even cause us to give up. To persevere, we need to believe firmly in our mission, in God's help and our ultimate success, trusting in God's power rather than our own strength or ability.

105 Giving ourselves and persevering in the mission is one of the most fruitful, enriching and unforgettable Christian experiences, as our Lord said, "There is more happiness in giving than receiving". Being an apostle is not only a duty of Christian life, it is an extraordinary way to discover the full meaning of your own life as you serve others.

7. A CONTEMPLATIVE AND CONQUERING SPIRITUALITY

106 Prayer is a loving, heart to heart dialogue with God. It is a privileged time in our personal relationship with him. In this loving dialogue God takes the initiative of going out to meet us, placing himself at our service in a listening, forgiving, welcoming and giving way. In its various expressions –liturgical or devotional, vocal or mental, personal or community– prayer is an exceptional opportunity for union with God so as to experience his love.

107 Contact with God through prayer is a source of certainties and convictions, attitudes and particular behavior. The praying person senses the need to adapt his mind, heart, will and activity to the most holy will of God who has come to meet him, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 22:10). Therefore, besides giving glory to God, the primary fruit of prayer in man is that he listens to and accepts God's will serenely, joyfully and lovingly.

108 A Regnum Christi member should keep alive in his life every day the spirit of the prayer, "Holy Spirit, inspire all my thoughts, what I should say or leave unsaid, what I should write and all I should do. Teach me how to act so as to bring about the good of all people, the fulfillment of my mission and the triumph of Christ's Kingdom."

109 The Church has always understood that prayer is an essential part of the apostolate, as in the beautiful words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "Giving to others what you have first gazed upon in prayer". Prayer, insofar as it is an experience of God's love, is central to proclaiming the Gospel.

110 Prayer is also a condition for the apostolate. According to the principle of the primacy of grace, God is the only source of fruitfulness and effectiveness in the supernatural order. The Christian will be an instrument of salvation for his brothers and sisters only to the degree that he is united with Christ, "for without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). So often it is prayer alone that is able to open hearts to Christ's love, give grace its victory over sin and get people to accept the demands of the Kingdom.

111 To pray, we must exercise the theological virtues. Faith, hope and charity are the greatest means we have to express our relationship with God. They are the source of our interior and apostolic life. Regnum Christi members should humbly pray to God for these virtues and practice them so as to follow always a threefold path: A living, active, and luminous faith, which sheds the light of God on all the events of our life and helps us remain faithful amid the difficulties and struggles that God's will imposes on us. A joyous, unbreakable hope, which fills us with the certainty that only God can give. An ardent, generous love, which enables us to understand God's goodness and leads us to correspond to this love by faithfully fulfilling our human and Christian duties and by giving ourselves to others.

112 In the daily grind of every Christian, prayer and work are essential commitments if he is to bear any fruit. We must neither pray without working nor work without praying. If you pray without working God may be deprived of the channel he needs to communicate his graces. If you work without praying it is not likely that your work will bear fruit for Christ's Kingdom. Therefore a Movement member seeks to strike up friendly dialogues with Christ as he goes about his ordinary activities: he needs to be contemplative in order to achieve the goals that his love for Christ and mankind set for him.

8. A SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS AND SELF-DENIAL FOR LOVE

113 To follow Christ, we must walk the way of the cross, "If anyone wishes to be my disciple he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." A rough and narrow way, yet one that contains the Christian paradox of happiness and fruitfulness through sacrifice.

114 Self-denial is a Christian virtue by which we renounce our egotism and everything that is a hindrance to our greater love for God and our neighbor. Far from meaning that we despise, hate or have no interest in material realities, abnegation frees our heart from selfishness, and purifies it of disordered inclinations that close us to the love of God and our neighbor.

115 Abnegation has no appeal to our human nature, which is wounded by sin and frequently inclined to grant itself every possible gratification. But viewed in the light of Christ's cross and with the strength that stems from there, it becomes a necessary avenue to holiness and apostolic effectiveness. It is the path Christ chose to fulfill his work of redemption and to bear abundant fruit, "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Besides, human experience proves that only by denying ourselves can we master our passions and disordered inclinations, and persevere in our faithful and personal love for Christ.

116 St. Paul compares the Christian's life to training so as to win first place in the stadium. He himself tells us that he exerted himself not as one wasting blows on the air but that he punished his body and subdued it so as not to be disqualified. This shows us that self-denial is not an end in itself but instead a necessary means to achieve our goal, which is to grow in our personal holiness and spread Christ's Kingdom. When self-denial emerges as something demanded by our love for Christ and others, then it finds its true meaning and justification.

117 There is quite a variety of ways to practice self-denial: faithfully and carefully fulfilling our duties; developing a strong will against all the fickleness of our feelings and emotions; mastering and tempering our character; controlling our disordered emotional reactions; and renouncing anything that might hinder our giving ourselves to God and others. Sometimes this rejection is necessary because it is at one and the same time the rejection of sin; other times, as the Holy Spirit inspires us, it may be very helpful for our personal purification and self-improvement, or to create harmony in our relationships with others.

118 Self-denial is also necessary when it comes to the apostolate, since our mission requires great personal detachment in order fruitfully to undertake any apostolic initiative, and to brave fatigue, setbacks and misunderstandings for the cause of Christ without ever losing heart.

9. A SPIRITUALITY OF THE NEW MAN AND THE NEW WOMAN

119 Christ, true God and true man, is the pattern of human plenitude. He is perfect man, he is the answer to man's deep desires and aspirations, and he reveals to man the sense and meaning of his own humanity.

120 By baptism the Christian is clothed with Christ and participates in the newness of his life. The baptized person is already a new man but he has before him the task of cooperating with God's grace to attain "the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of Christ's fullness" (see Eph 4:13). For this, the Christian must work to strip himself of the old man, with his disordered inclinations of sensuality and pride, and to appropriate for himself the new heart that God has given him in baptism, by means of his communion with Christ and the Church. In this way, by the action of the Holy Spirit, he gradually acquires a heart that is open to his Creator and the vocation God has given him; a pure heart, inscribed with God's law, the law of love; a meek and humble heart, like Christ's.

121 In order to become a new man in Christ, on the one hand we need to meditate on the richness and depth of the gift of our own baptism and the commitment it involves. We must continually seek the interior renewal that is the fruit of divine grace, living the Gospel, participating in the liturgy and the sacraments, prayer, moral and ascetic effort, and our dedication to our neighbor out of love for the Lord. On the other hand, we need to prepare our nature as best we can so that the Holy Spirit can elevate it with his grace: "the man first, then the saint".

122 The principal enemy of our new life in Christ is our egotism. As the sorry legacy of original sin, egotism consists in giving preference to our own self—with our interests, passions, occupations, likes and whims—over our love for God and our neighbor. Egotism is not only the root of moral disorder in each human being, it is also the real source of countless evils the world suffers, such as social injustice, violence and moral deterioration. Therefore, Regnum Christi is convinced that the true means to transform the world and society is the interior transformation of the human person, achieved by grace. The degree to which man—every human person—is converted to Christ in the depths of his heart, will determine the degree to which

an authentic civilization of justice and love, peace, stability and genuine progress will arise, according to God's design.

123 On the other hand, the Movement is well aware that we need permanently to convert since in this life the Christian has not yet crossed the finish line. The road after our initial conversion is still one that requires our effort to clothe ourselves with the new man. It is not without its great joys and lights from the Lord, but it also has its dark valleys in which we must persevere with trust, relying on the goodness of the Lord who died and rose again.

10. A SPIRITUALITY WITH MARY, OUR MOTHER

124 One creature, the Blessed Virgin Mary, occupies a completely special place in the plan of mankind's salvation laid down by God from all eternity. Because of her singular union with Christ her Son, and her cooperation in the spiritual regeneration of humanity in Christ, she is the Mother of all men in the order of grace.

125 Mary's life is a hymn of faith in God and his loving providence. Her life also offers a constant witness of trust and filial abandonment to God's will, above all in the difficult and dark moments she lived. In addition to her faith and trust, the Blessed Virgin lived a heroic degree of charity. Second to her Son, she was the creature of whom God demanded the most love; a limitless love, up to the supreme sacrifice she made on Calvary as she gave her own Son over for all men, and opened her heart to receive them all as their Mother. Mary is at the same time an eloquent and simple model of the daily living of the theological virtues.

126 The most typical fruit of her life of faith, trust and love was her prompt, loving and heroic obedience to God's will. Through her practice of this virtue, Mary freely and actively linked her life to her Son in his work for mankind's justification and eternal salvation. Thus, the Blessed Virgin is every man and woman's most perfect example of love for Jesus Christ, dedication to his service and cooperation in his work of redemption.

127 Mary is the model of fidelity. The Church proclaims her as the faithful Virgin because throughout the various and oftentimes difficult circumstances of her life, she kept her soul in the disposition of the Lord's handmaid. Thus she ratified her initial "yes" in every new decision and was docile in her embrace of God's plan, which became more mysterious and surprising every step of the way.

128 Once assumed body and soul into heaven, Mary does not cease to exercise her spiritual motherhood over mankind, interceding for us before God in order to obtain the necessary graces for our salvation.

129 The same Divine providence that deigned to grant Mary such a prominent place in the history of salvation is admirably in tune with the deepest and most lively sentiments of us Christians, with our deeply felt need for a mother in our spiritual life; a mother who accompanies, educates, guides and sustains us on our pilgrim path to the Father's house.

130 The Church translates the multiple links that join her with Mary into a variety of devotional attitudes:

1. Profound veneration, as she meditates on Mary's singular dignity, made Mother of the Word Incarnate by the work of the Holy Spirit;
2. Ardent love, as she reflects on Mary's spiritual motherhood of all the members of the Mystical Body;
3. Confident supplication, as she experiences the intercession of her advocate and helper;
4. Loving service, as she discovers in the humble handmaid of the Lord the queen of mercy and mother of all grace
5. Diligent imitation as she contemplates the holiness and virtues of the one Full of Grace;
6. Moving admiration, as she contemplates in Mary, as in a flawless reflection, all that she desires and hopes to become;
7. Attentive study, as she recognizes in the co-redeemer now fully participating in the fruits of the Paschal Mystery, the prophetic fulfillment of her own future, until the day in which, purified of every wrinkle and stain, she will become the Bride decked out for her spouse Jesus Christ.

131 An important element of our devotion to the Blessed Virgin is to foster in her regard the love and trust that we have toward a true mother —love and trust based on God's providence, Mary's fidelity and her closeness to her Son, which makes her closer to mankind. When she accepted us as her children, Mary committed her love: a perfect love, breathing tenderness and compassion for her children, especially for sinners. A demanding and authentic love that seeks the good of her children. A merciful love that intercedes for all before God to obtain the graces each one needs for their sanctification, daily life and apostolic activity. Our love for Mary and our trust in her find their strongest and most moving motive in these truths, in which we can see clearly Mary's role in the life of the Church and in the life of each one of her members, according to the plan of salvation laid down by God from all eternity.

132 Devotion to the Blessed Virgin as the Church understands it would not be complete without our sincere effort to imitate her virtues, especially her faith, hope, love, humility, obedience and cooperation in Christ's redemptive plan. She is the way to Christ, and with our hand in hers it is easier to progress surely, rapidly and objectively toward holiness.

III. WRAP-UP REFLECTION; WHAT THE TREE IS MADE OF

Christian life is more than a formula or a to-do list. Above all, as we saw in the core convictions, Christian life is experiencing Christ's love, hearing his call, and courageously and lovingly setting out to follow him. It is a way of life that emerges from God's grace and the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

In every stage and factor of the Christian's life, therefore, Christ himself remains the standard, the center, and the goal. A Christian is called to be another Christ. Re-incarnating in oneself the style of life and virtues of Christ is the very stuff the tree is made of; it gives solidity, substance, and vitality to the wood.

We don't want hollow trunks and brittle branches, so we must strive, with the help of God's grace and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be other Christs:

- Christ was a man of prayer and a deep interior life – just so the Christian.
- Christ embraced the cross as an essential part of his mission (persecution, betrayal, suffering, difficulties, opposition) – just so the Christian.
- Christ gave himself to others generously and constantly – just so the Christian.
- Christ chose to be poor, chaste, and obedient to his Father's will – just so the Christian.
- Christ humbly sought to please his Father and others before himself – just so the Christian.
- Christ tirelessly pursued his mission in life – just so the Christian.

The perfect model of imitating Christ and fulfilling the mission of a Christian apostle is *the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Love for her goes hand-in-hand with love for Christ.

- She is a model of the core convictions:
 - "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... for the Almighty has done great things for me" (Lk 1:46, 49). [God loves me.]
 - "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me" (Lk 1:38). [God's will above all else]
 - "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'" (John 2:5)... "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother..." (John 19:25). [Christ was her passion]
 - "With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14). [Love for the Church]
 - "When they ran out of wine... the Mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'" (Jn 2:3). [Love for neighbor]
 - "As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in heart" (Lk 2:19). [Life is short – destination eternity]
 - Mary, Mother of Sorrows is recognized by the Church as the patroness of the Movement. [Regnum Christi is a gift for me and the Church]
- She is a model of the practical principles and of apostolic action most especially through her unconditional faith in and obedience to God's will: "Blessed is she who believed..." (Lk 1:45). "More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it," Jesus said about his mother (Lk 11:28).
- She is a model of all the virtues, which she lived out in accordance with her unique vocation.
- And she is the loving mother who accompanies all Christians with her powerful intercession.

