



**The Path of Hospitality
in the Manner of St. John of God**

**The Spirituality of the
Hospitaller Order of St. John of God**

INTRODUCTION

- **The Change of Age**
 - **The Church and the Order in this context**
 - **MEMORY: OUR CHARISMATIC ORIGINS**
 - **The spiritual Path of St John of God**
 - Emptiness: making room for Grace - the first stage
 - The call: to serve the Lord God for ever - the second stage
 - Change: transformed by the Word of God - the third stage
 - Identification: like the poor Jesus and like poor humanity - the fourth stage
 - **Tradition: handing on the spirit of the Founder and Father**
 - A Father and a brother in the Spirit: the first Brothers
 - The hospital spirit bequeathed as a legacy
 - **The "topical relevance" of John of God's charism today: A shared mission and inculturation**
 - **THE BASIS: MERCY AND HOSPITALITY**
 - **AS BASIC CATEGORIES**
 - **The starting point: mercy and hospitality, guilt and violence**
 - **Mercy**
 - The God of Mercy
 - The embodiment of Mercy
 - Mercy in the Order's charism
 - **Hospitality**
 - What is hospitality?
 - Hospitality in Revelation
 - Hospitality in our Father St John of God
 - Hospitality in the Constitutions and the writings of the Order
 - **Rethinking Mercy and Hospitality in our age: relations with the outsider**
 - Relations with "strangers"
 - Apprenticeship in hospitality and mercy
 - On a mission of mercy and hospitality "today"
 - **THE SPIRITUAL PATH**
 - **TAKING THE PATH OF JOHN OF GOD "TODAY"**
 - **Spirituality today**
 - **The paradigm or model of our spiritual path**
 - Experiences of emptiness: being uprooted to "be born again"
 - The "call" and the calls that continue throughout life: "Listen, my son!"
 - Change and Consecration
 - Mystical identification with the poor, marginalised and suffering Jesus
 - **Taking part in the Path of the People of God**
 - **Participants in the Path of spirituality of the Order and its Communities**
 - Charismatic transmission
 - Fraternal love
 - Sharing the experience of God and discerning His will as a Community
 - A Community on a mission of hospitality
 - A community with a sense of Church
 - **Our "personal" way of spirituality**
 - Personal prayer as a path of spirituality
 - A personal spirituality project
 - Contemplatives on the mission
 - The bodily dimension of our path of spirituality
 - Vigilance and receptiveness to the Spirit
 - **Formation as a path of spirituality**
 - The first stage: charismatic induction or initiation
 - The second stage: operational responsibility
 - The third stage: increasing limitations
 - The crucial moments
 - **CONCLUSION**
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PRESENTATION

In implementation of the principles laid down by the 2nd Vatican Council, and more specifically in the Decree *Perfectæ Caritatis* on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, our Hospitaller Order has spent the past few years trying to help the Brothers and Co-workers live the charism of Hospitality bequeathed to us by St John of God to serve the poor and the needy.

It has therefore been promoting a pastoral and evangelising dimension, placing particular stress on the need to ensure that while making use of technology in the provision of care, we devote special attention to humanisation. It stresses the need to enhance our identity while respecting those who hold other beliefs, whether coworkers and those whom we serve, carefully bearing in mind the bioethical implications of health care today, seeking to respond to them in terms of the Church's Magisterium.

For many years we have been committed to a reflection on our Spirituality, which we are now setting out under the title "The Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St John of God. The Spirituality of the Hospitaller Order".

For many years, the Brothers, and particularly the Formation Masters and many of our Co-workers, had been advocating this.

Our intention was to examine our Spirituality in contemporary terms. We felt the need to formulate it so that it would adequately set out our interpretation of the manner in which the spirit of St John of God should be lived today, in both our personal lives and the way we serve the sick.

Various writers, particularly Brothers, produced papers around this theme, but we needed one single reflection expressing the feeling of the whole Order, today.

The LXIII General Chapter in 1994 addressed this issue, considered it to be necessary, and gave its approval to draft such a reflection. It was intended to be completed within a year. Chapter felt that the celebration of the 5th Centenary of the birth of St John of God, 1995-1996, would be the most appropriate moment to publish it. But as often happens, the drafting took a great deal longer, far longer than expected.

Following the Chapter a Commission was set up made up of Brothers from different cultures: Valentín A. Riesco, José Sánchez, Bernhard Binder, Stephen de la Rosa, Rafael The, Francis Mannaparampil, a Co-worker, Professor Pietro Quatrocchi, a priest and a sociologist. Fr Camilo Macise, the General of the Discalced Carmelites acted as adviser on the part of the work that each of these Commission members should be asked to undertake. Two meetings were held with Fr Macise.

Eventually, under the guidance of Fr Macise, it was decided to seek a theologian of the spiritual life to produce the final draft on the basis of all the material that had been produced, incorporating everything necessary to set out the Spirituality of our Institution in the way it should be presented today.

Although we soon found the person to undertake this task, he was extremely busy at the time, and he told us, to his regret, that he would be unable to devote himself to the task as fully as he needed to, in order to produce a document of this magnitude.

By then, six years had gone by. We were on the eve of the 2000 LXV General Chapter, and we still did not have the final version of the book, although we were hopeful that we would be able to complete it fairly soon, because in the meantime we had given all the material to Fr José Cristo Rey García Paredes, who had undertaken to pull all the parts together.

After Chapter, at the end of November a small Committee was set up to help Fr Cristo Rey. All the members were chosen on the basis of their common language to facilitate the work. They were

Brothers Valentín A. Riesco, Jesús Etayo and Francisco Benavides. I also took part in the various meetings, and in each stage I read the documents as they were developed, and expressed my opinion on them.

Finally, with God's help the work was finished, and we circulated it around the Order as an instrument for reflection, to help the Brothers and Co-workers follow the spirit of John of God as we move along the path that each one of us is called to take, thereby embodying what we felt John of God would be thinking and feeling today, particularly with regard to our service to sick and needy people.

This reflection is the fruit of a great effort to portray St John of God as our spiritual Father from whom we have received our inheritance, enriched by tradition, which we must take up with great veneration and update by giving it new forms, a renewed zeal, in new places, a universal character, in a globalised world which needs St John of God's approach.

I am very happy to see how this reflection has turned out.

It contains a first part devoted to Memory, to our charismatic origins, describing the vocation of St John of God in these four terms: emptiness, calling, change and identification. The path proposed here is a powerful call to each and every reader. Enriched by the tradition of the Order this part leads us to a conclusion which is firmly anchored in the contemporary world, with a mission being performed jointly by Brothers and Co-workers together, and a need for inculturation in the fifty countries where we are present today.

The second part sets out the fundamentals of our spirituality, starting with two biblical terms, mercy and hospitality, firstly analysing them separately in their true sense, and then bringing together everything that the Order has lived, and still lives today, in terms of its spirituality. It brings us up to the present day, with what our spirituality entails today in terms of humanisation, the fullness of our vocation, and our being as Brothers who have consecrated ourselves like St John of God.

The third and final part deals with the spiritual path. Our spirituality is a path, a process, which as Brothers we must live in the Community with all its demands, and which all of us, Brothers and Co-workers to the extent that they feel called to it, must make it a reality in our personal lives and in our mission. This sharing is an expression of the fact that our spirituality springs from and lives within the people of God, and that we are an Institution wishing to perform our mission united with our Co-workers, wishing to share our spirituality with our Co-workers as a possibility for their own lives, so that it can also be enriched by their experiences and their values. This will truly require to stay on the move, never putting down our roots, and never turning a deaf ear to the demands of Our Lord.

Each of the three parts of the document closes with a relevant reference to the present time, expressing the present moment through which we are passing, and as a desire for what we are being called to live in the immediate future.

John Paul II's Magisterium has constantly strengthened the spiritual dimension of the Church's life and Consecrated Life. I thank our Lord for what this book has to offer, we place it in the hands of the Order, and which will lead us to think so often of our Father St John of God, and view the situations we are living through and where we are called to live our daily lives, in terms of his spirit. We need to be spiritual people; we need to live our spirituality as John of God lived his, in terms of the Merciful Christ and Hospitality, in our service to the sick and needy. May we, like John of God, have the ability to set out along the path, to be travellers, and never put down our roots.

I place all this in the hands of our Blessed Mother, the ever-Virgin Mary, as St John of God called her, on her Feast as the Patron of the Order.

The Solemnity of Our Lady Patron of the Order,
Havana, 15 November 2003
4th Centenary of the Order's presence in Cuba

INTRODUCTION



1. "The work which that blessed man, John of God, so piously began"¹ around the year 1538 in Granada, in a poor rented house,² continues to advance; his spirit and his charism continue to spread throughout our world after 465 years. Such is his fecundity and capacity to transform that he is recognised by men and women of different nations, continents, races and ages as their "spiritual father". Moved by his spirit, they carry forward his projects to welcome in, assist, bring health to and rehabilitate the most needy people.³
2. We are not only passing through an age of change, but a change of age, in a very real sense. The ways we thought, acted and lived in our immediate past are becoming obsolete and anachronistic; old methods and institutions are losing their effectiveness. The legacy we have inherited from John of God must not therefore only be welcomed with veneration, but it deserves to be expressed in new ways, lived with new cultural forms, and felt with a new zeal.

1. The change of age

3. The change of age affects us in many ways: globalisation and localisation, post-modernity, and the influence all this has on the Church and on the Order.

% *Globalisation and localisation:* We are living in an age of globalisation (the creation of vast worldwide networks); but we are also in an age of 'localisation' (acknowledging indigenous, cultural, own values). Both movements have positive sides. But there is also a downside. Humanising, non-exclusive globalisation based on solidarity can offer previously unthought-of possibilities for communion between countries, human groups and individuals. A form of open localisation which is not inward-looking or fundamentalist in character, can bring wealth and previously unimaginable prospects to our world. Our charism is also being globalised at the same time as it is becoming localised, and it is taking shape in different places and cultures. We feel specially driven to respond to the Church's call to globalise solidarity, kindness and charity, in a world where economic globalisation is causing so much discrimination, and countless victims. We also feel driven to defend the value of what is local and the individuality of each person, especially those who are being sidelined by the globalising society.

% *Post-modernity:* post-modernity is another distinctive feature of the change of age. It is usually described as a common, globalised "state of mind" which is present in one way or another in all the world's peoples. It shows us that the age of totalitarianism, absolutism, dogmatism and patriarchalism is passing, and the earlier Eurocentric view of the world which tried to explain the control the whole world, is losing momentum. The post-modern mentality is particularly strong among the younger generation, but it affects all of us. It requires us to prefer humble and fragmentary explanations of reality, and holds that it is more realistic to introduce small rather than wholesale changes; that we must accept pluralism and diversity, and show much more tolerance and hospitality to those who are different, to the others. Against this background, hospitality and mercy take on a new significance, and they also challenge us to translate them into institutions and actions that are appropriate to our age. Post-modernity is also a challenge to our spirituality which, consistently with it, is now being defined more as a way, a path, than as a moral law or some abstract requirement. Post-modernity is making us more sensitive to the plurality of forms of human and Christian life, and it therefore opens us up to correlation and

¹ *Rule and Constitutions for the Hospital of John of God in Granada (1585) Title 1, 1st Constitution (cited in Primitivas Constituciones, Madrid 1977, p 12.)*

² *1587 Constitutions, Introduction, loc. cit pp 81-82.*

³ John of God is not ours. He belongs to society, to the Church. Neither are we solely responsible for making him live on throughout history. But, with the help of God, we must ensure that both he and his Order live on in time. Brother PASCUAL PILES FERRANDO, *Let yourselves be led by the Spirit (Gal 5:16) Circular letter to the Brothers of the Order, Rome, 24 October 1996 (para.9.3).*



communion. This is why we talk about a shared mission, a shared charism, and a shared life.

- % *Possibilities and dangers:* we are being offered new and wonderful possibilities, but at the same time we are faced with new and terrible threats. We are entering an age which we do not dominate, and in which we have to seek out new paths. At all events, the repercussions that this change of age is having on us affects everything: spirit and body, individuality and society, the world and transcendency. Relations between us are no longer what they used to be. We are discovering new aspects of the relationship between the genders (male and female), and relationships between men and women are changing (both in the family and society). Faced with the build-up of economic and political power, alternative forms of power are emerging, which are threatening it (terrorism, mafias). Millions of human beings are affected by this, suffering from the consequences of this struggle. Humanity is characterised by amazing mobility - real or virtual - which is preventing us from moving forward with peace of mind, towards a predictable future, and is leading us into areas of great uncertainty. Economic growth is a fact, but it does not prevent millions of human beings from growing increasingly poor. There are so many contrasts and pressures on the human psyche today that many people are being destroyed, depressed, and even losing their minds. A substantial loss of "the meaning of life" and of history is affecting all of us, more than ever before.

2. The Church and the Order in this context

4. The Church is also party to this change of age. She is no longer what she used to be.
 - % She is now more global. She is more multicultural and multiracial than ever before.
 - % She is conscious of all the possibilities offered by this new age, but she is also exposed to all the threats and problems that a change of age brings with it.
 - % Carried forward by mercy, which is her constituent nature, Mother Church wishes to welcome everyone in, and open up - in particular - to those in greatest need.
 - % She listens with new attention and a creative attitude to the words of the Risen Christ who has sent her as a missionary to the whole world and to all ethnic groups, to proclaim the Gospel and make Mercy present among them.

5. In such an environment **the charism of John of God** takes on again a formidable topical relevance which we have to emphasise and configure. The Order has boldly and seriously embarked on the process of renewal heralded in by Vatican II. We have reflected in depth on the charism in our own age, and we have set ourselves new challenges and new goals. This has given a new look to the charism of John of God in our age.⁴ But we cannot stop there. Today we need that creative imagination which the younger generations are best endowed with. Under these historical circumstances, in our multi-centric and global world, in this Catholic Church of particular Churches, the Order will be capable of perceiving new responses, and new paths of the Spirit. In addition to the Brothers, we also have other people who are knocking at the doors of the Order and who are also aware that they have received the grace of the charism of John of God. This is why today there is a new outreach to "shared mission" and "shared spirituality", as the new definition of the Order's identity. Today, the Order reveals a plural, intercultural and interracial face.⁵ It feels that it is being called to offer the spiritual path of John of God to men

⁴ Cf. *Declarations of the LXV General Chapter* (Documentation), Granada, 6-24 November 2000; *The Charter of Hospitality of the Hospitaller Order of St John of God*, Rome, 8 March 2000; *Brothers and Co-workers together to serve and promote life*, Rome, 8 March 1992; *John of God lives on*, Rome, October 1992; *The New Evangelization and Hospitality on the Portals of the Third Millennium, LXIII General Chapter of the Hospitaller Order*, Bogotá 2-28 October, 1994; PIERLUIGI MARCHESI, *The Hospitality of the Brothers of St John of God towards the Year 2000*, Rome 1986; PILES FERRANDO, *Let yourselves be led by the Spirit* (Circular letter to the Brothers of the Order), Rome, 24 October 1996; PILES FERRANDO, *Hospitality at the Dawn of the Third Millennium. Making the Prophecy of St John of God Come True* (Circular Letter), Rome, 2 February 2001.

⁵ "We number 1,500 Brothers, about 40,000 Co-workers counting our employees and volunteers together, and 300,000 Co-workers-benefactors. We are present in all five continents, in 46 countries and in 21 Religious Provinces, 1 Vice-province, 6



and women who do not belong to the Western cultures, as has been the case hitherto.

6. The challenge to be receptive to the spiritual wealth of nations and cultures, without entailing the loss of the spiritual legacy bequeathed to us, is a new source of encouragement to our historical charism, as an Order. The younger generations sense a cultural air in their souls. There is a cultural divide between different generations which we must not underestimate. Only people who have continued to remain open-minded to reality can adequately understand it and accompany the younger generations in their quest, and in their aspirations. New and previously unknown challenges are emerging. It is no longer sufficient to accept the charism as a legacy we have received. We must re-configure it, give it a new face, interpret it in a more relevant way. We must "set hearts ablaze" not only in the Order but also in our society, among ordinary people and the Church. It would be impossible to set about re-founding spirituality without the conviction that it is the Spirit at work, offering what we so passionately desire as a grace to us. The Spirit is only asking us to be vigilant, to be capable of welcoming, and to be receptive and willing to take the new paths opening up before us.
7. The purpose of this *document* is to offer a number of basic elements of the spirituality of the Order, set in the new historical and ethnically and culturally plural context which characterises the Order today. We have therefore divided it into three parts:
 - I. **Memory:** its charismatic origins.
 - II. **The Gospel keys:** Mercy and Hospitality.
 - III. **The spiritual path:** the Hospitaller spirituality for our times.

I. MEMORY: OUR CHARISMATIC ORIGINS

8. Let us contemplate the spiritual path of St John of God. It will reveal to us the original plan and the icon of our "path of spirituality".

1. The spiritual Path of St John of God

9. St John of God was a man on the move, a wanderer: he went on pilgrimages and long treks. It was there that he sketched out the route for his interior pilgrimage and his spiritual path. John of God made his whole life a path - walking barefoot and up a steep track⁶ - to reach the peak. Paradoxically he reached that peak by going down into the depths of human misery and suffering. In his life we can identify four phases that we might summarise with the following words: *emptiness, calling, change and identification*.

a) Emptiness: making room for Grace - the first stage

10. After a string of failures, St John of God experienced emptiness and discovered the fullness of

General Delegations and 5 Provincial Delegations. We perform our apostolate on behalf of the sick, the poor and the suffering in 293 Centres. Although we are all members of one and the same body, our Order, we nevertheless live in widely differing situations. Some of us are in highly technically advanced societies and Centres, while others are living in developing societies and Centres; some live in countries that enjoy peace, while others are suffering from violence and war, or the aftermath of violence belonging to a recent past; some enjoy the benefits of a free society, but others have their freedom and their fundamental rights severely curtailed; some of us are devoted specifically to hospitaller work, while others are more concerned with social issues and marginalization; some are trying to help people to live, while the mission of others is to help them to die with dignity. Although all of us are working with the aim of providing comprehensive, holistic care, some concentrate more on physical health, others on mental health, and others still are helping to create the conditions to enable people to enjoy decent living standards. Some live in the North, others in the South, some in the cultures of the East and others in the West." THE HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST JOHN OF GOD, *The Charter of Hospitality of the Hospitaller Order of St John of God. Caring for the Sick and Needy in the Manner of St John of God* Rome, 8 March 2000, p.1.

⁶ John of God was aware that to achieve fullness and avoid perils, we must "be ever wakeful and ready to leave" because "we do not know the hour at which they will knock at the door of our souls" (*Letters, 1st Letter to the Duchess of Sessa (1 DS), 7; Letter to Luis Bautista (LB), 6 & 29.*



God: "God before and above all the things of this world!"⁷. He was a failure in his first adventures as a soldier, and like St Paul he was thrown off his horse, threatened, and had no help apart from what God was able to give him.⁸ He was a failure as a soldier, when a captain condemned him to be hanged on a tree, because the booty placed in his safe-keeping had been stolen, and even though he was not executed he was cast out of the camp, leaving him even poorer than before. On his way from Fuenterrabía to Oropesa he complained that "the world badly rewards those who most follow it".⁹ After nine years of silence, John once again enrolled in the army of the Emperor to fight against the Turks. He returned from Vienna and landed in La Coruña. Being so close to his birthplace he suddenly felt a longing to see his parents from whom he had been taken away at the age of eight, and he was greatly distressed when he discovered that while he had been away his parents had died.¹⁰ He felt empty. He discovered the meaninglessness of life:¹¹ "*even were we masters of the whole world we would be in no way better*"¹² and he therefore decided, "*We must not trust in ourselves.*"¹³

b) The call: to serve the Lord God for ever - the second stage

11. His uncle offered him the chance to stay in what had formerly been his parents' home, but he declined, saying "*I wish to... go in search of a way to serve Our Lord... I therefore put my trust in my Lord Jesus Christ that he may give me the grace to carry out this desire...*".¹⁴ And he went on seeking, but without finding what he was looking for. He returned to Seville to tend sheep, "*he was not able to see where Our Lord wanted him to serve him*", he was saddened.¹⁵ He eventually gave up tending sheep, and went to Ceuta. In order to help a sick family he set about working on the "fortification of the city walls", and every night he gave the family "his daily pay".¹⁶ He overcame a deep spiritual crisis with the help of a learned monk who expressly ordered him to leave Ceuta and return to Spain. He reached Gibraltar and made his general confession, in a flood of tears, John prayed for peace and calm, and to be able to achieve his goal of providing the service that he desired, "and to give peace and serenity to this soul". And this prayer became an increasingly more generous act of self-giving, in order "to serve You and to be forever your slave".

"He went about visiting the churches to pray and wherever he went he tearfully implored Our Lord from the depths of his heart to forgive him his sins and to let him know in some way how

⁷ Letters, passim

⁸ When supplies were running out during the siege of Fuenterrabia, "John of God volunteered to go and look for food. They had captured a mare from the French, so he mounted it in order to ride there and back. once he had gone about two leagues from where he mounted, the mare recognised her usual surroundings and bolted forward... She threw him amongst some rocks with such force that he lay unconscious for over two hours... he seemed to be dead for blood was pouring from his mouth and nostrils. Once he had regained consciousness, the agony from the fall made him realise his peril from being captured by the enemy. rising from the ground as best he could, he fell down upon his knees and fixed his gaze upon heaven and in a voice barely audible, he called upon the name of Our Lady the Virgin Mary... Taking hold of a stick he forced himself to walk once more and slowly made his way back to where his companions were waiting for him, and put him to bed. (FRANCISCO DE CASTRO, *Historia de la vida y sanctas obras de Juan de Dios*, in MANUEL GÓMEZ MORENO, *Primicias históricas de San Juan de Dios*, (hereafter CASTRO), Ch.1, Madrid 1950, p 33, in J. SÁNCHEZ, o.c.).

⁹ CASTRO

¹⁰ "Born of middle-class parents who were neither very rich nor poor, he grew up with them until he was eight years old, then without their knowledge he was abducted by a cleric" CASTRO.

¹¹ "Everything passes away... as long as we are living in this exile and in this vale of tears" (1DS 6; 2DS 10)... "death consumes and destroys everything this miserable world gives us and allows us to take with us nothing but a piece of torn and roughly sewn canvas" (3DS 15).

¹² 1DS 10

¹³ 1DS 10

¹⁴ CASTRO

¹⁵ "He was not able to see where Our Lord wanted him to serve him ... he became restless and ill at ease". CASTRO

¹⁶ CASTRO



he could serve him.¹⁷

12. He did various jobs to obtain the wherewithal for survival, and eventually became a bookseller, first travelling around the streets with his books. Anxious to settle down in a new form of service, to perform an apostolate, as well as to earn enough to live and to practise charity, he decided "to go to Granada and settle there".¹⁸ In Granada he found some relief, devoting his time to his work, but he constantly heard the voice that was urging him on from within, and he continued to listen attentively to it. On the Feast of St Sebastian he went to the Hermitage of the Martyrs, "sitting among the others", to listen to the sermon preached by Master John of Ávila.¹⁹ And there the Lord was waiting for him.
13. Master Ávila was his spiritual guide. He was very particularly moved by his commentary on Lk 6,17-32 (the Beatitudes, and Blessed are the poor):

"No sooner had the sermon ended when John rushed out of the place imploring and shouting for God's mercy... He carried on like that until he reached his lodgings where he also kept his shop and the stock... he began ripping into shreds the... profane books and those of sound doctrine... he gave away free to anyone asking for them for the love of God... Not only satisfied with stripping himself of all his worldly good, he even began to take off his clothing to give it away as well. Stripping himself of everything and giving it away... John once more ran out into the streets of Granada. He was dishevelled and shouting out that he wanted to be stripped so that he could follow the naked Jesus Christ, who although he was the richest of all creatures, made himself poor to show us the way to humility."²⁰

c) Change: transformed by the Word of God - the third stage

14. From that moment onwards, John of God's vocation was defined as a naked desire to follow the naked Jesus Christ, and to become wholly poor for the One who had become poor for him.

"Some decent folk... did not consider him to be insane as everyone else did. Lifting him up from the ground, they... took him to where Father Avila was staying... Master Avila was pleased to see such a tremendous demonstration of contrition for having offended Our Lord in his new penitent...Brother John, take great strength from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in his mercy because he has begun to operate in you and he will finish it...Be faithful and constant in what you have started to do...I believe that the Lord is not going to deny you his mercy, so go now in peace and with my blessing, and the blessing of God as well... John of God was so relieved and found new strength. He wanted everybody to take him for a madman, an evil man worthy only of contempt and being despised so that he could serve Jesus Christ all the better so as to live in his sight."²¹

"Two respectable gentlemen of the city took pity upon John when they saw all this. They took him by the hand and led him away from the rabble and brought him to the Royal Hospital where the city's insane are put away for treatment... The cures they used for such cases like his consisted of flogging and placing the afflicted person into a dismal dungeon... so that by means of inflicting pain and punishment the patients might shed their madness and regain their sanity... they stripped him naked and tying him up by the hands and feet, they flayed him with a doubly knotted whip."²²

¹⁷ CASTRO

¹⁸ CASTRO

¹⁹ CASTRO

²⁰ CASTRO

²¹ CASTRO

²² CASTRO



15. At the Royal Hospital John found the answer to his yearning to serve the Lord where and how he desired. The experience of being considered among those who had lost the most important part of what makes a person - their reason - and feeling that he had been thrown down the deepest well of scorn and commiseration, he recalled the path that Christ had followed to redeem humanity: he had to go through the world of human misery and suffering, and endure the scorn of those who considered themselves to be wise and normal, in order to restore to health those who were travelling the path of sickness, poverty and madness. He had to join their group, in order to show them that they were also persons, sons of God like him... and like the rest of humanity.

"Looking about at the insane patients being punished along with him, he said: "May Jesus Christ eventually give me the grace to run a hospice where the abandoned poor and those suffering from mental disorders might have refuge and that I may be able to serve them as I wish."²³

16. John was *"wounded by the love of Jesus Christ"*.²⁴ This was *"the mercy that he had to practise"*²⁵ He discovered the Path - the Way - whom he had so ardently sought and desired, by showing solidarity with the poor and the sick, and experiencing and suffering their same fate.

d) Identification: like the poor Jesus and like poor humanity -- the fourth stage

17. He began to embark upon the new and ultimate Path: he gathered firewood and sold it. With what he earned, he was able to eat simple food, and give the rest to the poor. His home was in the doorways of the squares and streets of Granada, sharing the heat of the day and the cold of the night with the disinherited, sharing their hopes and their sorrows. He decided to become a beggar in order to help alleviate the sufferings and the misery of his brethren, calling out *"My brothers and sisters, who wants to do well for themselves? Who wants to do well for the love of God?"*²⁶
18. Seeing the poor *"turned away from doorways, frozen, ragged and covered with sores. He was so moved with compassion at having seen so much of all this, that he decided to do something about it as soon as possible."*²⁷ with the help of a number of devout persons, he rented a house and installed what was necessary and *"began to bring in poor people on his shoulders, and all those who he found anywhere around the city"*²⁸. Jesus began to enable him to achieve his ambition to have a hospital of his own, where he could care for the sick poor people, as his heart dictated to him.
19. John of God saw the hospital as a sacred place, the house of God. It was a *hospital-home*, open to all the defenceless poor, without distinction, because God caused his sun to shine on all of them, and where the guest was "the lord" and John his slave:

*"For the city is large and very cold, particularly now in wintertime, and many poor people come to this house of God... we take in people suffering from every disease and people of every type, so that there are cripples, the maimed, lepers, mutes, the insane, paralytics, people with ringworm, and also very old people and many children - and this is without counting the large numbers of other pilgrims and wayfarers who come here"*²⁹

²³ CASTRO

²⁴ CASTRO

²⁵ CASTRO

²⁶ CASTRO

²⁷ CASTRO

²⁸ J. SANCHEZ MARTINEZ. "Kénosis-diaconía" en el itinerario espiritual de San Juan de Dios, Jerez, 1995, p. 331, 441.

²⁹ 2GL 5.



20. The people were astonished, and failed to understand that *"our Lord had sent him into the wine cellar to have access to his charity."*³⁰ John grew in contemplation of *"the great mercy of God"* and he himself became mercy and self-sacrifice: *"he helped them all according as they had need. he never once sent anyone away disappointed";*³¹ *"whatever he did and gave seemed little to him, and he yearned to give himself in a thousand ways."*³² The people said of him, *"he was always begging out of his great charity";*³³ *"he always practised charity and almsgiving"*³⁴. He spent whole nights praying to the Lord, *"weeping and sighing in supplication to Our Lord for pardon and to relieve the necessities facing him."*³⁵ John of God recognised that *"the things people do are not theirs but belong to God: honour, glory and praise to God, because everything is his. Amen Jesus"*³⁶ This is why *"whatever he did and gave seemed to be little to him",*³⁷ because he lived his life imbued with the ever-spreading mercy of God who *"had been so wonderful and generous to him"*³⁸ This is why his greatest suffering was his inability to meet everyone's needs. It was this that broke his heart³⁹ because *"so great was the charity which Our Lord bought about in his servant... that... he became inebriated with his love. He never refused anything to anyone asking him for something"*⁴⁰ For his meals, John of God *"ate baked onions or some other common sort of food"* and slept on *"a course mat upon the floor, his pillow a stone and his covering a tattered old blanket. Sometimes he slept in a trolley left by a cripple in a small alcove beneath the staircase"*⁴¹ In a corner, under the hospital staircase: he lived in the same poverty as his poor brothers.
21. One day he discovered that he was able to pawn himself, to give himself as a guarantee for a debt, so that he could go on helping to alleviate all that suffering and pain. He did not think twice about it, and he borrowed the money, pawned himself, and the debts increased, and he continued pawning himself, until he owed *"more than two hundred ducats"*⁴² But his problems were far from over. The *"needs and troubles... increase daily ... the debts and the poor increase by the day."*⁴³ The debts rose so much that the creditors used to come knocking on his door *"they no longer want to give me credit since I owe a great deal"*⁴⁴. He was trapped in a vice, and was being hounded the debts and the needs of the poor assailed him, blocking him in a blind alley. *"I often do not leave the house because of my many debts, and I am also very unhappy when I see so many poor people... and I cannot help them"*⁴⁵
22. **In prayer** he discovered the meaning of all things: *" I find myself a debtor and a prisoner solely for Jesus Christ"*⁴⁶ Captivity and commitment, which were to become permanent shackles for him which, for the rest of his life, he was never to shake off. Just before he died, he left the book of *"these debts which I owe for what I have done for Jesus Christ"*⁴⁷ in the hands of the

³⁰ CASTRO

³¹ CASTRO

³² CASTRO

³³ Process for the Beatification of St John of God, L-52/1.23, f81.

³⁴ Ibid. L 52/1.20, f73v.

³⁵ CASTRO

³⁶ 1GL 11

³⁷ CASTRO

³⁸ CASTRO

³⁹ IDS 15. Castro also says that his heart suffered when he saw the poor in need without being able to help.

⁴⁰ CASTRO

⁴¹ CASTRO

⁴² 2GL 7

⁴³ 2DS 2

⁴⁴ 2GL 17

⁴⁵ Ibid 8

⁴⁶ Ibid 7

⁴⁷ CASTRO



Archbishop of Granada, Pedro Guerrero. And *"feeling that his time had come, he lifted himself out of the bed and embracing a crucifix, knelt upon the floor where he remained for a short while in silence. Then remaining in that position he said, 'Jesus, Jesus, into your hands I commend my soul'. Then he gave his soul back to his Creator."*⁴⁸

23. John of God was put to the test with pain and suffering. Like Jesus, he became one of many demented people, but thanks to his faithfulness he was enriched with the gift of true wisdom: he understood that the dignity of the person was rooted in the richness of the heart; like Jesus, he discovered that the battle against evil and suffering is a human need, and like Jesus he devoted himself to doing good to all people, beginning with the most discriminated against: the sick of all classes, sinners, prostitutes ... at the cost of being despised and libelled. Like Jesus, he contemplated the world of men with gentle and merciful eyes, and thanks to his boundless love, he spread love, and he became the brother of all, and embarked upon a path of Hospitaller solidarity. Like Jesus, he plunged into the utmost depths of human misery, allowing himself to be taken off to the Royal Hospital. And in the Royal Hospital God continued to speak to John, this time through the wailing, lamenting and despair of his brothers, the sick. This is how Our Lord answered John's yearning and his decision to *"be stripped so that he could follow the naked Jesus Christ, who although he was the richest of all creatures, made himself poor to show us the way to humility."*⁴⁹

Summary: John of God followed a spiritual path which, from the disembodied harshness of being stripped, to the madness with which the infinite love of Jesus Christ gripped him, entering the world of poverty and marginalisation and reaching the basest depths of Granada society, until, imitating his Master, he achieved a mystical identification with the poorest of the poor, taking on their opprobrium and their debts until his death.

2. Tradition: handing on the spirit of the Founder and Father

a) A Father and a brother in the Spirit: the first Brothers

25. The gift of John of God spread far and wide. His spirit was handed on to others. His love for the poor and the sick attracted many others to his work of charity. Most of them were benefactors who helped him with their alms, and a large number decided to work with him serving the needy. A few decided to live with him, in a new manner of following and imitating Jesus. And it was with these that he set up a community of Brothers. The only rule of life he needed to give them was his own way of living.
26. From his own personal experience he knew that serving Jesus Christ in the poor was by no means an easy thing to do. Those wishing to live with him and like him were reminded in simple but stark terms that it was necessary to be willing to **empty themselves** and *"leave the flesh and everything else behind."*⁵⁰ overcoming doubts and insecurity and moving forward *"like a rudderless boat... like a rolling stone"*⁵¹; he invited them to be aware of their weaknesses to avoid being carried away by sudden bursts of enthusiasm, realising that in future they would have to become *"accustomed to toil and distress and to the alternation of very bad days with very good ones"*.⁵² Time was therefore necessary, to **discern the call**, and he recommended them to *"strongly commend the matter to Our Lord Jesus Christ"*⁵³ and to take the path of personal asceticism, since it is *"good for you to go and mortify your flesh for a while and suffer a hard life, hunger and thirst, disgrace and weariness, distress and anxiety, and misfortune; all...*

⁴⁸ CASTRO

⁴⁹ CASTRO

⁵⁰ LB 13

⁵¹ *Ibid* 8, 9

⁵² *Ibid* 6

⁵³ *Ibid* 7



for God's sake, because if you come here you must suffer all this for the love of God".⁵⁴ He urged them to live in a close relationship with God, and to frequent the sacrament: "Each day of your life you should look to God; always attend the full Mass; make frequent confession, if at all possible".⁵⁵ Ultimately, anyone who wished to adopt his style of life needed to go through a **process of acquaintanceship and intimacy with Jesus Christ**, which would motivate them to imitate Jesus' self-giving to God and to his fellows in love. There was no half measure possible. He set out to achieve the highest possible level of love: "Remember Our Lord Jesus Christ and his blessed Passion and recall how he gave back good for the evil they did him. You must do likewise, my son Bautista, so that when you come to the house of God you can recognize both good and evil".⁵⁶ But he did not conceal the difficulties and the demands of this life: "But if you come here, you will have to be very obedient and work much harder than you have ever done... not to sit idle, for the most beloved son is entrusted with the greatest tasks and labour... All this must be borne for God's sake, because if you come here you must suffer all this for the love of God. You must offer God deep thanks for everything, both the good and the bad."⁵⁷ As his final criterion, which gave meaning to all the rest, he proposed that they should aim at basing and focusing their life on the experience which animated the whole of his love and work: "Love Our Lord Jesus Christ above everything in the world, for however much you love him he still loves you more. Always have charity, for where there is no charity God is not there - even though God is everywhere."⁵⁸

27. He wanted Brothers who had experienced the mercy of God⁵⁹ which would enable them to live their lives full of love, serving to the smallest detail, faithful, understanding, capable of forgiveness and reconciliation, and united among themselves. In his way of being and living, he handed them down an indestructible sense of security in the faith and charism they had received. Very soon the people of Granada saw that the "Brothers were walking through the streets, looking for poor people, and carrying them in their arms to the hospital and on their backs, where they were looked after with great love... Everyone knows that the Brothers gather up the poor in the streets, load them on their shoulders, and take them to the hospital".⁶⁰ The Order of the Brothers of St John of God was born in the Church.

b) The hospital spirit bequeathed as a legacy

28. John of God's first *companions*⁶¹ participated in his Hospitaller spirit and disseminated it. Antón Martín was like the long arm of John of God; he founded and managed the Hospital of Our Lady of the Love of God in Madrid which was named after him on his death;⁶² Pedro Velasco, transformed by God's grace like Antón Martín, his erstwhile enemy who wished to have him executed, joined the Saint and imitated his life, dying in the John of God Hospital in Granada. The mercy of God touched both of them through John's testimony of mercy, and his wonderful acts of witness of reconciliation and Hospitaller brotherhood. The other companions are referred to by the witnesses as 'hospitallers' who lived at close quarters with the poor and the sick whom

⁵⁴ Ibid 9

⁵⁵ Ibid 15

⁵⁶ Ibid 10

⁵⁷ Ibid 11, 13, 9

⁵⁸ Ibid 15

⁵⁹ cf. IDS 13

⁶⁰ J. SANCHEZ MARTINEZ. "Kénosis-diaconía", pp. 292, 307, 393.

⁶¹ Nothing is known about them. Only Castro's biography, in Chapter XX, mentions Antón Martín as the companion of St John of God. Conversely, in "The Trial" which preceded the Castro biography, many references are made to the Brothers of the Habit of John of God, and there was also mention of his companions in the biographies written by Dionisio Celi and Antonio Govea. John of Ávila (whom our Founder calls "Angulo" in his letters) named four of John of God's companions: Antón Martín, Pedro Pecador, Alonso Retingano and Domingo Benedicto.

⁶² L. ORTEGA LÁZARO, *El hermano Antón Martín y su hospital en la calle Atocha de Madrid (1500-1936)*, Madrid 1981., p. 31. cf. 17-



they ministered to; they recognised that John of God was their 'initiator'⁶³ and imitated him in his boundless hospitality.⁶⁴ Twenty years after his death, the Hospitaller spirit remained extremely vibrant.

29. This spirit has continued to live on throughout the history of the Order. Here are those whom the Church has declared to be Saints, Blesseds and Venerables: St John Grande, St Richard Pampuri, St Benedict Menni, numerous Blessed Martyrs, and other Brothers whose cause of Beatification has already been introduced (Francisco Camacho, José Olallo Valdés, Eustace Kugler, William Gagnon) and so many others who, throughout the history of the Order have suffered martyrdom and persecution for Christ and for Hospitality, in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Poland, The Philippines, France, Spain and, more recently, in other countries.
30. The Order's spirituality has also been handed down through the founders and re-founders of Communities and Centres of the Order: Brothers Pedro Soriano (Italy), Giovanni Bonelli (France), Gabriele Ferrara and Giovanni Battista Cassinetti (the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Francisco Hernández (America). In more recent times we may remember Paul de Magallon (France), Eberhard Hacke and Magnobon Markmiller (Germany), Giovanni Maria Alfieri (Italy) and St Benedict Menni (Spain, Portugal and Mexico). The Hospitaller spirit has also been handed on to our Co-workers who have taken part in the mission and shared in the charismatic spirit.
31. The spiritual *values* that have driven this long history since the original experience of John of God, are:

% ***A profound experience of God's "grace" and "mercy"***, which leads us to recognise our sinfulness and our need of forgiveness, and to welcome the gift of hospitality granted by God with such abundance to John of God and his followers.⁶⁵ John of God experienced the infinite merciful love of the Father and felt moved to practise mercy himself. Above all, he wished to contemplate the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. He expressed it simply and profoundly in these words that he wrote to the Duchess of Sessa: "*If we reflected on the breadth of God's mercy, we would never cease doing good while we were able while for his love we give the poor what he himself gives us... with open arms [he] begs us to be converted, to mourn over our sins and to have charity first towards our own souls and then towards our neighbour.*" (1DS 13). When he invited her to contemplate the Passion of the Lord, it was to motivate thanksgiving and contemplation, to enliven her hope in Jesus Christ in whom we will find consolation and encouragement in times of difficulty and suffering, *to do good and to practise charity to the poor and the needy* (Cf. 3DS 8.9; 2DS 9.19). And in John of God we see the privileged place that he gave, and which the Order still gives to the Passion of Christ in our spiritual path.⁶⁶

⁶³ Cf. J. Sánchez Martínez. "*Kénosis-diaconía*", TT 8/5; T 9/5; T 10/5, p. 346, 356, 364.

⁶⁴ Cf. J. Sánchez Martínez. "*Kénosis-diaconía*", T 11/20, p. 383: They took in all kinds of poor people, suffering from all manner of sickness, regardless of whether they were Muslims or Christians, without abandoning any one of them.

⁶⁵ This essential aspect was evidenced in the earliest Constitutions.

⁶⁶ Like John of God, what captivates us about Jesus in particular is his total giving out of love, dying on the Cross for us: *the contemplation of the Passion of Christ, as the "Man of Sorrows"* (Is 53,3) which occupies a prominent part of our spirituality (Const. 33). On this point the Order's tradition takes us back to our Founder, who was most devoted to the Passion of Christ. When he contemplated the crucified Christ, our Father focused so much on Jesus' sufferings and on the love which drove him to accept them; a love which led him to the point of even forgiving his enemies. John urges us to achieve this degree of love, when he says to Luis Bautista: "*Remember Our Lord Jesus Christ and his blessed Passion and recall how he gave back good for the evil they did him. You must do likewise.*" (LB 10). John of God does not invite us to imitate Christ's sufferings by devoting ourselves to a life of penance and sacrifice, but to give ourselves to the service of the suffering out of love. It is in the suffering face of the sick, in the distraught life of the poor, that John discovered and contemplated Christ. For John, serving them is not a cross, it is not a sacrifice, but it is the manifestation of the reality that the love of God had flooded and overwhelmed his life, so that he could not help loving everyone, at all times, but especially when they were weak and vulnerable.



- % ***Following the compassionate and merciful Jesus***.⁶⁷ in Jesus, we discover the embodiment and the human expression of the God of Mercy, the origin and the source of our hospitality (Const. 20); we follow and imitate him in his deeds and attitudes (Const. 2c; 3a); we recognise him in the person and in the face of the sick and the needy, lovingly welcoming them in and helping them.
- % ***Devotion to the Virgin Mary*** as a living and as the supreme model of hospitality: in the way she welcomed in, served, interceded for and stood compassionately by the side of those who suffered.⁶⁸
- % ***Harmonious and comprehensive experience*** of the love of God and love for our needy neighbour.⁶⁹
- % ***Spiritual constancy when faced with obstacles***: the experience of grace is such that there is no difficulty and no suffering that is able to interrupt what is done on behalf of the poor, the sick or the needy.

⁶⁷ Our spirituality is essentially Christocentric. John of God was a passionate lover of Jesus. We have learnt from him how to focus our lives on Christ and contemplate Him in the way He served, loved and healed the sick. Jesus of Nazareth is the Master who, through his deeds shows us the attitudes and the deeds that we must embody in order to continue his work of love. Like Jesus we are called to feel our hearts moved at the sight of the dereliction and misery and poverty of the people (cf. Mt 9,36) and to give ourselves up to serve them and console them, as the only thing which is important to us in our lives (cf. Mk 6,34-44). Like Jesus we experience the capacity of being aware that when we draw close to and serve those who are in need, the internal strength that drives us is manifested (cf. Lk 8,40-48); when we contemplate Jesus who identified with the poor and sick, taking on their sufferings and their sickness (cf. Mt 8,17) our decision to devote ourselves to the suffering is renewed, and like Jesus we take on the condition of servants who, by giving up our lives, promote and defend the lives of the poor (cf. Mt 12,15-21;20-28).

⁶⁸ The Virgin Mary, the figure of the Church and the first of all consecrated persons (cf. VC 112) is for us a model of service to Christ in Hospitality. John of God had a deep love for Mary: he venerated her and imitated the way she lived; he was her devotee, and felt accompanied and protected by her in the most difficult moments in his life. All the Letters of John of God begin with "*In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of Our Lady the Ever-Virgin Mary*"; and he habitually urged his correspondents to strive to work in "*His service and that of Our Lady the Ever-Virgin Mary*" (1GL 12). He invoked Our Lady when he recited the holy rosary and this encouraged him to recite it: "*I have been getting on very well with the Rosary, and I hope in God that I shall recite it as often as I can and as He wishes.*" (LB 17). He knew how to hand on to his companions his trust in the Virgin and his desire to imitate her in serving the poor and sick. One example is the witness of Bro. Antón Martín who, in his will wrote "*in the name of the most Holy Trinity... and the Blessed Glorious Virgin, our Lady, Mary His Mother, to Whom I look as my Lady and Advocate in all I do... at the service of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Glorious Mother*" (L. ORTEGA LÁZARO, *El Hermano Antón Martín y su Hospital en la C. Atocha de Madrid*. 1550-1936, Madrid, 1981, p. 8). Following the tradition of the Order, the Constitutions take up *the Marian sense of our spirituality*: the Virgin Mary is the model of our consecration to God (no. 25), *profoundly hospitaller* in her life dedicated to serving the person and the work of Jesus (cf. no. 42b). Her example encourages us to make our pilgrimage in the faith like her (cf. LG 58) and to imitate her, accompanying those who suffer with strength and deepest love, thereby associating ourselves with *her son's sacrifice which is continued in the suffering of mankind* (Const. 34a; cf. 4d). Mary, Health of the sick and Mother of Mercy has always had *a special place in the life of our Hospitaller Community* (Const. 34b), and in the heart of each Brother. We feel encouraged to honour Her and imitate her simplicity and willing readiness, her self-giving and fidelity to God's project for our lives (cf. Const. 4c) while we venerate Her with the affection of dutiful sons, celebrating her feasts, and in particular the Feast of Mary, the Patron of the Order, and with our traditional devotions of which the recitation of the Rosary stands out above all the others (cf. Const. 4d; 42d).

The Virgin of the Magnificat highlights one of the most evident aspects of our spirituality: the God of Mercy fulfills his promise of liberation and shows particular love for the poor and the humble, and will ensure that his power of mercy will triumph over the arrogance of the powerful of this world who oppress the weak. Like Mary, we are called to feel a sense of communion with them, and to feel their unjust situation as if they were our own, and to commit ourselves in the Gospel manner to their total liberating them (cf. Lk 2,46-53).

And when Mary visited Elizabeth, she offered herself as a model of hospitality when she set about assisting her cousin and in all simplicity devoting herself to serving her, and above all because it was in her that God manifested his salvation and brought it into the world, taking flesh in the womb of Mary, choosing her as the mediator to communicate his Spirit to Elizabeth and to the child that she was carrying within her (cf. Lk 2,41-44) raising acts of hospitality to the level of a sacrament which evokes and performs his saving action.

⁶⁹ Const. 1984, 103a.



- % **Radiating hospitality:** like John of God, his followers were also graced with a radiant and robust hospitality, which invited others to participate in new Hospitaller projects and to enter into a communion of charism and spirituality with them. The spread of the charism was accompanied by the carefully planned formation of the Co-workers, in the spirit of John of God.
- % **Caring for the sick and needy,** as the Order's contribution to the one and only mission of the Church.⁷⁰
- % **Professionalism:** the Hospitaller tradition of the Order bears witness to its concern to relate the hospitaller mission to technology, science and the updating of resources and facilities, in accordance with the problems and the possibilities of every age.
- % **A spirit of self-giving unto death:** one of the constant features found in so many followers of John of God is that they unreservedly gave themselves to others, to the point of offering their lives for the sick and needy. Heroic actions of this kind can be seen throughout the history of the Order in different places and times: epidemics, wars, dangers...
- % **Inculturation among the poor, or Hospitaller humility:** it is 'Hospitaller minority' or "kénosis" which led the Brothers to give up a life of comfort and any form of greatness, adapting to live the humble lifestyle of the poor and the sick.

3. The "topical relevance" of John of God's charism today: A shared mission and inculturation

32. John of God shared the gift that he had received with all kinds of different people who felt attracted and influenced by the way he lived Christianity and his love for the needy: simple people who joined him to help to serve, anonymous benefactors, and members of the aristocracy who supported him with their wealth, priests who cooperated with him to provide spiritual assistance to those who were hospitalised, and many other volunteers, physicians and individuals who cared for the sick with him and with the Brothers.
33. The gift of hospitality in the manner of John of God has always continued to spread, even to those who are not always animated by the values of the Christian faith. The charism that has been handed down has spread with remarkable creativity, giving rise to many achievements meeting the needs of different times and places. We are becoming increasingly more acutely aware that the charism of hospitality in the manner of John of God transcends the Brothers who have made their profession in the Order. We are continuing to move forward with a new vision of the Order as a "family", and we welcome the possibility of sharing our charism, spirituality and mission⁷¹ with others, as a "family". This situation, which has only very slowly gathered strength, is a challenge to us to identify so closely with our mission that our Co-workers feel animated to do likewise.⁷², not only because the apostolic works of the Order, particularly in the developed countries, have become enormously complex, but because it is driven by the Gospel imperative to joyfully and freely share what we have freely received from the Lord, for the good of the ecclesial community and for the proclamation of the Gospel of mercy.
34. The missionary Brothers - those working on the mission "ad gentes" - have made it possible for

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1984, 103 'c.

⁷¹ VC 54

⁷² In the wake of Vatican II, in the mid-Eighties the Order began animating and pushing through a movement for a *Covenant with our Co-workers*. Recently, the Church has acknowledged that the laity work for the mission or collaborating in the mission of Religious, *share the charism and mission of the Religious*, such that "a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity" (VC 54) (cf. Const. 23a).



the charism of John of God to extend far and wide, and be inculturated; from inculturation we are now moving to the *embodiment of the charism and the mission of the Order* through our indigenous Brothers. This means that we must supersede the ways we live our consecration to hospitality in the manner of the countries from which the missionaries proceed, and promote the style and manners of living it according to every culture, preserving what is genuine and eternal in the charism. The needs are even more significant on the mission, which must gradually move away from the way we organise assistance according to 'first world' patterns to adopt ways of practising hospitality in a manner that is consistent with every real-life situation, embodied in the local socio-ecclesial environment, without renouncing the Order's traditional value of promoting a decent level of care, backed up by progress in science and technology, and provided by highly qualified Brothers and Co-workers.

35. In this way, while the charism of John of God is enriched by the values of every culture, the Order will continue to be the critical conscience in places in which medical and social care is lacking, and will promote the proper development of health care and welfare structures to which everyone can have access, particularly those who are most deprived.





II. THE BASIS: MERCY AND HOSPITALITY

AS BASIC CATEGORIES

36. The Order has expressed the charism of John of God in terms of two closely related words: "mercy" and "hospitality";⁷³ we also find these words in the Word of God. In our own age, these are two terms that speak to us of human values that are highly prized in every culture. Here are a few reflections on each of them, which are linchpins around which the peculiar spirituality of the Order revolves. We shall be dealing with these three points:

- % firstly, mercy, as a biblical and anthropological category;
- % secondly, hospitality in the biblical and anthropological sense;
- % thirdly, the special importance of each of them in the Order's charism, bearing in mind in particular the New Constitutions.

1. The starting point: mercy and hospitality, guilt and violence

37. Mercy is first and foremost the capacity to show understanding, compassion and forgiveness, and to be agents of reconciliation manifested through our reaction to guilt and to sin. Human beings can act faithfully to God's project or decide to act against his will, against human rules, and against the covenants we have concluded. We can live in a manner and with attitudes that produce harmony and self-development, and create an atmosphere of serenity and solidarity, or we can do the opposite: in this case our acts of transgression affect our psychological state and can throw it into disarray; we acquire an awareness of guilt, a sense of guilt, and this affects us in every dimension of our lives. When

- % we know we are guilty and feel guilty in the eyes of God, we talk about *sin*,
- % we know we are guilty and feel guilty in our own and others' eyes, we talk about "*moral*" or "*ethical*" *guilt*,
- % we violate a fundamental principle in our value system, we have a *guilty conscience*, and a *sense of guilt*.

38. This is why it is not good to deny guilt, although it is not good to encourage people to have a guilt complex which blows reality out of proportion and disfigures it. Forgiving - knowing how to forgive and knowing that one is forgiven - is the most radical way of overcoming guilt and sin.

39. Hospitality is first and foremost the person's capacity to open up and to reach out to others; it is also a reaction to violence. There is violence where there is antagonism among ourselves, and we are incapable of living in peace, and coming to terms with ourselves as persons. Interior violence makes us prefer conflict, struggle, degradation. Violence triggers the worst in us, (our root sins) and makes us more aggressive. The original violence was not all-out war with everyone against everyone else, but the hostility of a human community - family, village, country, religion, cultural entity - against outsiders and aliens. When the violence of the spirit becomes a universal law, it claims the monopoly of civilisation for itself, and fights against human diversity. Violence exists where we disavow those who are different.

40. Religious violence confesses "God is with us!", and denies the presence of God in those who are different. Those who believe that God is only on their side owe nothing to anyone. This creates *sacred egotism*, "in order to exist it is necessary that the others do not". This is why sacred

⁷³ cf. V.A., RIESCO, *La Hospitalidad manifestación del Ser de Dios en favor del hombre. Fundamento bíblico de nuestra espiritualidad*.



violence is fundamentalist and homicidal in its view of others; and it is also destructive to those who exercise it. Reaching out and welcoming others, those who are different, and practising hospitality - philoxenia as opposed to xenophobia! - alone can take on violence.

2. Mercy

a) The God of Mercy

41. The supreme feature of God according to the Old Testament is mercy, and not violence.⁷⁴ Mercy infinitely surpasses anger: "*In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.*" (Is 54,8). The text that epitomises the idea of mercy as God's specific identity is in Ex 34,6-7:

"The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

42. Here God is proclaimed as "raham", the one who has a burning, maternal, deep-seated love of the heart. This merciful love is totally freely given, not because it is deserved but as a demand of the heart. Mercy is therefore goodness, kindness, patience, understanding, and the readiness to forgive despite infidelity.
43. The mercy of God is always manifested in a situation in which the Covenant has been violated. Mindful of their infidelity, the people, threw themselves onto God's mercy. Violations of the Covenant gave rise to God's anger. But with the Prophets (Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah) his threats were converted into an announcement of consolation and to manifestations of mercy, a Gospel (Good News) for the poor (*Is* 40, 61).

b) The embodiment of Mercy

44. The text in Phil 2,6-11 tells us that Jesus "*emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*". The Almighty God set aside the desire for power: "*I am among you as one who serves*" (*Lk* 22,27; cf. *Mt* 22,25-28). Almighty God did not mechanically destroy evil and death, but took it upon himself. This is why, faced with the suffering of the innocent or with the absurd episodes in life, God always reveals himself as invincible weakness. And since God shows himself as weak, he suffers with the human being. Suffering is the bread which God shares with us. Divine Mercy is God's repentance, God's weakness. God's weakness corresponds to the weakness of the human being. Our God always presents himself as the first one to give forgiveness. By forgiving, by practising mercy, we are doing what God did to reveal himself as God to us human beings.
45. The New Testament shows Jesus as the great forgiver, the great healer who forgives. In Him the whole of God's mercy is present. Exercising such an exclusive property of God, forgiving, (cf. *Mk* 2,7; *Lk* 15) Jesus took the place of God the Father. Jesus was concerned about people in their whole being, descending into their very depths, penetrating their hearts, but without staying only in their soul, and in their psyche, but also healing their bodies. "Jesus himself was the therapy he gave" (Hanna Wolff). When he pardoned, Jesus unleashed a process of total readjustment within the pardoned person. In Jesus, mercy, not violence, was revealed. The Incarnation was the

⁷⁴ It is not easy to explain why, but the God of the Old Testament was often presented as having violent, even demoniacal, characteristics. This helped to conceal the need to explain the mystery of evil, and to take a stand against all forms of idolatry, and demonstrate that Yahweh was the only God.



coming down of God (God's kénosis). It was the sign that God is not violent. God loves weakness, and made himself weak. Jesus did not appear with the absolute character of a sacred person, but as "one of many" (*Phil 2,7*), as a person of this world. Jesus became everyone's neighbour, without exception. Jesus loved all, because He is the icon of God, and God is Love (*1Jn 4,7*). He rejected all kinds of violence out of hand. Jesus spoke of his Abba not as his Lord and master, but as his friend; not as a dominator, but as a servant; He said that the essential things were revealed not to the wise, but to the unlearned (*Mt 11,25; Lk 10,21*). The thread running through the history that began with Jesus is bringing down powerful structures, renouncing violence and efficiency for its own sake; this is why He so strongly recommended forgiveness and urged us to forgive again and again (up to seventy times seven! (*Mt 15,22*)). Jesus was the great educator who leads us to still waters, and teaches us how to overcome violence, whether sacred or social.

46. The hymn with which Paul opens his Letter to the Ephesians stresses the greatness of God who, in Jesus and through Jesus, forgives our sins. If free giving is one of the features that exhibit what is so surprising about God, mercy in particular brings him close and makes him accessible to us. God is not only given freely, but when He forgives He gives himself to us as a gift of mercy. Being merciful is the property of God. God exercises his presence among people by forgiving them: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (*Lk 5,21; Mk 2,7*). Jesus takes on the frontline role which is reserved to God. The Incarnation of the Son of God was the supreme manifestation of God's Mercy. His Abba is "*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*" (*2Cor 1,3*), "*God, who is rich in mercy.*" (*Eph 2.4*).
47. The way Jesus identified not only with human beings but in particular with the hungry and the thirsty, with exiles, with the sick, with prisoners and with all needy people (*Mt 25,34-45*) showed the lengths to which the mercy that he embodied was able to reach. He received no mercy and on the Cross he went so far as to say: "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (*Mt 27,46*). But the Son was nevertheless listened to, and his prayer bore fruit in the Resurrection. He rose from the loving depths of his Father's heart: You are my beloved Son. Today have I engendered you (cf. *Ps 2,7; Heb 1,5*). He was born for eternal life from the merciful love of the Father.

c) Mercy in the Order's charism

48. "Mercy" is the key to the charism and the spirituality of John of God⁷⁵ and his Order.⁷⁶ We seek to be a living and collective icon of Mercy in the Church.

% *The starting point:* we acknowledge that we are merciful to the extent that John of God himself and each one of us have been touched by the Mercy of God and have experienced it in our lives: "*If we reflected on the breadth of God's mercy, we would never cease doing good while we were able.*"⁷⁷ We feel that we are equipped and consecrated to be merciful. We wish "to love Jesus above all the things of the world, and because of his love and goodness to do good and show charity to the poor and needy"; we wish to imitate Our Lady, the "Ever-Virgin" Mary in her maternal love (Const. 4b.c).

% Our spiritual *objective* is to "*strive to incarnate in ever greater depth the sentiments of Christ towards the sick and those in need and to manifest these sentiments with actions of mercy*";

⁷⁵ This is repeatedly stated in the first chapter (Fundamental Constitution) of the New Constitutions. Firstly, they show John of God as a man: "inwardly transformed by the merciful love of the Father, he lived love for God and neighbour in perfect unity" (Const. 1); he "faithfully imitated the Saviour in his attitudes and actions of mercy" (Const.1).

⁷⁶ Secondly, the Constitutions say that "Our Hospitaller Order was thus born of the gospel of mercy (Mt 8,17; 25, 34-46) as lived in its fullness by Saint John of God" (Const. 1); through consecration in the Spirit, Brothers are configured with the merciful and compassionate Jesus, and participate in the merciful love of the Father, keeping alive in time the merciful presence of Jesus of Nazareth (Const. 2).

⁷⁷ IDS 13



"*make ourselves weak with the weak*"; to make our life "*for them...a sign and proclamation of the Coming of the kingdom of God.*" (Const. 3). Our vocational response leads us to cultivate within ourselves an increasingly more ardent love for the poor, the needy and for sinners.

% The *manner* which has characterised us from the very beginning, is demonstrated through the following virtues: "*humble, patient and responsible service; respect for, and faithfulness to, the person; understanding, lovingkindness and self-denial; sharing in the anxieties and hopes of those who suffer.*" (Const. 3b).

3. Hospitality

49. The Order has traditionally expressed the charism it has received using the term "hospitality". This word has not only retained its expressive power to this day, but some even put it forward as a fundamental category of a new morality for our present age.⁷⁸ This is why it is important to reflect on the expression, as the hub around which the particular spirituality of our Order revolves.

a) What is hospitality?

50. Hospitality speaks to us about the relationships that are established between a guest and the host. In these relationships obligations and responsibilities are created. The guest and the host establish a mutual relationship: one cannot exist without the other. The guest is an absentee, who may at any time become present and demand his right to be given hospitality. Where there is hospitality the absentee has rights to be claimed with respect to the host (the right to be taken in), and the host, who does not yet have that capacity until the guest is present, acquires duties towards the guest when he appears (the duty to take him in).

51. Why are human beings hospitable? It is not easy to know why. But one thing is certain: the hospitality relationship is not mechanical because the guest can leave and the host can refuse to take the guest in; but neither is it arbitrary, because the host feels morally obliged to take in a guest, even when it is inopportune.

52. The fundamental feature of hospitality is taking in and recognising the guest, and recognising one's capacity as the host; but this recognition and this welcome has a number of special features:

% Hospitality is virtually *universal*. Anyone can be a guest; recognising a person as a guest presupposes that one takes a very important step towards recognising all human beings as *virtual* guests. Anyone in this world is a virtual guest, or a virtual host. In many cultures it is prohibited to ask guests where they come from, or ask their name, as if this were a symbolic representation of the absentee. Protecting the anonymity of the guest is the sign that in each guest we see any person in the world. We have specific duties towards visitors who come to us as they pass by. A lack of interest in their name, origin or lineage does not mean we despise them, but that we are willing to offer hospitality reaching out to the whole world.

% Hospitality reveals a high sense of morality and of policy. The guest is not only received as a particular individual, but also as an ambassador who can be replaced, as a representative of other people. Human beings therefore form groups and communities, societies, nations, and each individual belongs to them. Hospitality therefore confronts us with something of great ethical and political significance: taking in the stranger, the alien, the other, the person who does not belong "to mine". Hospitality is recognition of people who are "different": we accept

⁷⁸ Cf. DANIEL INNERARITY, *Ética de la hospitalidad*, ed. Península, Barcelona 2001.



that the guest is different from ourselves. We give the guest freedom to differ from us.

- % Hospitality is virtually *sacred*. In many peoples there is a sense that this "other person", the guest, is enshrouded in mystery. A certain air of the sacred envelops the guest. The guest could be a god. Hosting gods is something that appears many times in Greek mythology, in the Bible and in the tradition of very widely differing cultures. It is said that gods frequently take forms that are unrecognisable, and seek assistance from humans. In the Letter to the Hebrews, Paul says that some have hosted angels without knowing it (*Heb 13,2*). This gives religious sanction to the right of hospitality: we have to treat outsiders as if it was a visit from God. The figure of the guest is covered with ambiguity, presented as being in an uncertain place, in which something important to ourselves is at work. It is a place of fear and desire at one and the same time. The guest becomes a symbol of mediation between two different spheres. When the guest is taken in, a meeting occurs between beings of different orders: the divine, the distant, the boundless, the inconceivable, is taken into a human environment. This meeting sometimes takes on the character of a violent breaking-in, which destroys the established order and upsets the familiar environment; in some cases, it is also something disconcerting and imponderable.
- % Hospitality is an *event*. It is unpredictable and uncontrollable. We never know when it will happen, or with whom. The host must always be prepared, because the guest can arrive at the most unpredictable time.
- % Every meeting of hospitality is *unique* and brings with it care for *a specific person*; it must be performed and interpreted according to the features of the people exercising the functions of the guest or the host. The duties of the guest and the host are general duties, but they are performed within a finite and specific horizon. One may be willing to fulfil the obligations imposed by showing care for any human being, regardless of the particular characteristics or features of that person, by virtue merely of belonging to the human race. But these demands always occur in the specific terms of a given individual. A host expecting a universal guest, as the only one truly worthy of attention, rejecting all other visitors who knock at the door, because none of them fully fits in with the human condition, would be rejecting the possibility of the event of hospitality taking place.

b) Hospitality in Revelation

53. Judaeo-Christian revelation is particularly sensitive to the event of hospitality.⁷⁹ It begins by telling of how God welcomed the human being into his Garden: He worked for his guest (growing "*every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*"); He offered him food and clothing ("*You may freely eat of every tree of the garden*") (*Gen 2,8-9,15-17*). The revelation ended by recounting how God requested the human beings to be hospitable, too: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*" (*Rev 3,20*).
54. Hospitality turned human beings into God's guests, made God the guest of human beings, and made human beings guests to one another. Adam and Eve were God's guests in his Garden of Eden. Abraham, and subsequently the people in Egypt, were taken to the land of manna, milk and honey, and there they were God's guests: "*for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.*" (*Lev 25,23*; cf. *Ps 23,5;27,10*). God was Abraham's guest and stayed in his tent in the Vale of Mambre; then he was the guest of the people that walked through the wilderness, and dwelt in the tent of the meeting. Lastly, he agreed to stay in the house of the Temple: "*The glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*" (*1 Kings 8,10-11*). Hospitality opened the eyes of human beings so that they could see and recognise themselves as guests to one another. Abraham and Moses felt as aliens in a foreign land. So did the people in Egypt. They

⁷⁹ N.B. PAGADUT, *Be hospitable*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines 1992.



understood that the human being is made for hospitality.

55. Hospitality is the welcome given to each one at the mother's breast. Hospitality received and hospitality given in tents, houses, towns or countries. Hospitality was not merely a question of taking in a guest, but involved "including" of the guest into one's own circle of interests, protecting them against their enemies, sheltering them, respecting them in the depths of their being, and through the care shown to them as persons, meeting their needs.
56. The icons of hospitality in the Old Testament were Abraham, who took in the three men, the widow Zarephath and Elijah who showed mutual hospitality, the prostitute from Jericho, Rahab, who took in Joshua's envoys, the old man who took in the Levite and his wife (*Judg 19*), and Tobias who took in the Archangel Rafael, and Ruth.
57. The New Testament is the great explosion of hospitality, where it reaches its peak. Jesus is the Sacrament of God who welcomes us in, serves us and ministers to us, who restores our dignity and our health, who identifies with us, who washes our feet and dies for us. It is worthwhile contemplating the figure of Jesus, for example, as depicted in the Gospel of Luke, as the genuine path of hospitality. Jesus also welcomes the hospitality of human beings: the hospitality of Mary, who hosted Him in her womb, the hospitality of several Pharisees, of Martha and Mary, of Zacchaeus, etc. Christian spirituality sets great store by the hospitality which sees the presence of Jesus in the poor, the prisoners and the sick, and in all those human beings who need our solidarity, love and service.
58. The great Christian parable of hospitality is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In reply to the question of the lawyer, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus answered with a parable. One might think that the neighbour was the man who had fallen among thieves, the person in need. But Jesus turns the lawyer's question around, and asks him once again: "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" (*Lk 10,36*). What is important for Jesus is not the fact that neighbours exist, or that there are people who recognise the needs of others. It was the fact that one can take on the status of a neighbour by exercising mercy to those in need of it. This is why the lawyer did not have to be concerned about going out to look for people in need, but to make himself a neighbour, and exercise mercy himself, as the Samaritan had done. In this parable hospitality and mercy are merged.

c) Hospitality in our Father St John of God

59. John of God made his whole life a project, a path of merciful hospitality. But within this great anthropological and biblical proposal, he felt called to emphasise hospitality to the poorest, to those human beings who were most degraded, the physically and mentally ill, without any exclusion or discrimination. For John of God, hospitality was the rationale of his whole existence, viewed in that sense. It was this charism that he received with an amazing and sometimes incomprehensible intensity. He took in everyone, he even went out to look for them. He gave them the whole of his being. He identified with others. He gave them his time. He discovered the sacred character of the outsider.
60. His form of hospitality was to welcome in and serve the sick as a brother and a neighbour. His main concern was to console his patients with his words, and then give them everything they needed. "*In the morning, before leaving the house, he saw to it that they had enough provisions At night when the house had settled quietly down and in spite of the fact that he felt worn out; he would not retire until he had gone around to visit each and every patient. he consoled them with his kind words, giving them both spiritual and temporal comfort.*"⁸⁰ Loving the Lord in the poor and the sick gave him a joy which he was unable to disguise.⁸¹

⁸⁰ CASTRO

⁸¹ ...and one day this witness recalled that he went into his kitchen, where he found him very happy and clapping his hands



61. John's charity was very creative. This comes out very clearly in one of the descriptions of his hospital: "*Since this house is for everybody, without making any distinctions we take in people suffering from every disease and people of every type, so that there are cripples, the maimed, lepers, mutes, the insane, paralytics, people with ringworm, and also very old people and many children - and this is without counting the large numbers of other pilgrims and wayfarers who come here.*"⁸² He demonstrated it in the way he went begging for alms, which he adopted as his apostolate, reminding those who gave that the first to benefit from alms-giving was the giver. John of God excluded no one from his boundless love. Whether he was dealing with the poor or the rich, it was a love that had its origin in love of Jesus Christ and love for Jesus Christ, in whom he loved all men and women as his brothers and sisters.
62. It was St John of God's identification with Christ that made him a great master of mercy: God gave him a compassionate and profoundly human heart. Like Jesus, he taught more through his deeds than his words. He was not concerned about drawing up statutes or rules for running things; he merely lived the gift that animated him, to do good, to pray for long hours during the night, and to visit one or other of the patients and to listen to all with *very great patience*, consoling them and giving to each one according to their needs and possibilities. Like Jesus, he lived, loved and served, giving his life for all. Like Jesus, he laid down only one commandment which would shed a great deal of light later on when it became necessary to codify rules in order to help to keep his spirit alive in people and in the works of the Order.⁸³ The Brothers who followed his way of life learned from him to take in, serve and love the poor sick people with the deeds they had seen him performing, and which were taken up later up in the Constitutions of the Order, to perpetuate the model of Hospitality inherited from our Founder:

*"Ensure that in our hospitals that the service that we give to the Lord in his poor is agreeable. This means that before you go to bed with the charity which is required you must cut their hair and their nails as necessary, because this is not dangerous to health, and you will also wash their hands and their feet and, if necessary their whole body, with warm water prepared for this purpose; and when this is done you will dress them in a clean shirt and put a cap or a cloth on their head, and when the sick person is clean you will put him in his bed, which will have clean sheets and pillows; and in the winter, he must be kept warm, and this is the way in which the bodily care will be provided".*⁸⁴

d) Hospitality in the Constitutions and the writings of the Order

63. The whole rationale of the vocation of the Brothers of St John of God is to "*keep the merciful presence of Jesus of Nazareth alive*" embodying "*the sentiments of Christ towards the sick and those in need*", in order to show that the "*Christ of the Gospel is still alive among men.*"⁸⁵ Jesus of Nazareth is "*the root and the crown*" of our spirituality.⁸⁶ The Brother has a very specific mission and ministry: to represent Jesus by serving the sick, and taking in the poor and the abandoned. Jesus handed on the peace of the Kingdom to those who were tired and heavy laden, and liberated those who felt oppressed by evil, by sickness, and gave peace to those

and singing a sacred song. And the witness said: "You are fine today, Father," to which he replied: "Those who serve God are always happy" (Witness 30. In GÓMEZ MORENO, op cit., p. 214).

Very often he went there and saw him working and healing the sick, dressing them, washing them and putting them in their beds, embracing them, with a smile on his lips and so much love and charity that was almost frightening, and it seemed that he wanted to love all of them. (Witness 59. In GÓMEZ MORENO, op cit., pp 231-232.)

⁸² 2GL 5

⁸³ "Love Our Lord Jesus Christ above everything in the world, for however much you love him he still loves you more. Always have charity, for where there is no charity God is not there - even though God is everywhere." (LB 15).

⁸⁴ Const. 1587, Chapter 17.

⁸⁵ Const. 2c, 3a, 5a

⁸⁶ Cf. GS 22; Const. 20



whom he found troubled.

64. The purpose of the Constitutions is to offer a framework of a new spirituality for the Order suitable to the new age. The Order realises that without conversion and a serious spiritual commitment, it is not possible to carry through the renewal which the Council requested.⁸⁷ In its renewal process, the Order made a number of choices:

% *Humanising care*: the primary purpose of the Order is to defend the dignity of the sick human being (Const. 10d; 12c; 23a; 28b; 43d).⁸⁸ The Hospitaller apostolate is thereby identified with humanisation. This reveals, simultaneously, the need to humanise the religious life and to enhance the humanising capacities of the Brothers: "healing themselves while they heal others". Unless we focus on the human side we lose the very sense of the charism of servants of hospitality.

% *The purpose of the Hospitaller vocation* is to enter into a Covenant with suffering people, which is the charismatic expression of our Covenant with God.

% It also consists of creating bonds of *brotherhood*. John of God felt that he was the *brother of all*: from the poorest of the poor to Prince Philip.⁸⁹ Creating bonds of brotherhood is one of the distinctive features of the Brother, beginning with his sense of being the brother of those who suffer and those who share with him the ministry of hospitality (45b; 46b.c; 23), professionals, volunteers and benefactors, with whom he is called to live in a Covenant to serve and promote Life.⁹⁰

% Hospitality must be understood in terms of a *preferential option for the poor and humanisation* (Const. 5a)⁹¹ of our service to the sick and needy in general.

4. Rethinking mercy and hospitality in our age: relations with the outsider

a) Relations with "strangers"

65. Hospitality and mercy speak of the relationship of human beings with their neighbour, brother and sister, and with "strangers". This outside reality may be a friend (communion!) or an enemy

⁸⁷ "Renewal has two fundamental aspects: firstly, it seeks to remove the weaknesses of our lives and remove the barriers that are hampering our fraternal communion; secondly, it endeavours to enable us to discover our "strong points", which help us to achieve a union which is similar to the union existing between the Father and the Son" (P. MARCHESI, *The Bases of Renewal*, Rome, 1978, p. 18).

⁸⁸ ("...we realise that the fundamental need of man is not the economy, but the need to be recognised as a person, with worth in his own right, worthy to receive care, attention and love, regardless of the differences of culture, institutions, social class, religion, race, etc." (P. MARCHESI, *Humanisation*, Rome, 1981, p. 198).

⁸⁹ "As soon as John of God arrived at Court, the Count de Tendilla and the other nobles who knew him, notified the King telling him all about him. When he was admitted to the court he said: 'My Lord, I usually call everyone my brother in Jesus Christ'" (CASTRO).

⁹⁰ HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST JOHN OF GOD, *Brothers and Co-workers united to serve and promote life*, Rome, 1992

⁹¹ In the 1980s, in the spirit of the humanisation movement, the Order sought to find a way of reorganising the mission to help to meet old and new needs of humanity. It is interesting to see the conclusions of the work of the Assembly of Provincials held in 1981: "Our Meeting restated its hope in, and commitment to, the continual renewal of the Order. **We are convinced that it can only be carried out if every single member of the Institute lives in a continual attitude of heeding the needs that arise as a result of our consecration to God as Hospitaller Brothers** and if we try to translate this attitude into a concrete response to the hopes which the Church and Society place in us. Considering that the world is going through an important period in its history, in which fundamental personal values are being both demanded and crushed, **we hereby undertake a definite commitment as a concrete expression of the charism of the Order to defend and promote forthwith the respect due to the dignity of man.** This has made us firmly convinced that humanisation, in the sense it acquired in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is the unifying and integrating bond that will help us to put the renewal process into practice, in the moment of history through which we are passing." (P. MARCHESI, *Humanisation*, p. 89-90)



(hostility!), or the alien who frightens us, or our own body as a scenario of suffering, or alienation as a result of our own actions (cf. *Rom 7*). Meeting the "other", the "friend", the "enemy", the "alien", the "outsider" can lead to a variety of different reactions: joy, welcome, solidarity, irritation, fear, curiosity, or interest in the exotic. What we do not know about others causes fear; it makes them appear as a threat and a fascination at the same time: a threat, because they compete with us; a fascination, because the outsider awakens possibilities that have hitherto been undiscovered in our own life.

66. Something is strange or alien when it appears to be *outside our own environment, our own space*, something that belongs to someone else. It is something that is against us, something we cannot understand, unusual, heterogenous, not available to us. Reality appears strange when it is held up against what is "mine", "ours"; to be defined as alien or strange, we have to recognise the relationship between both terms. In this way, something is strange when, to a certain extent, it belongs to us: we recognise our own in terms of what is alien or strange, and we recognise what is alien or strange by what is ours. This is why the guest is not the traveller who comes and goes, but the traveller who comes and stays: but he stays temporarily. The guest occupies a borderline space. And so does the host who takes him in. The space that they both occupy is not their own.
67. And something is strange or alien above all when it appears to be *outside our own time*. Every individual lives in "their" time. We might talk about others as being "other times", other paces of life. Living with others therefore means harmonising time and pace, harmonising the time of others with my own time. Hospitality becomes something that is closely bound up with respect for other people's pace and time, and not only a question of respecting their spatial environments. Viewed from the point of view of one's own time, other people are generally an inconvenience, people who bother us, and cause us to move ahead or backwards. Other people are slower or faster than we are, people who live in a time frame which, for whatever reason, is strange to us or seems alien to us. Those who are truly alien are not so much those who live at a great distance from us, but those who live in a different time from ours. The person who is marginalised is not living in some spatial periphery, but literally in another time. This is why hospitality has a great deal to do with the ability to "waste time" or to "devote our own time".
68. The outsider - whether in time or in space - is always the person who *calls out and challenges us*, who turns up unexpectedly and inexhaustibly. What is alien demands a response from us. Not responding to what is alien is also a kind of response: this neutralises future questions and we thereby protect ourselves against an unpredictable future. What is alien can throw our own identity into crisis. This is what makes it attractive and risky. The cultural experience of what is alien always presupposes a confrontation with possible alternatives in one's own life, and throws down a challenge to what we are and have. What is alien is a reserve on which to draw, to enrich and correct the limitations of our own positions. Durkheim, in this connection, said that the moral quality of a culture is measured in terms of its relationship with the outsider. What we respond to always exceeds what we offer as a response.

b) Apprenticeship in hospitality and mercy

69. Hospitality understood in this way, and mercy as love and non-violence, demonstrate to us the fundamental truths of the human being. People discover themselves by going out to meet other people. Self-discovery is an inter-subjective act. We know our rights and our duties to the extent that we go out to meet others. Discovering oneself to be a guest or a host, as someone who is taken in or someone who takes others in, means discovering an identity which gives rise to obligations and responsibilities. Individuals only become persons through the approval or the disapproval of others.
70. The words of Merleau-Ponty are very eloquent in this regard: "Learning to consider one's own as alien, and the alien as one's own". This is achieved by learning to practise a type of hospitality
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and mercy which is not enslaving or indifferent, but which is capable of living with what is heterogenous, and which knows how to rise above one's own and others' contingencies. We learn hospitality and mercy by growing accustomed to taking an interest in other people, outsiders, respecting them and trying to take on board their peculiarities.

c) On a mission of mercy and hospitality "today"

71. Under the present conditions of life, it is very easy to travel, and our experience of otherness and alien things is becoming increasingly more frequent in the experience of human beings. There are massive waves of immigration and emigration. We are living in a society on the move, a globalising and globalised society. We are living in multicultural societies which make us discover and experience pluralism. This demands tolerance of others, of aliens. This situation enables us to see that no compact, homogeneous groups exist, and that there are no more any clearly defined and clearly delimited realities anymore. We are surprised when we see how our own things become alien, and what was initially alien enters our own environment. Complex societies require greater sensitivity in order to deal with all the situations of exclusion created by the excessive demand for our own identity or which stem from any social order. In contemporary society there is a loss of "gravity" in its members. They are less bound than before to the "weight" of a territory. They are less easy to control. They live more loosely and with greater interdependence. We are living in a scenario in which there is little point in emphasising identity as if it were something well-defined, once and for all. Today we find it better to talk about a "complex identity" (Amin Maalouf). It is on the basis of the alien and the outsider that we can better understand our own.
 72. The perverse situations of our world are also well-known. We know that the number of poor and marginalised people is not declining, but growing, despite the new technologies and the processes of globalisation. The sacred view of the human being is giving way to idols before which modern societies bow and pay tribute. The education which society offers the new generations (through the mass media and the socio-economic environment) does not emphasise the value of hospitality, but places greater stress to individualism and a materialistic and hedonistic view of life. This mentality does not prevent or stop - and is not equipped to - such perverse phenomena as the consumption and trafficking in drugs and pornography, and free love, with the consequent loss of the dignity of human sexuality, greater poverty and injustice, the outbreak of so many new diseases from which thousands of human beings are suffering. With the degradation of humanity there is also ecological degradation (water, coasts, marine resources caused by industrial mining, air pollution caused by textile, food and drink industries and petrol refineries, and genetic manipulation), and environmental degradation (looting nature, the depletion of resources, the threat of a breakdown in the ecological balance).
 73. Our capacity for hospitality is being sorely challenged by the population explosion. Every day the world's population increases by 220,000. Rapid population growth is throwing down new challenges: families are being uprooted, urbanisation is spreading, available and accessible resources are being unsustainably exploited to meet the huge needs of the population. In many places and in many individuals, it seems that humanity has lost the sense of the sacredness of life: fratricidal wars, violence against defenceless women, the exploitation of innocent children, heartless capitalism which is widening the gap between the rich and the poor. There is a huge imbalance between the 30% of the human beings who live in a world of material affluence and the 70% who are condemned to remain in thrall to poverty and the deprivation of the most basic elements in life. The cultures of the poor are also being threatened due to a lack of resources, and by being seduced by alien models of material development.
 74. The attitudes of welcome and thanks, service and solidarity (hospitality!) of our contemporaries reveal all their splendour in so many institutions and initiatives: voluntary services, NGOs, a wide range of different types of social institutions, peace armies, movements working for justice, for ecology, for human dignity, and for the rejection of all forms of xenophobia, etc. There are also
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many peoples in the world who still preserve their precious traditions of hospitality as one of the most highly prized values. But it is also true that even among these peoples the value of hospitality is beginning to wane, because of the even more fundamental value of security; insecurity caused by violence, war, crimes and terrorism is so threatening that the traditional values of hospitality are bearing the brunt. But within all of this world of grace, the Order of the Brothers of St John of God is present, with the weight of its tradition. The Order wishes to be able to keep pace with the times and to respond with new vigour to its specific vocation, by offering places in which organisation, professionalism, technology and humanisation can be coupled harmoniously with attitudes and deeds of welcome, service, solidarity and the healing of physical and moral suffering.





III. THE SPIRITUAL PATH

TAKING THE PATH OF JOHN OF GOD "TODAY"

1. Spirituality today

75. In the Church - and also in our world! - there is a deep yearning for spirituality. Confronted by loss of sense and meaning and the accumulation of what seem to be insoluble problems, and the frenzy of an age in movement, we all feel the need to connect with the Mystery, with the Spirit which gives stability and a reason for living and being. We are thirsting for spirituality. The Church has tried to channel this thirst for spirituality through different schools of spirituality.
76. Today we see a kind of globalisation of spirituality. Inter-faith dialogue has had marvellous results in this field. But at the same time there are demands for the more local aspect of spirituality. Accordingly, a spirituality is being designed with African or Asian or American or European features... At the beginning of the new century we view spirituality in a more comprehensive manner. Spirituality has to do with the body and the soul, the individual and the community or society, with what is local and what is worldwide, what is of local religious relevance, and what is of ecumenical religious relevance... The same is happening in our Order. In the Order we have a globalised spirituality which responds to the gift we have received, but at the same time our peculiar spirituality is taking on particular, local features in different parts of the world.
77. We view spirituality as a process, as a path. We divide it into various stages. Our Constitutions illustrate the goal to us. We have to find the path in order to reach that goal, and we must find the most appropriate method of spirituality for this purpose. The Spirit is our "interior teacher"; it leads us to the perfection of Love, of the Covenant, of union with God, with our fellow humans and with the cosmos. In this life we shall never reach the goal, and that is why the words of Gregory of Nyssa, in his "Life of Moses" are so eloquent:

"Stopping along the road to virtue is the beginning of the road to vice. ... Everything that is marked out with boundaries is not virtue. With respect to virtue, the only limit to perfection is that it does not have limits... The apostle, who always hastened along the path of virtue, never ceased to press forward, because he felt that it was dangerous to linger along the path... perhaps the perfection of human nature consists in always being ready to achieve a greater good".

78. The Church presents this same perspective to Religious in the document "Starting Afresh from Christ" where it says:

"It is precisely in the simple day-to-day living that consecrated life progressively matures to become the proclamation of an alternative way of living to that of the world and the dominant culture... In addition to the active presence of new generations of consecrated persons who bring the presence of Christ to the world and the splendour of the ecclesial charisms to life, the hidden and fruitful presence of consecrated men and women who are experiencing old age, loneliness, illness and suffering is also particularly significant. In addition to the service already rendered and the wisdom which they can share with others, they add their own particular precious contribution by joining themselves in their sufferings to the patient and glorious Christ for his Body, the Church (cf. Col 1:24)" (Starting Afresh from Christ, no. 6)⁹²

⁹² See also no. 10: "This is a time when the Spirit is breaking forth, opening up new possibilities. The charismatic dimension of the diverse forms of consecrated life, while always in progress, is never finished. Cooperating with the Spirit, consecrated persons prepare in the Church for the coming of the One who must come, the One who is already the future of humanity in progress." See also nos 18, 21, etc. Let us not forget that this document is based on the image of the "path" or "way".)



2. The paradigm or model of our spiritual path

79. "*Our hospitality has its source in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.*" (Const. 20) whom our Founder St John of God faithfully imitated, devoting himself entirely to the service and salvation of the poor and sick (Const. 1a). Now *we are John of God*: we share his gift, his faith, his sensitivity to human suffering, his unconditional self-giving to serve them, his humility and his loving creativity.⁹³ His spiritual path is the pedagogical proposal offered to us by the Holy Spirit to develop within us the charism of hospitality. Like him, we are people on a path, wanderers and pilgrims in a globalised and enormously complex world. His interior pilgrimage, his spiritual path to the lowest depths of human misery are the best proposal for the spirituality of the mission and communion (Const. 5): a house and school of spirituality!
80. The stages through which St John of God passed: "*emptiness - calling - change - identification*" show us the stages that we have to pass through, too. We understand them not as a linear sequence of stages, but as a spiral, because they are reproduced and repeated in each stage of our life. John of God is converted for us into the symbol of the path which leads us from emptying (kénosis) to emptying, and from emptying to service unto death (Cf. Phil 2,6-11).

a) Experiences of emptiness: being uprooted to "be born again"

81. In any journey, we leave one place to reach another. Setting out implies being *uprooted*: and what used to be our normal state of life, our *Lebensraum*, begins to lose its meaning. We feel like strangers in our own home. Thus begins the process which marks the beginning of a path which very often leads us, we know not where. We are St John of God, and like him we have sensed the emptiness of the things of this world. With him we experience an *uprooting*.
82. This experience is wonderfully reflected in the biblical figure of Moses and the People. Initially, Moses faced life with the wisdom of the Egyptians. Little by little, after a long trek through the wilderness, he discovered that his life and the life of his people was being led by Yahweh. He therefore gave up all immediate sense of security and the false gods, and in his life he welcomed the initiative of the one true God who urged him to set up his tent, to walk forward overcoming obstacles and barriers: mental barriers and feelings (fear, the tendency to be discouraged, refusing to make the effort that was necessary to achieve his promised future), which are stronger and more violent than the wilderness and the rivers themselves.
83. **The spiritual path begins with an initial experience of the limitations of this world and of life. Through the grace of God one feels the contingent nature of everything. Nothing of what we see is absolutely necessary! We search for a meaning to life, for a meaning of history, and all we find are partial or even contradictory answers. What is most promising subsequently disappoints and deludes. The lack of affection, the sense of frustration, disappointments and failures (the family, friendships, study, projects that come to nothing...) lead us to ask questions about the substance of the values which take priority in society, and to seek those which can give our lives meaning. Even though the greatest success may be eventually insufficient to sooth the anxiety of the human heart: "You made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (St Augustine). But above all Jesus tells us: "*For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*" (Lk 9,25). The experience of being called, the experience of a vocation is usually the first step towards a change of life. The voice of God is powerful and it silences all other voices. It invites us to go "further still", and engenders a yearning for something different.**
84. On various occasions in the course of our lives, we may experience this. These are the moments in which we need to "be born again", because we have had serious failures, either interior or

⁹³ Cf. GENERAL GOVERNMENT, St John of God lives on, Rome, 1991, pp 12-13..



external. They are usually moments of chaos in our lives, experiences of death which seem to close every possibility of moving forward. The experience of emptiness can lead us to discouragement, to a passive acceptance of reality, to allow ourselves to be carried along by life instead of leading the life and living it. Then it can also be an alarm signal, telling us to go back and pick up our own existence with our own two hands once again, and allow the questions and the stimuli which, even though silent, were at least alive within our soul and let them ring out again.⁹⁴ The experience of emptiness, of welcoming, borne with endurance, and not superficially soothed, will enable the grace for re-creation or interior restoration to work.

85. This is the stage that Teresa of Jesus called the two first mansions, or which John of the Cross called the beginning of the ascent of Mount Carmel. St John of God describes them to us as an experience of death in a world of death, without a way out. They are also the first steps in the spiritual life which John of Ávila - the spiritual director of our Father St John of God - described as the stage of the unlistening of the language of the world, the flesh and the Devil (*"Audi, filia"*, I A).

b) The "call" and the calls that continue throughout life: "Listen, my son!"

86. When a person gives up living for himself, he discovers a mysterious plan for his life. He is then capable of listening to the voice of God and to experience the power of the spirit leading him towards "the unknown". The experience of a vocation has been compared to being "seduced", or to an "irresistible attraction". Jesus, the Son of God, comes out to meet us, he cuts the path short and invites us to change direction and to follow Him.
87. The *call* initially takes place almost without our realising it. Happy events and moments of discouragement following a sense of experience or disappointment, are the language that God uses to speak to us. One thing is certain: it is the voice of God at a particular moment in time that rings out in the depths of the person and removes layers that enable that person to tune into it: "listen, my son, lend your ear". Through contradictions or through the clash or the harmony with one's deepest aspirations, the individual feels the seduction exercised by way of life and of manifesting Jesus of Nazareth, and his love for the Father and his fellow brothers and sisters. He experiences the urgent need to change his way of life, to break with the monotonous and repetitive form of Christianity based on practices without further complications, in which the person always sought, almost always without realising it, that it would be possible to gain the love of God.
88. The seduction of the Mystery does not always take place in areas of pure transcendency, isolation or intimate prayer to God. This seduction frequently occurs, as it did in the life of John of God, when meeting the crucified people of this world, with the marginalised and those who are despised. It is in them that one can discover the face of God and the calling of God through them, a calling which is unavoidable and which challenges us to the depths of our being. In the face of those who are deformed, we discover the presence of the Transfigured Christ.
89. The call, the vocation, is a stage in which discernment is needed, and spiritual accompaniment and support, and answers to many questions. The masters of the spiritual life talk about the "beginning of the road", or the third mansions. But here it is necessary to make a great ascetical effort which enables us to adjust our lives to the life that God is proposing.
90. Throughout life "new calls" occur, which deepen the first call, giving it more substance. These

⁹⁴ This is what happened to St John of God: it was when he felt that he had no real human roots that he experienced the calling, inviting him from Oropesa, to give up leading the life of a shepherd and looking after the horses of the Count, to devote himself to the service of the Lord "he sadly remembered how well fed, protected and healthy the horses in the Count of Oropesa's stables were, whilst the poor were so badly off, ragged and hungry, he said to himself: "John, would it not be better if you learned how to feed and care for the poor people of Jesus Christ rather than farm animals?" (CASTRO).



are the moments in which we discover a new direction, when we feel called to change mentality (metanoia), in which we feel the interior need to be sent out to new mission frontiers. Responding to God's call under these circumstances is as vital as it was to respond at the beginning. If we fail to reply, the spiritual path is blocked.

91. The entrance gate to the spiritual path is certainly the vocation, but it must be accompanied by the response. The response is expressed above all through prayer and humble obedience and service. St John of Ávila prayed "listen to the first Word... only God who is the Supreme Truth" (*Audi, Filia*, I, B) 1.), "by faith" (*Audi, Filia*, I. B) 2.).

c) Change and Consecration

92. Whoever knows that they are being called by God to live in the manner of St John of God and answers that call experiences for themselves as a person undergoing a mysterious and gradual interior transformation, as someone changed and consecrated, prepared by the Spirit for a way of life, stripped, and emptied of themselves.
93. As he did to St John of God, God speaks to us through the cries of humanity suffering from sickness, poverty and injustice. He awakens and strengthens in us compassionate and merciful love, outreach and welcome, lovingkindness and a sense of solidarity and fraternity. This transforms the scale of values that had previously defined our lives. When we configure ourselves in Hospitality, the Holy Spirit makes us capable of manifesting the special love of the Father in our lives to those who suffer, and to continue in time the way of life of Jesus of Nazareth, living in chastity, poverty and hospitality, cooperating in the mission of the Church, and serving God in suffering humanity (Const. 1d; 2b; 7b).
94. This transforming action of the Spirit is celebrated and welcomed in the liturgical celebration of our Religious Profession (cf. ET 47; Const. 9a). In it we recognise that God is consecrating us through the many events of our lives.
95. It is not sufficient to participate in acts of consecration. We have to allow ourselves to be consecrated. When this occurs, God does all the rest. We enter into a mystical stage, in which God, through Jesus and the Spirit, once again becomes the great protagonist of the life of his chosen one. The masters of the spiritual life define this stage as the four mansions, as the change from one ascetical stage to another, more mystical, stage. John of God did not experience this stage in contemplative isolation, but in mystical contemplation in the midst of his charitable, merciful and hospitaller work. He felt that he had been anointed by the Spirit in his contact with human misery. That is also our path of continuing consecration. John of Ávila taught how listening to the voice of God led the believer to adopt a new vision, and to take up a new attitude to the will of God, leading him to set out and forget this evil world, and even his parental home. (*Audi, Filia*, II-V).

d) Mystical identification with the poor, marginalised and suffering Jesus

96. Walking in the Spirit never ends in this life. Its aim is total identification with the Lord. The last stages place us before a transformation or an ever greater transfiguration which can be described as a "mystical betrothal", an authentic symbiosis: "*It is not I who live but Christ who lives in me*" (*Gal 2*, 20). The Spirit manifests himself and acts in us as Hospitality. He configures us *with the compassionate and merciful Christ of the Gospel*, in order to keep *alive in time His merciful presence* (Const. 2).
97. These final stages of the spiritual life are the ones that make it possible for us to discover the secret potential of our lives, which exceeds all imagination and all desire. Whoever refuses to be carried to this point is frustrating themselves. These last stages are called "the last mansions" by the Spiritual Masters, or "the arrival at the peak of the Mountain", or the opportunity in which
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God feels captivated by the soul of the believer (*Audi, Filia*, VI).

3. Taking part in the Path of the People of God

98. Our charismatic, communitarian and personal spiritual path is set in the great spiritual Path of the People of God, of the Church. Where the spiritual path of the Church appears in a paradigmatic, exemplary and pedagogical way is in the sacramental and liturgical cycle. That is also our path. The *liturgical-sacramental cycle* of the Liturgical Year is the great environment in which our spiritual path takes place. Throughout it we enter into contact with the whole of the revealed message. The *continuing reading* which Mother Church offers us, day after day, week after week, is the best spiritual food, and the best guide along the paths of the Spirit.
99. Vatican II told us that "*the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows... From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way.*"⁹⁵ This is why the daily celebration of the Mass, in the context of the liturgical cycle:
- % incorporates us into the sacrifice of Jesus and to the worship that He offered to his Father (Const. 7c);
 - % expresses and performs our mission as a Hospitaller family);⁹⁶ the love of Jesus, which is present in the Eucharist, *renews our Hospitaller spirit* (Const. 30);
 - % the reserved Eucharist and the Real Presence of Jesus in our tabernacles converts our communities into genuine schools of hospitality.⁹⁷ Our Eucharistic hospitality is the source of our charismatic hospitality. And our charismatic hospitality strengthens and enlivens Eucharistic hospitality, which we express in the daily celebration of the Eucharist and in the prayerful welcome of the Real Presence of our Lord in our chapels.
100. In the penitential season, as well as in the Community and personal celebrations of Reconciliation, we celebrate God's Mercy, we recognise our collaboration and participation in evil, we open up to God and to the Community and we welcome in the grace that transforms. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is central to our spirituality which practices Mercy and the unconditional and hospitable welcome of others.
101. The *sacrament of the anointing of the sick* has always had a special place in the pastoral and spiritual ministry of the sick. St John of God used it with great solicitude; the tradition of the Order has retained it as the manifestation of true love to the sick. Mother Church offers us the possibility to celebrate Jesus' merciful and transforming presence with us through the *sacrament of the anointing of the sick*. The Community celebration of this sacrament, both as subjects of the celebration or as the celebrating Community, enables us to experience the real and healing presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has come into the world of pain and sickness. Participating in the prayer and anointing of the Church for the good of the sick is one of the highlights of our spiritual growth as Hospitaller Brothers.

⁹⁵ SC 10.

⁹⁶ "In the Eucharist, Jesus joins us to himself in his very paschal offering to the Father. We offer and are offered. Religious consecration itself assumes a Eucharistic structure, it is the total offering of self closely joined to the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In the Eucharist all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received, relationships with God, with brothers and sisters, with all men and women are challenged. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity with Christ, is at the same time the Sacrament of Church unity and community unity for the consecrated person." (*Starting Afresh with Christ*, no. 26)

⁹⁷ "The unceasing openness and readiness [of Jesus] to be the refuge, consolation and comfort of the sick is an incentive to us to persevere alongside the person who suffers, keeping him company in his pain and solitude." (Const. 30c).



102. The *Liturgy of the Hours*, in which we regularly participate, unites us extremely closely to the Path of the People of God. Praying the Psalms, listening to the Word, which is more effective than a two-edged sword, guides our lives along the Way of the Lord, infallibly. This is why we do not wish to set aside this life-giving pace. When we participate in the prayer of the Church, we also enter into communion with humanity, particularly with suffering men and women - the Church of pain. It is important for us to renew our awareness of this dimension of our spirituality: we are the voice that blesses, praises, gives thanks and offers supplication to the God of Life and the Father of Mercy, in the name of those who are unable to do it personally, or who have not experienced the joy of their divine sonship.

4. Participants in the Path of spirituality of the Order and its Communities

a) Charismatic transmission

103. Our spiritual path is the Path of the Order and of the Communities of which we form part. Spirituality takes place through processes of transmission, "contagion" and communion. This is why the Community is so important. Hence the importance of the Order (in the present and in the past) as a school of the spirituality of hospitality. We receive the charism of hospitality in a Community of Brothers called together by the Lord Jesus *so that we can walk together towards the Father and make the Kingdom present in the world of Health and Care* (Const. 26a). Entering a Community of the Order means entering into a great spiritual tradition, and committing oneself with creative fidelity to it, so that the Spirit can quicken the gift of hospitality, through us, in those who bear it.
104. The Brothers and those earlier institutions take on a new importance in this context. They stand as the witnesses, the ministers of a spiritual tradition. Contact with them is enlivening. Their presence and influence is particularly important in places in which, due to the youth of the Brothers, there is a danger of losing contact with our origins. The older Brothers and the Brothers who have been given their formation within the Great Tradition have to exercise the function of charismatic paternity.

b) Fraternal love

105. Like John of God, we are called to establish bonds of brotherhood. One of the most negative results of the secularisation of our societies is the loss of the Brothers' social identity in our societies. We are becoming socially marginalised, in the sense that society no longer recognises our role as consecrated men. Yet all people need to feel that they fit in, and to be socially accepted. The response is to find a membership group, to find a group with powerful primary relations, where there is the social support needed to strengthen our own identity. Our place of reference *par excellence* for finding the whole sense and meaning of our identity, is the Community in which we live. And if, because of spiritual individualism, the Community does not support this deepest vocational reason for our whole existence as consecrated men, it is no surprise that there are those who look for it outside, or who privatise this dimension, and try to identify socially through the activity they perform (nurses, social workers, etc.), reducing their community membership to the job they perform, no longer being identified by what they *are*, but what they *do*.
106. The gift of hospitality prepares us to live and to manifest attitudes of outreach and welcome, understanding, lovingkindness and service first and foremost within our own Community (Const. 36b). The mercy we experience encourages us to appreciate the value of the other Brothers, as persons who have received the same gift, and to develop bonds of communion which the Spirit has established among us, to be signs and witnesses of the fact that
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differences of age, culture and ethnic origin all become relative when the relationship is established based on the values that support coexistence within humanity: appreciating the value of others, and accepting them for what they are.

107. The sense of the sign of brotherhood in communion remains as topical and as vigorous as Jesus wished it to be: it is an invitation to grow in Him as the One who has been sent by the Father, and the sign that we are his disciples (cf. *Jn* 13,35; 17,21; Const. 26b). The possibility of being a sign to society lies above all in the capacity to establish communion between the Brothers, in fraternal love. This is always seen as a Gospel value: "fraternal communion is a theological space, before it is an instrument for a specific mission, in which we can experience the mystical presence of the Risen Lord" (cf. *Mt* 18,20; VC 42).

c) Sharing the experience of God and discerning His will as a Community

108. The community of merciful hospitality is the ideal environment for our spirituality. It is, and it is called to be a biocoenosis, a biotope, a place where people live and grow. The Community will be a "school of spirituality" to the extent that the Brothers realise and appreciate the fact that the deepest reason that we have to come to know one another and live together is our personal experience of God, and that "*our community is, because of its nature, the specially favoured place where the experience of God should be able to reach its fullness and be communicated to others.*" (Const. 27; cf. P.C.15). This makes it urgently necessary to overcome the tendency towards individualism in our interior life, and to encourage communion in the spirit, dialogue and meetings so that we can share the faith, our difficulties and the means which help us to live that faith. We must be committed and make the effort to moving ahead along this path together, and to practise mutual assistance, fraternal correction, while communicating our experiences of God to one another.
109. The liturgical celebrations, common prayer and community meetings are opportunities in which, led by the Spirit, and welcoming Christ as the centre and hub of our assemblies, we can and must practise communication and dialogue at the level of faith, reviewing and evaluating our lives and seeking to welcome in the will of God for the Community and for each Brother (cf. Const. 38, 3).
110. A Hospitaller Community is called in particular to be a community which is expert in spiritual discernment. Perhaps this is one of the aspects that we might develop more than others in the future. Discerning the good spirit is something that ranges far beyond mere acute intellectual insight. In this regard no one may consider themselves superior to anyone else. In discernment, a community places itself humbly before God with the desire to discover his will. This is why discernment demands prayer, listening to God and to the Brothers, mindful that God usually reveals his mysteries to the most simple, the poor and the young.

d) A Community on a mission of hospitality

111. The mission of hospitality - which is central to the life of the Order - is present and embodied in the local community. Communion and mission require each other and complete one another (cf. Const. 41a; 43c).
112. We do not act on a personal basis: the Community sends us, and at the same time it supports us and makes us credible as Brothers of St John of God (cf. Const. 43c). In the Community, all the Brothers are committed to proclaiming the Gospel to the poor and the sick. Not all of us can devote ourselves to serving them, of course, but all of us participate in what the other Brothers are doing, who themselves are animated and encouraged by those who do not perform professional work due to age, sickness, or their official duties elsewhere. This sense of communion on the mission has to be cultivated and lived, mainly in places where the average age of the Brothers is high and social and labour requirements make it impossible to continue
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performing the professional duties that are specific to our service to the sick and needy.

113. We have been called through Hospitality to create a community of apostolic life (Const. 5b; cf. Mk 3,13-14). It is on the mission that our community reaches its full sense and meaning (Const. 41a) and where the fruit of our meeting with God and with our Brothers is manifested. It is on the mission that the *transfiguration* of our identity as believers is made visible and where the compassionate and merciful Christ of the Gospel is made present and is actualised. He becomes hospitality, service and self-giving to the sick and needy in us and through us (Const. 2c; 5a). What makes our identity is not any one level of our life taken separately from the others. Transformation is the fruit of the gift of Hospitality (Const. 2b). This means that we cannot separate our apostolic work from our prayer life, and our fraternal life in community, and we cannot imagine that it is thanks to our activities and our work that we have performed that places us in the presence of Christ. Hospitality makes us apostles, and we become apostles when we act professionally, fully exercising our skills and talents, and also when our age or other restrictions prevent us from being by the side of the sick and the poor in order to serve, heal and minister to them, because our constituent feature is *being hospitality*, from which actions and activities of hospitality flow.
114. Performing apostolic work does not entail suspending community life (Const. 43c). On the contrary, community life is very powerfully expressed in the dispersal of its members which is demanded by the need to show mercy and hospitality to the needy; it forms part of our spirituality to be aware of the bonds which unite us all, scattered in many different places. We have to live together at a distance, by participating in our community's spiritual programme. We must never feel that we are alone. Being incorporated into the people is a very special form of apostolic diaspora in hospitality, and of community living. Here we demonstrate the fact that our community has been created for others and not for itself (Const. 5b; 41a).

e) A community with a sense of Church

115. We must never forget that we are members of communities that belong to the great community which is the Church, and the particular Churches, with their Pastors. For this reason we therefore let ourselves be led by her spiritual promptings, her Magisterium, and by the unforeseeable action of the Spirit in her and we cooperate in her mission to make the Kingdom present (Const. 1d; 5a; 41a), mindful that the Church of Jesus would be incomplete without the witness of the service to charity and the mission of bringing health. The apostolic works of the Order are called to be environments in which we publicly confess, proclaim and practise Christian love, just as the parish is the place where we publicly confess and celebrate the faith.⁹⁸
116. Communion with the Church quickens the Brothers' vocation as a "compassionate and merciful priest" in the manner of Jesus (cf. Const. 7c; 30b): incorporated into the suffering people, he offers the Father the worship of the giving of his own existence and of the existence of the poor and sick; he is also the prophet of the God of Mercy who came down to the world of the poor to show them his love and to denounce situations of social or structural injustice; the Brother, in the Church, embodies the mandate of Jesus who manifested his self-giving in love to the very end, by kneeling down before his disciples to wash their feet, and sending them out to perpetuate the practice of hospitality and service so that his permanent presence in the Eucharist is not merely a rite which is repeated, but a memorial of his self-giving in order to communicate life and place the life of his brothers, humanity, at the same level of dignity (cf.

⁹⁸ The Church needs us as we need it, and this will be more and more the case in years to come. We must communicate with each other within the Church. Our vocation and our Order's charism should be always present in the minds of believers, their identity and programmes clearly defined, and be an encouragement and a model for them, pointing the way towards the fulfilment of our common baptismal vocation to sanctify".P. MARCHESI : "The Hospitality of the Hospitaller Brothers of Saint John of God towards the year 2000"- Rome, 1986.



Jn 13,1-17; Lk 22,17-21).

5. Our "personal" way of spirituality

117. It is not enough to follow and share the path or way of the People of God. Each one of us is a unique being, an irrepeatable person. Along the spiritual path there is also an individual dimension in which no one can replace us and which falls under our absolute and personal responsibility which we cannot delegate.

a) Personal prayer as a path of spirituality

118. "The prime source of our charitable mission is the Father's merciful love (cf. 1 *Jn* 4, 10-11). This means that on both the personal and community levels we must, in the dialogue of prayer, work towards the integration of interior life and apostolic activity, that we may be capable of living love of God in harmony with service of our brethren" (Const. 28a). In prayer, Jesus wished to perform wonders of mercy for us (St Benedict Menni). He bends over us in our weakness, He looks at us with infinite gentleness, He holds us with all the love of his heart just as He leaned over the bed of the sick, and just as He looked into the eyes of the children and the sinners, and welcomed in Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus and Peter. In prayer we are called to allow Jesus to look at us, and to enable the light of his life to shine into our minds and our hearts, to see God's will for us at each moment, and to follow him with the obedience of sons.
119. In our meeting with God in personal prayer, the Brothers realise the truth and the dynamism of their path forward in the Spirit. A loving and regular meeting with our Triune God becomes increasingly more intense and more extensive, until we reach the stage where we pray all the time. The quality of interpersonal dialogue with our God shows how far the Spirit has reached within us. It is true that we do not know how to pray as we should. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid (*Rom* 8,26-27). He guides our progress forward in prayer, and he surprises us in prayer with his inspiration. When our daily concerns and our work commitments do not enable us to allow the life of prayer to flower, our path of Spirituality is held up, and we can actually backslide.

b) A personal spirituality project

120. Every Brother must express his path of spirituality in the form of a personal programme or project, worked out seriously, discerned with his director or companion along the path of the Lord, and as far as possible shared with the Brothers in the Community.
121. The personal life project becomes a manifestation of our continuing vocational response. It is the best sign of the fact that we have responsibly taken on the vocation that we have received and are willing to retranslate it at all times into appropriate actions: we know that in order to be the family of Jesus, and as Brothers we must not only listen to the Word but we must also put it into practice.
122. Our life project is our response to God's Covenant and is focused on the Kingdom of God which is coming. Chastity, poverty, obedience and hospitality which characterise our commitment to God's Covenant with his people, takes on its full sense in the context of the Kingdom of God and the apostolic discipleship of Jesus. With the practice of these evangelical counsels, the Spirit enables us to prophesy against systems of injustice, the discrimination against the weak, waste and violence. The Gospel charisms which the Spirit has given us for the life of hospitality grow within the context of an impassioned mission and love for people, which incorporates us increasingly more deeply into the people, and their history, and identifies us ever increasingly with the least of this world.
123. An essential part of our personal life project is that we should be ready at all times to serve the people as Brothers of St John of God. This is the most evident expression of our Hospitaller
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spirituality. It is the spirituality of self-giving, of permanent service, of unreserved outreach and welcome; it is the real path which leads to the peak of love which, as was the case with Jesus and John of God is achieved by descending to the greatest depths of human misery and weakness, dedicated *to assisting those who suffer "to helping those who suffer (14), with those attitudes and actions which characterise the Brother of Saint John of God: humble, patient and responsible service; respect for, and faithfulness to, the person; understanding, lovingkindness and self-denial (Const. 3b)* showing solidarity with them in their sufferings and their hopes.

c) Contemplatives on the mission

124. Apostolic work is not purely exterior work. It is the sacramentalisation of the mission of the Spirit and the Risen Lord. This requires us to integrate interiority and activity (cf. Const. 28a; 103a). On the mission we do not cease to be with Christ. On the contrary, it is then that we are united with him in an unusual manner. It is good for us to bear in mind that "a constant danger with Gospel workers is that of allowing themselves to be involved so much in their activity for the Lord that they forget the Lord of all activities" (John Paul II). One very important part of our spirituality is to prepare ourselves for the service of charity, renewing the awareness that when we serve the weak we are serving Jesus himself. The "mysticism" of hospitality drives us on to live with a contemplative. We have the privilege of being able to contemplate Christ unceasingly: the small ones - every individual person is "small" and weak - are the living icons of Jesus. Attending to human bodies to heal them of evil, as Jesus did, in order to give them dignity and to convert them into spaces of dignity and of religious and Christian experience, is essential to our spirituality.
125. The fruitfulness of our apostolate is vitalised when we feel our solidarity with those who suffer, *"in awareness that our merciful love for them is never a one-sided action"* (Const. 42c): the Hospitaller apostolate is a source of spirituality. Not only because the Brother evangelises, but because he feels evangelised by the evangelising work. God speaks to us through others, particularly in those who are in need of our help: God becomes groaning, asking, thanking... and he invites us to listen and to discern his messages; the immigrant and the sick person are the "others" who embody and actualise diversity, and what is different, with which the Spirit desires to surprise us; to discover the values that exist in human groups and in individual persons, allowing ourselves to be amazed and enriched by them, is a source of spirituality. The consequences are unpredictable, just as the Spirit is unpredictable.
126. The Hospitaller apostolate is a genuine school and melting pot of humanisation: it stimulates us to grow as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who gave back to humanity the face which his Father had decided to give it from the beginning, while purifying egoism and lack of solidarity, to ensure that outreach and welcome, understanding, service and total self-giving could be fashioned and transmitted in acts of mercy and care. In his weakness, the sick person is not only a beneficiary, but also an agent of understanding and love: the patient is "our university" (Fr MARCHESI) who, without any need of theories, helps us to acquire genuine science, the authentic wisdom of living. The Hospitaller apostolate is also shared with the health care professionals and social workers, and all those who cooperate with the apostolic Centres of the Order. This is a source which enables us to constantly review and revise our attitudes and motivations, urging us to ascertain that the suffering person is *"the centre of our whole apostolic activity and of all our concerns"* (Const. 103b); if we devote all our energies and talents to serving God in the sick and needy (Const. 22b; 1d); if, personally and as communities, *we are moral guides, critical and creative consciences*⁹⁹ - today we would use the term *re-founders*¹⁰⁰ - of a style of hospitality which is on the same wavelength as the

⁹⁹ P. MARCHESI : "The Hospitality of the Hospitaller Brothers of Saint John of God towards the year 2000"- Rome, 1986.

¹⁰⁰ Spirituality in the mission is expressed through the enthusiasm, the prophetic imagination and the apostolic creativity we exhibit. When the Spirit is lacking, there is routine, monotony, mere repetition. But the presence of the Spirit is the fire



hospitality of St John of God; if we keep his spirit alive and promote it, individually and as Communities (GS: 127b); if we are so closely identified with our mission and *"it is always clear that our chief concern is the sick or needy person, and we are so imbued with our mission that those who work with us feel inspired to behave in the same way"* (Const. 23a). With our Co-workers we are committed to cultivating and promoting the values of the human person and to contributing to develop and deepen what we are calling "the culture of hospitality".

d) The bodily dimension of our path of spirituality

127. The incarnation of the Word continues in time, and becomes a reality in the individual person; in the person of the Brother who serves, and in the sick or needy person whom he is serving. Corporeity is the form of mediation of human relations, and forms part of our spiritual process. Our body is the temple of the Spirit and a member of the body of Christ; its mission is to glorify God. Our history is engraved in our body, as are our deepest memories. The body is the place of our existential adventure. It has a Eucharistic vocation; it tends to be converted into a body which is given up, as the body of our Father, John of God was given up. The virtue of chastity, lived as Hospitaller Brothers, is the seed of personal fecundity, because *"in this apostolate we carry out the mission of serving, protecting and encouraging life and affirm the dignity and value of the body"* (Const. 10d).
128. Psychosomatic unity means that there can be no spirituality except through the body, and no form of worship which is appropriate to the body which does not also end in the spirit. The relationship between the psychosomatic balance and the spiritual life is beyond debate. Hence the importance of cultivating the balance of our bodily reality: peace, internal serenity, our affections and sensitivities are transmitted through our senses. Jesus placed his hands on the sick when he healed them (Lk 4,40).¹⁰¹

e) Vigilance and receptiveness to the Spirit

129. The Brother of St John of God wishes to remain very vigilant with regard to the action of the Spirit in our age and in different places. Vigilance will lead us to live our spirituality under situations of martyrdom¹⁰² in which it is not so much action but passion which characterises the way we perform the mission; in interfaith dialogue, where we propose Jesus as our Lord, the servant of all, the Body given up, and we are his witnesses in terms of a spirituality of kénosis and humility; in an attitude of communion with the laity, both women and men, discovering in them the energy we need for perseverance, to give ourselves "ad vitam", for a mutual relationship; in situations of conflict and under harsh conditions in which we are the messengers and witnesses of justice, and a pledge for peace.

6. Formation as a path of spirituality

which animates and re-creates all. A Brother with a Hospitaller spirit never settles into routine. He always discovers the novelty of the Kingdom of God in everything he does.

¹⁰¹ Our body has an extremely close connection with nature. It is that part of nature that we have most managed to train. Our spirituality thereby acquired profoundly ecological tones, which we must not ignore: this enables us to better perceive the possibilities of all human bodies, but also their misfortunes and their degradation.

¹⁰² In the life of the Brother there is always the possibility of martyrdom, the "serious case" of giving oneself up in charity, the confession of the faith and the proclamation of hope. Martyrdom is a gift. And this has always been recognised. It is a gift for the martyr and a gift for the Order. It is a paradoxical gift, but nevertheless a real gift. We can flee from it beforehand, if we avoid the danger, if we seek security, if we avoid any type of risk. But life of this sort does not deserve to be called "Hospitaller" and "merciful". Martyrdom as the horizon of our life gives our Hospitaller life a special hue. The different forms of martyrdom include those commitments to the poor which involve marginalisation, isolation and condemnation. This is when the Hospitaller can say "I was in prison", "I was exiled".



130. The path of spirituality has a reduced version which we call "charismatic induction or initiation", and which occurs in the first few years of life in the Order, and then "continuing formation", which extends throughout the whole of our life.¹⁰³

a) The first stage: charismatic induction or initiation

131. During initial formation and professional training, the Brother learns to do things: to study, to express himself, to perform professional work, to meditate, pray, and be a good Religious. This is the time of the ideals - of sanctity, communion, "embodiment in the world".¹⁰⁴ This enables the Brother to appreciate the value of others and to view them critically: they have failed to do certain things, and he will do them in another way, because he will put into practice what he knows and feels. In this stage, the Brother views reality "through the eyes of methods", namely, through an ideology which little by little he makes his own. We do not adjust to reality as it is. We enter into contact not with reality itself, but with the image that we have of that reality. It is therefore not surprising that when we come face to face with real life, the daily routine awakens us and clashes with the ideal we have always dreamed of. Frustration and disappointment can also act as a school for our "embodiment" in the world, in terms of the experience/acceptance of our own fragility, of the insubstantial nature of naked ideas and the limitation-richness of other people and of structures.¹⁰⁵
132. Similar experiences are repeated again in the apostolate, when the moment arrives to leave the active life because of age or poor health. Those moments in which we experience a crisis will be calls to us to stop on the path, to take in the power of hospitality and rediscover that we have been called and consecrated to *be* hospitality, and to proclaim the Kingdom in the manner of Jesus (Const. 21), who had to experiment failure, suffering, distress, fragility, and abandonment, and even the Cross and death, to understand and to be capable of suffering with and liberating those who suffer and die abandoned (cf. Heb 2,14-18).¹⁰⁶

b) The second stage: operational responsibility

133. After initial training, the Hospitaller Brother is fully incorporated into the apostolic work of the Order. Moving away from a guided existence, from being protected, to a situation of operational responsibility, also needs special accompaniment, and powerful support, to enable the Brother to live fully the youth of love and enthusiasm for Christ.¹⁰⁷
134. Middle age faces us with the risk of routine and restlessness, or even a lack of enthusiasm because of the few results we perceive. This is the time to revise and review our first love, our original vocation, in the light of the Gospel and of our charism. We find a new drive and a new motive for perseverance in our vocation. It is in this stage that we concentrate on essentials.¹⁰⁸
135. Mature age is when we might fall into individualism, to slow down in our lives, or for taking things easy. The spiritual path helps us to tone up our lives, to purify us and to offer ourselves

¹⁰³ "In our Religious Life we pass through specific important phases which we must carefully cultivate: the first years of Initial Formation in each of its stages, the age of maturity, the moments of crisis and then a gradual withdrawal from the active ministry. The life of Religious Institutes, and above all their future, depends in part on the Continuing Formation of its members. It is the duty of every Institute to find adequate means and set aside sufficient time to enable the Brothers to acquire adequate Formation. (*Formation Programme for the Hospitaller Brothers of St John of God*,132, Cf. *Ongoing Formation in the Order*, 1991.

¹⁰⁴ FP, 39 and 44

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, nos 46-57. The features of our formation model is: comprehensive, ongoing, experiential, personalised, gradual, differentiated, liberating, prophetic, and universal.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 24: "in the light of the path that our Founder took. It is a challenge to the Order educate, form and train the Brothers, to bear witness to the Gospel of mercy in contemporary society with creative fidelity".

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, nos 92 and 137c

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 26h *Ongoing Formation in the Order*, 33

with generosity. This age offers us a possibility to mature in the gift and experience of spiritual paternity.¹⁰⁹



c) The third stage: increasing limitations

136. Old age is characterised by a gradual withdrawal from active work, either because of sickness or forced inactivity. Even though it is frequently a painful time, it nevertheless offers the elderly Brother the opportunity to allow himself to be fashioned by our Lord's Easter. Under these circumstances the mission of merciful hospitality is tinged with the Passion; the Passion which identifies us with the Passion of our Lord. Thus the Brother completes the mysterious process of spirituality that began a long time earlier. Death is then awaited and prepared for, as an act of supreme love and total self-giving.¹¹⁰

d) The crucial moments

137. Independently of what stage we are in, our life always has crucial and decisive moments. External factors, such as a posting, a failure, a historical event, or internal factors such as sickness, depression, a loss, a friendship, a crisis of faith or identity, can create enormous tensions in our lives, until it creates the impression that we are about to snap. Under these moments spiritual accompaniment is essential,¹¹¹ prayer, fraternal closeness, the presence of friends. This is the way in which the Brother can rediscover the meaning of his Covenant with God and the primacy and fidelity of God to that Covenant. The proof is a providential instrument of the Spirit for growth, for identifying with Jesus, and for making progress in following the crucified Christ.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

138. When, as Brothers of St John of God, we allow the thirst for spirituality which we harbour to flourish in us, we must be attentive to the surprises that the Spirit brings. Something new will be born within us. Barriers will tumble. The impossible will become possible. New wildernesses will bloom. Our thirst will be quenched. We shall be joyful and enthusiastic messengers of the Good News of Mercy and Hospitality. We shall be a parable of a new world in the midst of the world of suffering and marginalisation.
139. The people of God and the whole of humanity are in need of our witness, and our spirit has a humanising power. But we must also emphasise the spiritual strength and energy which we are given from the holy people of God and of all humanity, of which we form part. This is why we believe that the more we feel that we are Church and the people of God, and members of humanity, the more will our spirituality develop, and become more profound and more relevant. We are called to live our spirituality by sharing our gift, and also the gifts and talents of others.
140. As Prophets of Mercy, animated by the spirit of St John of God, we take up the invitation which John Paul II has extended to us at the beginning of the Third Millennium in his Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*: "Duc in altum! Let us go forth in hope!"¹¹³ Christ Jesus, our hope (1Tim 1,1) will encourage us to remain faithful to our prophetic mission.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, no.136 *Ongoing Formation in the Order*, 34

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 44 *Ongoing Formation in the Order*, 35 & 36

¹¹¹ Along the personal path of spirituality it is essential to have spiritual support and accompaniment, not only when we are young but at every stage. The example of St John of God's relationship with John of Ávila is an excellent benchmark for us to follow. We need to communicate at the deepest level with a particular brother or sister who is experienced in the path of our Lord. Such a person stands as a benchmark, a foil, a source of stimulus. Our Superiors, as far as they can, must provide a service of spiritual animation for each and every member of the Community.

¹¹² "Each Brother and each person under Formation must know how to integrate and experience all positive or negative events as a part of their own history of salvation on the basis of which God speaks to us and leads us." (FP, 27 & 50).

¹¹³ NMI 58.