



CLARET AND PARIS FOUNDERS OF A NEW ORDER

Anthony Mary Claret I Clará and María Antonia París i Riera, founders of our Institute, Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, lived during the XIX century. This was a century of political unrest, of persecutions of the Church and of the birth of new ideologies. All of that greatly affected the Church, which did not always know how to face and respond to the needs of the times. Many of her members, among the hierarchy as well as among the people, did not live up to the demands of the gospel. Claret wants to respond to that situation with a tireless work of evangelization. Paris discovers in prayer that the Church needs a “reformation”, a conversion from the inside. She understands that the Lord asks her to found a religious institute whose aim will precisely be to work for the continuous conversion of the Church. Although both founders were born in Catalonia their lives took very different paths.

How would they meet? He is a missionary on fire, in love with Christ and he is completely dedicated to the preaching of the gospel in Catalonia and the Canary Isles. He is a man that does not have time for other businesses. She is a novice who lives secluded in her monastery, dedicated to the education of girls, woman of a profound prayer life, who experiences the fire for evangelization. The canon José Caixal will put them in contact. He is a friend of Claret and the confessor of the novice María Antonia, from her adolescent years.

Let us go back in time and let us see how they meet. Monsignor José Caixal who has been exiled for many years due to political reasons, has returned and hears from Antonia the religious experience she has had during her prayer. He is fascinated by the account and asks her to write everything about the Order and about her religious experience.¹ He sends a letter with these notes to Claret. By that time he is very busy and he cannot respond to them.

Caixal and María Antonia do not give up since they are convinced that Claret is the man that will make possible the foundation of the Order. Caixal because he admires Claret and he considers him more capable than himself.²

She had not yet met with Claret, she had only heard about him. The opportunity came when Claret went to Tarragona in January 1850. Caixal took advantage of this to have him meet María Antonia. She explained briefly her mystical experience, her call to found a new Order. Without allowing her to explain more, he answered her that without any doubt this would be done.³

¹ Aut. MP, 228.

² Aut. MP, 19

³ *Ibid.*, 61. “Now I know that you are here”

OUR FOUNDERS IN THE LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE

1. Process of the Foundation

Claret and Paris have met, the novice Antonia has explained to him her religious experience, that God asks her to found a new Order. After that a few month later Antonia will leave the convent of the Company of Mary together with Florentina Sangler. As for Claret, who has received the appointment as Archbishop of Santiago of Cuba, he embarks to that Isle to take care of the archdiocese of Santiago. They eagerly await for the letter from Claret inviting them to his archdiocese. During the time of their waiting, some other young women join them: María Josefa Caixal I Roig, niece of canon José Caixal; the sisters María and Antonia Gual.⁴

Claret finds a diocese destroyed in regards to the Christian life, many are the problems and the needs. One month after arriving to his diocese Claret writes to Caixal and tells him that he wants to call the young women from Tarragona⁵. He writes to María Antonia and her companions inviting them to come to his diocese⁶ to help him in the education of the girls and young women. In Tarragona Antonia and her companions open with eagerness the letter from the archbishop.⁷

No more doubts, no more sufferings for Maria Antonia. It seemed as if the heavens opened up, that the clouds of doubt and darkness when she thought that she might have been mistaken leaving the convent of the Company of Mary, disappeared. They begin immediately the preparation for the trip.⁸

Through the application for the foundation that they wrote to Claret we are able to discover more deeply the feelings that were in the hearts of these young women they say:

*“ we preferred to go to this Great Antilles as a place with a greater spiritual need of religious education, ... we faced the difficulties and we abandoned everything for the love of Jesus Christ...”*⁹

They travel in a stage-coach¹⁰ from Tarragona to Barcelona. Surely their hearts, in spite of the eagerness thinking in the newness of what they will encounter, were filled with the nostalgia to leave their country Tarragona, without being sure if they would sometime come back, but filled with the love of the Lord who calls them and of the fire for the proclamation of the gospel, they embark for Cuba on February 22, 1852. What they did not know was the difficulties and dangers of the trip. The ship “Nueva Rosalía” broke in the Canary Islands and they had to stay a month in Lanzarote. They took advantage of this situation to begin their evangelizing mission.¹¹

They leave from Lanzarote on May 3rd, Antonia encourages the crew and her own sisters to pray asking the help from heaven for this trip. She manifests her trust without limits in the Lord

⁴ Alvarez, *Historia*, 195-196.

⁵ Claret to Caixal, March 25, 1851: EC- I, 202.

⁶ *Aut. MP*, 126-127. Claret to Caixal August 18, 1851: EC- I, 202.

⁷ *Aut. MP*, 127.

⁸ Alvarez, *Historia*, 117-120.

⁹ Proceedings of the foundation of the Convent of Santiago de Cuba, 1-2.

¹⁰ Horse-drawn coach that was used to carry passengers.

¹¹ *Aut. MP*, 156.

with the following words “*The more we went into that immense sea of waters the more my spirit plunged into the immense sea of God...*”¹². During this last part of the trip, one day there was some movement in the sea. Frightened by the memory of what they had suffered, and realizing that there was no land around, Maria Antonia began to pray to the Most Holy Virgin. She heard Mary who said to her that she would always protect them.¹³

They arrived at Santiago de Cuba on May 26, 1852. They were very much welcome, since the Archbishop had left everything prepared. The joy to be where their dreams would be accomplished, was darkened by the absence of the Archbishop. Due to the delay of the trip, he had to leave to continue his pastoral visitation. The day they arrived he was in Manzanillo. From this city he had answered the letters of Maria Antonia and he wrote to his friend Caixal telling him that he would have liked to be there when the sisters arrived, but he could not.¹⁴

Due to some strong earthquakes, the Archbishop came back to Santiago to console his people. He visited the sisters on September 3rd, the very same day of his arrival.¹⁵ They began the conversations on what the sisters would do. The Archbishop says to Maria Antonia not to look for novelties, that it is better to establish a house of the Company of Mary. Out of respect she did not dare to contradict him, nor to remind him about the notes that herself and Caixal had given him in Tarragona and the conversation he had had with her.¹⁶

María Antonia did not know Claret well, he was a man on fire for the gospel, that could not remain idle without going from one city or town to another. He had left the administration of his Archdiocese in the hands of his Vicar Most Rev. Dionisio González, while he himself visited all the churches of his vast archdiocese. This was a cause of suffering for Maria Antonia,¹⁷ especially at the beginning. Latter on they began little by little to know each other, he discovered more and more the values of Maria Antonia and on her part she discovered the faithfulness of the Archbishop, who was able to discern the situations under the light of God and make amendments when necessary. Claret left again for his pastoral visitations and the Vicar began to take care of the sisters. He filled all the papers needed to grant them the permission to celebrate the Eucharist in their house. However he continued the procedure for a house of the Company of Mary. Antonia kept praying that this might not happen and whenever she could she gave her own opinion.¹⁸

In the midst of all these businesses of the foundation, affliction will be present in a very strong way among the group of sisters, especially María Antonia. On September 20 of this same year 1852, Florentina died, the companion and intimate confidant of María Antonia.¹⁹

To answer the requests of the people who wanted that the sisters started the school for girls, they fixed the little house they were living in, and on Pentecost 1853 Claret celebrated the First Eucharist in the little chapel which they had prepared in the house. On June 7 of this same

¹² Ibid., 159.

¹³ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴ *Claret to Caixal*, June 15, 1852: *EC- I*, 226.

¹⁵ *Aut. MP*, 172.

¹⁶ Ibid., 174.

¹⁷ Ibid., 175.196.

¹⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁹ *Aut. MP*, 179.

year, the cloister was established, thus the four sisters, María Antonia París, María Josefa Caixal, María Rosa Gual and María Encarnación Gual, began their novitiate. On the 15th of the same month they start the classes²⁰. Latter on they will move to another house bought by the Archbishop Claret²¹. He bought the house and the empty field next to it, giving a initial sum of money and the rest in monthly installments.²² The new house will be the first of the Order.²³

What the Lord had asked Antonia to do begins now to be a reality, however they will have to suffer many difficulties and disappointments until the foundation be finished. A cause for joy was the arrival from Spain of a group of girls candidates for the new Institute.²⁴ Among them was a young woman, María Gertrudis Barril, who was her secretary and confidant and also her successor as First Mother of the Order.

The royal permission for the foundation arrived on July 1853. Because there was a prohibition to establish new religious orders, Claret had presented his petition as a new monastery of the Company of Mary in Santiago de Cuba. The Queen in her answer said that since María Antonia had left the convent of Tarragona being a novice, they needed a professed sister from that convent in order to be able to proceed with the foundation and the profession of the sisters. Claret wrote to the Archbishop of Tarragona asking him that a sister from that convent might be sent to Cuba. The answer given by the sisters in the convent of Tarragona was negative, thus finally on November 20, 1854 Claret took the decision to request from Rome the permission to receive the profession of María Antonia and in this way make reality the foundation.²⁵ He also mentions in this document that the new foundation is different from the one in Tarragona in that he has established a more strict observance in the practice of the evangelical counsels. The answer from Rome arrived in Cuba on July 16th 1855.²⁶

Here again Claret and María Antonia had their disagreements.²⁷ What Maria Antonia wanted for the New Order did not fit into the canon law of the time. Claret, advised by the Vicar, knew that there are things that could not be granted, in the way María Antonia wanted them and thus he did not follow her requests.²⁸ The difficulty arose because in the papal bulla²⁹ one of the clauses requested that they had rents³⁰ to take care of themselves and not depend on the Church. Antonia in her "Initial experience" understood that the Lord wants a very especial poverty for the New Order, its members will get their income from their work and with it they will also help others. The goods will not belong only to one monastery but they will be distributed according to the needs of each one of the monasteries of the order. But according to the laws of

²⁰ *Aut. MP*, 189.

²¹ *Aut. PC*, 561.

²² *Aut MP*, 216.

²³ This house is located on the street San Germán n.72. It has been the First House of the Order, the sisters have lived there and have educated the girls until the house was confiscated by the Cuban revolution in 1961. The sisters had to abandon the house. This house continues to exist and it is dedicated to means of communication.

²⁴ *Aut. MP*, 199.

²⁵ Alvarez, *Historia*, 173-174.

²⁶ *Aut. MP*, 211.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 206-210.

²⁸ Lozano, *María Antonia Paris: Writings*, footnote 166 p. 135.

²⁹ Pontifical document from the Apostolic Chancery.

³⁰ Financial means that the convent had for the sister's sustenance.

the XIX century's laws, the convents and monasteries needed to have their maintenance guaranteed by their dowries and the rents produced by these dowries, moreover the convents were independent from each other even being part of the same order. Antonia in her prayer presents her complaints to the Lord and she sheds tears in abundance Eventually the answer comes during her prayer.³¹

Cleared all the difficulties to proceed with the foundation, the Archbishop Claret wrote the official document of the foundation which he signed on August 25, 1855. We read on the rescript:

*... we admit to the religious profession, which according to what is established in the Sacred Rescript we will receive, from our dear daughter María Antonia de San Pedro on the twenty seventh day of the month of August and we will receive the profession of her sisters and our beloved daughters, on the third day of the month of September of this same year. Once made the profession, we will declare them as RELIGIOUS OF THE APOSTOLIC INSTITUTE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD AND OURS.*³²

A new religious family had been born into the Church, a new order not new in doctrine but in practice. To discover the richness of this newness we need to read the Aim and Goal.³³ In order to be able to live in the way Antonia wanted, the Institute should have been an institute with simple vows, as those who were been established during the XIX century. They were considered Pius Institutes of sisters with simple vows, they did not have a papal cloister, they had a superior general who had authority over all the sisters.³⁴ The Mother always insists in that it has to be an Order, whose members must be nuns. This is something surprising when we look into the New Order's charism "to work until death in teaching every creature the Holy Law of the Lord." She envisions to have monasteries in mission countries to accompany the (men) missionaries.³⁵ Only after many years waiting for the approval from Rome³⁶ and suffering difficult situations among the convents founded by her, María Antonia, advised by knowledgeable persons on the religious life and the laws of the Church, will introduce in the constitutions "*the obligation of the First Mother of the Order to visit every three years, by herself or by another sister, the houses of the Order.*"³⁷

Let us go back to the part of the history where we were. María Antonia has made her profession on August 27th 1855 and the other sisters on September 3rd of the same year. This same 3rd of September the sisters met presided by Rev. Paladio Currius for the election of the Prioress. María Antonia was elected by unanimity. With this last formality the canonical foundation of the Institute, which is now called Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, was completed.³⁸

³¹ *Aut. MP*, 214.

³² Proceedings of the foundation of the Convent in Santiago de Cuba, 24. General Archives RMI.

³³ Constitutions of the Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters, 1988, 2.

³⁴ Alvarez, *Historia de la Vida Religiosa* (History of the Religious Life), III, 388.

³⁵ Constituciones del Instituto Apostolico de la Inmaculada Concepcion de María Santísima. (Constitutions of the Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy). *Trat primero* (First Part), ch.6, n.1, in Lozano, *Escritos*, 418.

³⁶ The Constitutions presented by our Founders did not fit into the canonical laws of the Church of the XIX century, the work would fit for a Benedictine Order, the poverty for a Franciscan Order, the obedience for the Jesuit Order. This was keeping the Holy See from giving the approval.

³⁷ Lozano, *Escritos*: TMP, 718.

³⁸ To know the different names of our Institute see the appendix n.2.

Another period will start in the life of the newly born Institute. It is true that the official date of the foundation is August 25th 1855, but the Institute was born in the heart of Maria Antonia at the moment of her “Initial Experience” and began to be a reality in what we may call the charismatic foundation on August 15th 1851, when María Antonia and the other four young women met at the Cathedral of Tarragona and made a vow to not separate from each other.³⁹

There is a difference between Maria Antonia and Claret in their relationship with the Institute. She knew with very clarity what she wanted for the foundation, Claret was discovering little by little during the process, what the Lord wanted from him in this foundation. At first he leaves everything in the hands of Rev. Dionisio González and latter on in those of Rev. Paladio Currius. However, as the events are unfolding, he realizes that he has to take part personally in order that the so much desired foundation may happen. Maria Antonia saw him always as the founder⁴⁰, he needed more time to understand it. God in his infinite patience was working on him and shaping him until Claret embraced this foundation as his and María Antonia’s. Through the process of foundation both Founders share the difficulties which arise and look together for the best answers to be faithful to the lights received by Maria Antonia in her “initial experience”. The relationship between both Founders becomes deeper, closer and more friendly. On reading the letters, they exchanged between them, we realize how in each one of them the trust and admiration for the other increases. As for our Founder we know that he did not answer the letters received from women, but we have a number of his letters addressed to María Antonia. Let us see how the history of the new Institute in the Church continues.

2.- From the Foundation to the death of the Founders

a. Until the Death of our Founder Claret.

After her profession, Claret asks Maria Antonia to write again the Constitutions of the Institute, based on those written in 1848 when she was in Tarragona, making the necessary amendments.⁴¹ A few days earlier Currius had also asked the Mother to write the “Plan for the Renewal of the Church”.⁴²

In her “initial Experience” she understood that she had not only to be the foundress of a new order, but she had also to work for the renewal of the Church. She was afraid, the word “reformation” she used to talk about the renewal of the Church, was a dangerous word in the Church, due to the protestant separation in the XVI century. Because of her fears she did not do or say anything until her profession.⁴³ When she talked with Currius about that, he asks her to put in writing what she just had said to him.⁴⁴ When Claret receives the Constitutions written by Maria Antonia, advised by Rev Dionisio González, he asks Currius to put rewrite them in juridical language.⁴⁵

³⁹ *Aut. MP*, 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 228.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴³ *Aut. MP*, 49-53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁵ Currius a Caixal, March 31st 1857.

Again the events disrupt the peace and joy of the sisters and especially Maria Antonia. As we have already seen this is a constant situation in her life and also in Claret's. When the difficulties seem to be overcome, the foundation is already a reality, the Archbishop is attentive to their needs, he receives a letter from Madrid dated March 18, 1857 which will change this peaceful situation they are enjoying. Queen Isabella II wants him to be her confessor and the teacher of the little princess Isabella. Claret begins to make the arrangements necessary to leave as soon as possible.⁴⁶ He gives all the necessary dispositions to leave the Archdiocese in order, he also finds time to say good-bye to María Antonia and to the other sisters as well, so dear to him, and he embarks for La Habana from where he will leave in a few weeks towards the Peninsula. Maria Antonia asks him that, once in the Court of Madrid, he do what would be necessary in order to have another community of the Institute in Spain.

To read during his travel to Spain, Claret took with him the "*Plan for the Renewal of the Church*" written by María Antonia. She explains with simplicity and without much order her intuitions and thoughts about how the renewal of the Church should be done and who would have to do it. Claret kept them always with him, and he attached them at the end of his Autobiography.⁴⁷ We know that during his trip he wrote his own version addressed to the bishops, his brethren. The title of his document is "*Notes of a Plan to Preserve the Beauty of the Church (Apuntes de un Plan para Conservar la Hermosura de la Iglesia)*."⁴⁸ The main points are the same: evangelization, poverty, communion. As Rev. Dionisio González would say, answering to Claret who asks him to give his opinion on the "Plan for the Renewal" written by María Antonia, "*it seems to me that the same spirit has guided both pens.*"⁴⁹ During his trip and as he was reading the Plan for the Renewal written by María Antonia and writing his own, Claret begins to discover the will of God hidden in his new mission as confessor of the Queen. As in other situations in his life this he will have the opportunity to preach the gospel from a larger scenario, Spain, Paris and Rome.⁵⁰

Immediately after his arrival in Madrid, May 26, 1857, he begins the legal process for the foundation of the new community. It will not be as easy as Currius and María Antonia thought.⁵¹ The first thing was to find a diocese. Before embarking for the Peninsula, the Archbishop and María Antonia had talked about founding in the diocese of Urgel, whose bishop was Caixal.⁵² Claret has to spend many hours in the waiting rooms of the offices, he says to Currius: "*alas how many sacrifices do those nuns cost me*".⁵³ Realizing that he was not getting anywhere, he advises Currius and María Antonia to write to Caixal. This strategy got the effect he was looking for, on the month of October Caixal writes to Currius letting him know that he was willing to welcome his daughters from Cuba.⁵⁴ Having solved all the problems, obtained all the licenses and Caixal's

⁴⁶ Alvarez, *Historia*, 245.

⁴⁷ Claret to Currius, February 2nd, 1889 quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 24.

⁴⁸ Claret to Currius, June 5, 1857, CO 61, p.109. Claret to Caixal, May 31st 1857, CO 58, p.105.

⁴⁹ Dionisio González de Mendoza a Claret, EPCL II, 31.

⁵⁰ Ruiz, Carmen and Velasco Encarnación, *Positio sobre la vida, virtudes y fama de santidad de María ANTONIA Paris I Riera*, Roma 1987.

⁵¹ Alvarez, *Historia*, 249

⁵² Paris to Claret, June 2nd 1857, EMP 4, p.8.

⁵³ Claret to Currius, August 8th 1857, CO 67, p.118.

⁵⁴ Caixal to Currius, October without date, 1857, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 255.

approval, Claret let Currius know that he may come to the peninsula with María Antonia and two other sisters.⁵⁵

After six years in Cuba, she comes back to Spain in the ship “Venus” on April 6th 1858 with the sisters María Josefa Caixal and María Gertrudis Barril. They arrived at Cadiz on May 12. Claret and Caixal had asked the Bishop of Cadiz to look for a convent in the city for the sisters to stay, so they could rest for a while before continue their trip to Barcelona. They lodge at the convent of the Concepcionistas who even gave them gifts for the new foundation.⁵⁶ On May 17 they embark again to the port of Barcelona where they arrived on May 23. On arriving they have the pleasing surprise to meet the Founder who was waiting for them.⁵⁷

They travel to Tremp in a railroad train, a coach, a horse ridden carriage and on a donkey back until they arrived to the Conca de Tremp (Valley of Tremp)⁵⁸ where the town is built. The official foundation of the second house of the Institute, is made on June 13th 1859, feastday of our Founders,⁵⁹ They begin without delay the building of the convent. María Antonia in a letter to Currius gives him a report explaining how she covers the construction expenses in Tremp, and how Claret has helped them *“the donations that you know our Father the Most Rev. Claret has sent to us”*⁶⁰.

He continues to communicate with María Antonia and, through her, with the community. As the number of sisters was growing, they felt the need to have a written legislation so that all the sisters could follow it. When the Foundress was present, she could advise the sisters, but not in the house of Cuba especially the young Cuban women that were entering the Order. Although the Constitutions were not approved, María Antonia took counsel from Claret on the need to print the rules about the daily life of the sisters and communities. He answered affirmatively.⁶¹ She also took counsel from the Father about the book of ceremonies. We read on a letter to Caixal *“I have received a letter from our Most Rev. Claret, that he likes very much the book of ceremonies.”*⁶² Claret besides helping them financially, he also oriented to the Institute those young women he considered fit for it. He made him present through an abundant correspondence through which he was concerned about their life, their mission and the formation of the new candidates.⁶³

When the time came to send the first expedition to Cuba, the Mother was in communication with the Founder who was giving her advice on the matter. After some years and having increase the number of sisters María Antonia believes it is time to found the third house of the Institute. She wants to move to the South of the Peninsula but the Founder, thinks it is better to remain in the Northern region.⁶⁴ They turn their eyes to the Archdiocese of Tarragona⁶⁵ to the

⁵⁵ Claret to Currius January 8th 1858, CO 91, p.157.

⁵⁶ Diary 40, in Lozano, *Escritos*, 238; Alvarez, *Historia*, 277.

⁵⁷ Alvarez, *Historia*, 279 footnote 57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁰ París to Currius, April 17th 1863, EMP 55, p.93.

⁶¹ Claret to París, December 30th 1861, CO 208, p.314.

⁶² París to Caixal, March 29th 1863, EMP 53, p.90.

⁶³ Claret to París, February 23rd 1863, CO 221, p. 330.

⁶⁴ Claret to París, March 23rd 1863, CO 224, p. 335.

city of Reus⁶⁶ in the “Plain of Tarragona”.⁶⁷ The little house where they will lodge is situated on the road to Tarragona. Father Founder takes care to buy the house and to do the necessary repairs. He also helps them with the legal procedures even, as we have already seen, how much all of this was difficult for him, but for his religious sisters he was able to do even what he did not like. Finally the authorization arrives. Some sisters from Tremp will be able to go to Reus for the third foundation of the Institute.⁶⁸

On July 12, 1867, after eight years in Tremp, Maria Antonia leaves with the sisters: Ma. Gertrudis de San Felipe(Barril), Ma. Luisa de San Pablo(Fábregas), Ma. Rosa de Santo Tomás (Caixal), Ma. Josefa de San Mateo (Vidal) and Ma. Dolores de Santo Tomás (Caballé). They travel to Reus in “tartana”⁶⁹ where they arrive on the thirteenth at night.⁷⁰ Rev. Paladio Currius accompanies them, the law of the Church did not allow the nuns to travel alone, they had to be accompanied by a priest. The official foundation took place on the fourteenth, feast of St Boventure. Some days later they received a letter of the Founder in which he gives them advise and shares with simplicity his joy for the foundation of the third community.⁷¹

Now the works and difficulties of building the convent began. As usual there is a scarcity of financial means and also the struggle with the architects that want to show off adding decorations to the building and also the struggle with the clergy who do not understand the poverty of the Institute. María Antonia will have to suffer and struggle, but at the same time the Lord will intervene to help his daughters. Very soon new young women knock at the doors of the convent, contributing in this way to the growth of the new Institute. On the other hand the sisters will suffer the 1868 political revolution and will have to leave for some month their convent and look for shelter in the Hospital.⁷²

Meanwhile, the Archbishop Claret, confessor of the Queen, suffers the consequences of being in the Palace. All the hatred that the different political parties have against the monarchy fall upon him. Claret, who never wanted to take part in politics finds himself in a very difficult situation, suffering all sorts of slanders⁷³ and finally he goes exiled to Paris together with the Royal Family. Now he is waiting for the moment that the Queen is not the Queen of Spain anymore to end his responsibility as his confessor.

Mother Antonia writes to request from him that while he is in Rome he might try to get the approval of the Constitutions.⁷⁴ He answers explaining to her what he has done for the approval of the Constitutions and he recommends her to be patient.⁷⁵ A few days latter he explains to her how he is preparing himself to participate in the I Vatican Council from which he expects great

⁶⁵ Claret to París, January 18th 1865, CO 235, p.346.

⁶⁶ Alvarez, *Historia* 346.

⁶⁷ *Camp* a Catalan word which means “field”.

⁶⁸ Alvarez, *Historia*, 360 footnote 36.

⁶⁹ Spanish word for horse drawn carriage.

⁷⁰ Report of the trip to Reus in the Chronicles of the House of Reus, 1-2 quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 362.

⁷¹ Claret to París, July 21st 1867, CO, 266, p.375.

⁷² Alvarez, *Historia*, 385.

⁷³ Obscene cartoons and other mockeries about Claret and the Queen printed on boxes of matches and on the newspapers of that time.

⁷⁴ Paris to Claret, July 8th 1869, EMP 95, p.135.

⁷⁵ Claret to Paris, July 21st 1869, CO 283, p.392.

things.⁷⁶ Later on in another letter he shares with her his intervention in the Council in defense of the Papal Infallibility.⁷⁷

During the year 1870 he writes two letters to Maria Antonia about the so anxiously expected approval of the Constitutions. In the first letter he exhorts all the sisters to live as good religious.⁷⁸ In the second letter he manifests his trust that all will go well, they have only to wait patiently.⁷⁹

Claret continues participating in the Council, but the stress that this produces in him, besides the terrible heat of Rome, are the cause of the beginning of a stroke. With the good care of the Mercedaries help he gets better.⁸⁰ However his health continues to worsen, for that reason the Superior General of the Claretian Missionaries P. José Xifré goes to Rome to take him to Prades where the Claretians, who were expelled from Spain in the revolution of 1868, have a community. There he lives humbly as any other member of the community. However he cannot remain in Prades. There are news that because of the intrigues of the Spanish ambassador in France, some people want to capture him.⁸¹ His brothers decide to take him to the Cistercian Monastery in Fontfroide. During the two following month, it seemed that his health was improving, but this was only a temporary recovery, his health starts deteriorating little by little until his death on October 24 of the same year 1870. He had been an apostolic missionary during his entire life. He himself had written some time before to describe his mission:

*I have preached the Law of God in Paris as the capital of the world, and in Rome, capital of Catholicism, I have done in words and in writing. I have lived in holy poverty....*⁸²

On his grave they wrote the following words which are witness to his life and ministry "*I have loved justice and hated impiety, for this I die in exile*"⁸³ At the moment of his death in the Monastery of Fontfroide in France, the bell of the convent of Reus rang without anyone touching it, Currius and all the sisters in the convent understood that it was the Father who wanted to say his last farewell to his daughters before leaving this world.⁸⁴

b. From the Death of the Founder to the Death of the Foundress

After the death of the Founder, the Archbishop Claret, María Antonia will faithfully follow the commands he had given during his life, and she will invoke them whenever some one wanted to do something different, and she will repeat over and over again that Claret founded the Institute.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Claret to Paris, July 21st 1869, CO 283, p.392. He is probably referring to the document about the renewal of the Church.

⁷⁷ Claret to Paris, June 17th 1870, CO 294, p.408.

⁷⁸ Claret to Paris, January 1st 1870, CO 289, p.399.

⁷⁹ Claret to Paris, June 17th 1870, CO 294, p.408.

⁸⁰ Claret to Xifré, July 1st 1870, EC-II, 1451 p.1481-1482.

⁸¹ Alvarez, *Historia*, 397-398.

⁸² Claret to Currius, October 2nd 1869, CO 286, p.395.

⁸³ Saint Anthony M. Claret, *Autobiographical and Spiritual Writings*, General Introduction 64.

⁸⁴ Deposition of Rev. Paladio Currius in the "*Proceso Informativo*" of Tarragona, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 400.

⁸⁵ Paris to Orberá, August 15th 1880, EMP 319, p. 395.

But let us not anticipate the events, let us see how our Foundress continues to guide the Institute. After some years from the foundation of Reus, the Mother begins to look toward other horizons to establish other communities. She looks toward America and also Spain. Bishop Orberá⁸⁶ suggests the United States of America, Belice, but none could be. Finally they do the foundation in Baracoa, Cuba on September 5th, 1875. Maria Antonia could not go personally to that foundation. The Gual Sisters, María Rosa and María Encarnación, went with the sisters who were going to form the community of Baracoa. They returned to Santiago once the community was established and realizing their mission as educators.

At the same time María Antonia was doing all the paper work for the foundation of Carcagente in the Province of Valencia, Spain. Bishop Orberá helped her. He had come exiled from Cuba to Spain, because the Government of the Cuba had accused him. On January 1975 he was free from all charges and was about to return to his Archdiocese of Santiago. First he wanted to help María Antonia, by leaving this foundation already on its way. He presented a petition to the Cardinal Archbishop of Valencia to be granted the authorization to establish a community of the Institute whose name is House of Mary Most Holy and of Education, founded in Santiago de Cuba by Most Rev. Anthony M. Claret, archbishop of Cuba.⁸⁷ Cardinal Barrios answered this letter granting the authorization. María Antonia having learned that the Cardinal welcomed the institute she wrote to him asking him to give the authorization to Rev. Paladio Currius to accompany the sisters. She says to him that Currius had been the subsecretary of *“our late, most reverend and never forgotten Founder, His Excellency Archbishop Claret.”*⁸⁸

The Foundress with her three companions arrived to Carcagente on September 2nd 1875. Rev. José Navarro Darás, principle of St. Luis School in the same city, had prepared for them an old abandoned convent. On the 12th of the same month they broke the ground for the building of the convent and school.⁸⁹ The day after, September 13, the cloister was established and this is the date recognized as the foundation of the new house.⁹⁰ The construction began and also with it the headaches of María Antonia who was faced with several difficulties: the lack of financial resources, the misunderstanding about poverty by the clergy and the architects, as it had happened already in the previous foundations. The people of the town helped to cover the expenses according to their financial means. In the official document of the inauguration of the convent, that was not completely finished, it is recorded that the new convent-school will be used for the gratuitous education of girls and that it will be conducted by the nuns called Teaching Sisters, founded by His Excellency the Most Rev. Anthony M. Claret.⁹¹

When María Antonia was still in Reus some difficult situations began to surface with the community of Tremp. The new superior elected in 1872 did not recognize the authority of the Foundress as the First Mother. The constitutions mentioned a style of governance in which the First Mother or Superior General, had the authority over all the convents. However according to

⁸⁶ CO 420, “Index of Persons”.

⁸⁷ Orberá to Cardinal Barrios, January 16th 1875, cfr. Cepeda, *La Sierva de Dios María Antonia Paris y la Congregacion de las Religiosas de Enseñanza de María Inmaculada* (The Servant of God María Antonia Paris and the Congregation of the Teaching Sisters of Mary Immaculate), 188-189, quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 463-464.

⁸⁸ Paris to Cardinal Barrios, January 27th 1875, cfr. Cepeda, pp. 190-191 quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 465.

⁸⁹ Newspaper “Las Provincias” (the Provinces) quoted by Alvarez, *Historia*, 475.

⁹⁰ Book of the Foundation of Carcagente, page added and glued at the beginning of the book, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 475.

⁹¹ Cepeda, “*La Sierva de Dios*”, 198-199.

the law the convents of solemn vows were independent from each other. Based on this, without paying attention to the spirit of the Institute, the new superior, María Dolores Moles de Santiago, not only did not accept the authority of María Antonia, but she started changing the content of the constitutions, which were already in Rome for their approval. She had the support of Bishop Caixal and also of Rev. Paladio Currius who was in Reus.

After María Antonia leaves Reus, there will also be some very serious difficulties in this community. They were caused by the superior María Luisa de San Pablo and the confessor Rev. Paladio Currius. The Archbishop of Tarragona writes to our Foundress and asks her to come back to Reus to fix the difficulties of that community. She comes back on June 1879, with Ma. Gertrudis Barril and Rev. Enrique Goimis. She remained there until her death. She was not welcomed, but little by little, with her humility, meekness and love she won the heart of her sisters and peace was restored to the convent.

The third convent to make our Foundress suffer was the one in Santiago de Cuba. The new Archbishop José Martín Herrera, who arrived in Santiago on December 1875, had always a great concern and love for the sisters. When he did the first canonical visitation as he read the Constitutions he was aware of certain juridical anomalies in the constitutions. He asked María Antonia for a copy of the document of the foundation and of the constitutions. She sent both documents to him and she explains that, although they are not officially approved, all the bishops have followed without any difficulty what our dear father, his Excellency the Most Rev. Claret had established for the Institute.⁹² In this same letter she let him know her approval to his prohibition to the Gual Sisters to go to the new projected foundation in La Habana. Due to the abuses of authority on the part of the Gual Sisters, who had been leading the convent during twenty years in a row, the Archbishop asked the Vatican for the faculties to have anticipated elections in the convent. The election was done on May 1882. The Foundress writes to the Archbishop letting him know her sufferings.⁹³

The two sisters were left without any responsibility in the governance of the convent. Mother Antonia offered them to come to the peninsula and she will send each one to a different convent. They said that they had made a promise to their mother to never separate from each other. Surely it was also hard for them not having any responsibility in the governance. They decided to leave the Institute on September 22, 1882. This was the strongest blow for María Antonia, they had been the first collaborators, they had made in Tarragona in 1851, with the other young women the vow to not separate from each other.

The city of Velez Rubio was going to be the scenario of the sixth and last foundation during María Antonia' life. She was in Reus since 1879 and she could not travel with the sisters to the new foundation. On September 22, 1880 the sisters appointed for the foundation left Carcagente, they were accompanied by Rev. Enrique Gomis, who will return to Carcagente once the sisters be in their new house. They arrived on September 24 and they were welcomed with warmth and joy by the people of the town. On the Decree of foundation Bishop Orberá wrote that it was *"a convent of the Teaching Sisters of Mary Most Holy founded in the city of Santiago de Cuba in 1855 by His Excellency the Archbishop Anthony M. Claret and Clará"*.⁹⁴

⁹² Paris to the Archbishop of Cuba, without date, it seems to be from the end of 1876 or beginning of 1877, EMP 224 .

⁹³ Paris to Gomis, May 9th 1881, EMP 370 .

⁹⁴ Book of the Foundation of Vélez Rubio, cfr. Cepeda, *La Sierva de Dios* , 203-206, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia* 655.

They had to do some changes to that building since some parts did not agree with the poverty and simplicity of the Institute as was required by the charism and the will of our Founders. After making the needed adaptations for the classrooms, the school was inaugurated on November 3rd 1880. Very soon some young women asked to enter the convent, but their number was not enough to take care of the growing apostolate of education in that town.⁹⁵

María Antonia is in Reus, her health is failing, and she is confined to her bed since 1884. The sisters think that the Lord will come to take her during the Christmas celebrations,⁹⁶ but it did not happen, the day of her final encounter with Christ, her only love and to whom she had surrendered her life, was on January 17, 1885.

c. Relationship between our Founder and our Foundress

As we read the history, the letters and other documents about our Founder and Foundress found in the archives, we discover that the relationship between them grew in depth, respect and admiration as time was passing by and the events were happening.

The first time they meet in Tarragona Claret does not speak to much. In Cuba they had their problems because he did not want to found something new. He wants them to collaborate with him in the women's education in his Archdiocese of Cuba. This helps us to understand that he values the talent and ability of María Antonia. On her part she is convinced that he is the one who will be her collaborator in the foundation, because she had understood in prayer that Lord was telling her "Fr. Claret will help you in the establishment of the first Houses of the Order".⁹⁷

From the first time that they begin to talk and do the paper work for the foundation in Cuba, she acknowledges him as the founder. She does nothing without his approval and this again is the cause of many frictions between them. He expects her to speak and say for him to know how to act, and on the other hand she expects him to take the lead, because she knows that God makes his will known through those in authority in the Church,⁹⁸ but when the decision does not agree with what she has understood in prayer about the New Order, she suffers, weeps and keep silent. Little by little he accepts that mission which has been entrusted to him against his will, as in so many situations in his life: archbishop of Cuba, confessor of the Queen, exile in France... in a word during the journey of his life God keeps asking him and although he wishes something else he keeps responding with faithfulness. As the Foundress says:

*And so it has happened in this foundation, that though the Archbishop was unwilling to be concerned for this or that, he has been, by Divine impulse, concerned for everything, because I have never expressed a desire of mine except when I have been asked.*⁹⁹

As time was passing they began to share not only about the Institute, but also their apostolic dreams, poverty, the renewal of the Church. Let us remember what we have already

⁹⁵ Alvarez, *Historia*, 659.

⁹⁶ M. Gertrudis Barril, "Biografía de la Madre Fundadora" (Biography of Mother Foundress) placed on her casket, quoted in Alvarez, *Historia*, 669.

⁹⁷ *Aut MP* 36.

⁹⁸ *Aut MP* 221.

⁹⁹ *Aut MP* 218.

explained about their writings on the renewal of the Church. In Cuba Claret with the collaboration of Paris makes a plan to work for the morality of the clergy. He communicates this to Caixal in a letter saying “ *in Cuba we began the project with Mother Antonia*”¹⁰⁰. He writes the *Colegiala Instruida* on the request of María Antonia. “*The second means is the formation of youth of both sexes, for this reason, I will write the booklet you have asked me for*”¹⁰¹ He sends her his books for her opinion on them. Claret appreciates very much the opinion of María Antonia and on her part she has a great admiration for Claret. When Claret suffers the attack in Holguin she writes to him a letter in which she says that God has given him the greatest reward to shed part of his blood for the zeal of the divine word.¹⁰²

Before the foundation of the third house of the Order, María Antonia consults with him and even though she has a different opinion she follows the advice of Claret whom she considers to be the founder of the Order. It happens as well with the criteria for the admission of new candidates to the Institute. Even after the death of Claret she will continue to lead the Institute according to the directions that Claret had given, and she will remind this to the bishops who will help her in future foundations.

To conclude this section let us see the letter written by Claret to Antonia some month before his death in his exile in Fontfroide, France:

I have received your letter of the 23rd of the present month, after reading what you say in it, I answer.

In general the weather of Rome did not help me, and besides that there has been during this present year some special circumstances which are: a extraordinary heat, to have to go through the streets of Rome, almost every day, from seven in the morning to two in the afternoon and many times walking, because I could not find a carriage to rent, Finally, in the Council the very serious matter of the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff: all of this has made a mixture of things which have had a negative effect on me; thus on May 23 I had a cerebral stroke. I endured and suffered very much; the friends were alarmed; I took and continue to take the medicines prescribed by the physicians.

As soon as the superior of the Congregation knew that, he came to take me to Prades that with the change of weather and of place I could recover since I was very sick, with a headache which did not leave me during the day, and less during the night, it did not allow me to sleep or rest.

*Fifteen days after arriving in Prades they gave me the news that the French government ordered and commanded that all the Spanish citizens that had recently arrived had to be arrested; and thus I had to come to this place where I find myself now, which is in the diocese of Carcassone, called Fontfroide, which means cold fountain. It is a Monastery of Trapists who are very good, and take good care of me; since I have come to this Monastery I feel much better, thanks to God. This is in essence what has happened; you may know that the bishops of Lerida, Huesca, Barcelona and Tarragona have died.*¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Claret to Caixal, May 31st 1857, CO 58.

¹⁰¹ Claret to Paris, August 31st 1860, CO 196.

¹⁰² Paris to Claret, February 28th 1856, EMP 3.

¹⁰³ Claret to Paris, August 29th 1870, CO 295.

Our Founders Claret and Paris have gone a long way in their relationship which have become deeper as time passed. Both were prayerful persons, paying attention to what God was communicating to them, faithful in spite of their difficulties and reluctances about some missions. I think that this explains the journey that they walk together because the Lord wanted to do his work counting on them.