



MOTHER MARÍA FÉLIX TORRES
FOUNDRESS OF THE COMPANY OF THE SAVIOUR

50th Anniversary of the Canonical approval
1952 - 2002

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“Contemplate our Lady, the first in the Company of the Saviour, saying and doing «Fiat!», and devoting herself entirely, perfectly, forever, to the works of redemption, to the divine plan of the supernatural creation”.

(M. María Félix, C.S.)

Image of “Mater Salvatoris” venerated in all of the Company of the Saviour’s schools.

Sculpture by R. Lapayese.



On February 2nd, 1952, the first sisters of the Company of the Saviour pronounced their vows in a Mass celebrated by the Bishop of Barcelona Msgr. Gregorio Modrego, in the chapel of the Episcopal Palace.

Through their vows themselves consecrated definitively to Christ in order to serve His Church in a recently founded Religious Institute, the Company of the Saviour, which was vigorously manifesting its own charisma and spirituality.

The birth of the Company that we celebrate today has a name as the corner stone of its history: Mother María Félix Torres. As we remember the 50th Anniversary of the Canonical approval of our Congregation, we fulfil the desire of so many persons who have manifested their interest to know more about the life of its Foundress by offering a brief biographical outline of Mother María Félix, who died in Madrid, in the odour of sanctity, on January 12th, 2001.

She, who responded to the calling of God our Lord with all her being, invites us today, with her example, to generously and faithfully follow God's plans for our lives. Thus we ask the Lord through the "Mater Salvatoris", our Lady. Be it all to the greater glory of God.

Madrid, on February 2nd, 2002, Feast of the Presentation of our Lord.



COMPANY OF THE SAVIOUR

“Although the absolute wisdom and mercy of God our Creator and Lord is who will preserve, rule and keep this minimal Company going in his Holy service..., as He deigned to start it...”¹.

When Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote the Constitutions of the Company of Jesus, he was fully aware that, in fact, it was God our Lord who had inspired the foundation of that Religious Order which has given so many saints to our Holy Church. So, in order to show in a code the way of life that the Jesuits should lead, he decided to introduce a Preamble, as a portico, where it should be clearly explained that the origins of the Company must be primarily found in God, because He *“wills everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth”* (1 Tm 2,4).

The prologue of the Constitutions of the Company of the Saviour also begins with Saint Ignatius’ words. That was the wish of its Foundress, Mother María Félix Torres. She, who considered herself a poor instrument in the service of God, used to thank our Lord for the Company, for it was He who consented to inspire it.

¹ ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, Preamble of the Constitutions.



Fifty years have already elapsed. Today the Company of the Saviour lives the charisma of Love and Service to Christ in the Church that our Lord granted to Mother Félix. The following notes, taken from the Constitutions that our Mother wrote, will help us to get to know better the spirit that animates the Congregation.

NAME, NATURE AND MISSION

The Company of the Saviour is a female Institute of Pontifical Right, with an emphasis on Christ-centric inspiration, following the Ignatian spirit.

The Company's motto is *"to the greater glory of God"* because, in imitation of Christ and in union with Him, it is consecrated to the love, adoration, service and faithful fulfilment of our Heavenly Father's Will.

With the firm resolution of making Jesus Christ the centre of their lives and love, the sisters of the Company try to imitate Him, pursuing not only their own salvation and perfection, but also, with the Grace of God, endeavouring to help their neighbours to reach those aims.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The sisters of the Company profess a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where the divine glory of God is fully manifested and from where the love and graces that saves the world spring from.

With an extraordinary tenderness they love and worship our Holy Mother, who is Queen and Mother of the Company, under the sweet name of *Mater Salvatoris*.

These are the constituent elements of their spiritual life:

- *To distinguish* themselves by their adherence, love and service to the Holy Father. Consequently, the sisters of the Company of the Saviour take an explicit vow of obedience to the Supreme Pontiff.



- To *distinguish* themselves by their devotion and love to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whom the Company of the Saviour invokes as its Father and Patron saint. The Institute has always considered the Summary of the Constitutions of the Company of Jesus as its primitive and inspired Rule.

ECCLESIASTICAL LIFE

The sisters of the Company have a special union with the Church and its mystery due to their religious profession and the Institute's own charisma. Therefore not only does each sister have to individually make an effort to *feel in the Church* herself, but the whole Company devotes all of its energy to this service.

APOSTOLIC LIFE

The specific and characteristic activity of the charisma of the Company is to instruct and to educate girls and youngsters, especially female university students, in the Catholic doctrine and the Christian social principles anywhere in the world.



MOTHER MARÍA FÉLIX TORRES

I BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

Sometimes it has been said that “to know History is to know mankind”. To some extent it’s true, because a person’s life is always marked by the surrounding historical circumstances that contribute to shape his personality.

The world in which our Mother had to live was, undoubtedly, a changing world. María Félix was born on August 25th, 1907, at the very beginning of the 20th century, when there was still hope for mankind’s potential. The technical breakthroughs, the economic welfare that the wealthy enjoyed, the fascinating artistic and literary movements, the existentialist and religious problems... Europe was living a true “historic acceleration”, and social transformations were growing dramatically.

It is not necessary to insist on the importance that the family has in the development of personality. So much so that it might be said that a child’s genetic inheritance is not as important as the education and example that he receives from his parents. In the case of María Félix the figure of her father will have a remarkable influence in her life.



*Collegiate church of
St. Vincent of Albelda*

Mr. Ramón Félix Surigué (1882 - 1942) was a man well-ahead of his time. His humble origins were not an impediment for taking his Engineering degree by correspondence at Cervera College in Valencia, and he made sure that he cultivated his spirit with good books.

He worked as a civil engineer when he met his future wife, Florentina Torres Fumás (1889 - 1973), the youngest daughter of one of the wealthiest families in the village of Albelda in the province of Huesca. She was

his perfect counterpoint. Educated in the love for traditional values, despite her young age, she was very much aware of her relevant role in her family.

María Félix always adored her father. The fact that she was the only girl who survived among the four children of the Félix family was not an obstacle to receiving a carefully thought-out education. Mr. Ramón always thought that the best legacy he could leave his children was a solid humanitarian and academic education, and he did not neglect this subject with his only daughter.



Home where María lived in Seira

Her early childhood was spent peacefully between the village of Albelda (Huesca), where she was born and baptised, and the industrial colony of Seira, located in the Aragonese Pyrenees, where they moved



because of her father's job when María was only 5 years old. Engineer Ramón Félix, as head of the construction of the Santa María de la Peña dam, enjoyed a privileged position in the quiet social life of the town.



María Félix at the age of 11

But even in the simplicity and normality of her life, María Félix stood out, and her intelligence was an important element. In a matter of a few years, the village teacher would find out that she did not have much more to teach this bright girl, who read everything that came into her hands. A friend of Mr. Ramón's, a Mathematics Professor, would vividly recommend that he send his daughter to Lérida so that she could continue her secondary school studies there. She also stood out, no doubt, due to the influence that she exerted on her playmates, to whom she served as a leader despite being

the youngest. And, finally, she was outstanding, although it wasn't visible to the naked eye, because of her sensitivity towards religious matters.

We can find the best example of this on the day of her First Communion. The catechesis had been intense; María devoured the priest's words, who insisted on the importance of not being distracted by the details that accompanied the celebration. With great simplicity, in a language that the girls could understand, he told them that they should not be vain, that it would be a pity if they spent the whole day just contemplating how nice they looked in their dresses, while they forgot about Jesus, whom they were going to receive for their first time.



The priest's words made a deep impression on young María. As such, every time she went to the dressmaker with her mother to try on the dress for the ceremony, she closed her eyes tightly not to see anything, while she repeated to herself: "I shouldn't be vain". However, once, curiosity was stronger than her will and she opened her eyes. A few minutes later, María ran to the confessional to heartily apologise to the Lord.

It would be easy to judge these kinds of reactions as exaggerated. But we should perhaps think that a delicate conscience means a bigger capacity to love, and this is a gift of God that María, undoubtedly, received and preserved all her life.

So she wrote in her personal notes:

"I had an enormous capacity to LOVE and sacrifice myself for those I loved; a capacity not attributed to children and which, for their own sake, should be taken into account. When I loved, I didn't ask for anything in return; I gave myself totally. That was the way God made me in nature to make me love him with total generosity... What I would give for people to understand that the moral calling of children should be even greater than the material one!"

These lines superbly reflect her vocation as a Christian educator: God our Lord gave her a special sensitivity to know children's hearts. Mother María Félix was an exceptional pedagogue; she had the rare gift of being able to educate with delicate firmness, being demanding and understanding at the same time, to teach the young the way of the real commitment, always in need of effort and self denial. Our Mother's heart was made for loving and, because she loved so much, she could and knew how to demand a lot.



II LATE CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

SECONDARY EDUCATION IN LÉRIDA. HER CONVERSION

During the 1921-1922 academic year, having just turned 14 years old, she moves to Lérida to study her last three years of Secondary education at the town's High School. She lives as a boarder at the school of the Company of Mary. There, the simplicity and austerity of the sisters' life had an enormous impact on her.

While at the boarding-school her spiritual life develops. She comes across books whose authors have added the initials "S.I." to their names to show they belonged to the "Company of Jesus". Although she did not know the meaning of these initials, she always preferred the "S.I." books to the other ones and read them avidly. That was the delicate way in which our Lord was leading her, through his sons, to the father, Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

She will have the real encounter with Saint Ignatius – and, through him, with Christ – during the Spiritual Exercises, led by a Jesuit priest at the boarding-school.



There, our Lord would grant her a “great grace”. In her conversion, like in all her life, it was God who took the initiative. We transcribe her own words:

“I came by the altar, knelt down at the praying desk, raised my eyes to the altar and saw an immense flame that burnt with a clarity and softness that filled me with ineffable sweetness. I opened my eyes wide, I wanted to be certain about it. But that flame with no outlines, golden and luminous, motionless and penetrating into my spirit, was not fire from earth; it was heavenly fire which consumed my soul”.



Lérida, September of 1921

That Holy Thursday of, 1922, María consecrated herself to God.

“With a thorough knowledge, with an extraordinary clarity about what I was doing, irresistible and sweetly attracted by our Lord, I offered myself to Him forever...”

She is hardly fourteen years old, but her conviction is so great when she states:

“I’m His, totally and consciously His forever”.

These Exercises would be the turning point from infancy to youth in María’s life. When we observe photographs from this time, it is surprising to know that the only desire that this young girl, with long plaits and penetrating eyes had, was to consecrate herself to God totally and forever.

Every year she returned to Seira to enjoy her holidays with her family. The games with her brothers on the snow, the jokes and the



family happiness, hid to everybody the deep change that had taken place inside her.

The summer of 1924 was decisive for María, who for the first time showed in her actions her wish to take God to all those who surrounded her. She has a religious vocation, she is sure. Therefore, when her parents ask her, concerned by the strange transformation that has taken place in their daughter (she spent a long time praying, she gathered all the children in the village to teach them the catechism, etc.), María answers firmly that she wants to become a nun.



With her brothers José and Ramón

But she is a minor, and her parents demand that before making such a definitive decision, María must obtain a university degree. Mr. and Mrs. Félix favour a career in Medicine, because at the time, it was the longest lasting degree program, and thus, recommend this option to their daughter.

UNIVERSITY (1924 - 1929)

As a result, a new stage begins in her life, marked by her passage to University. María only studied one year of Medicine in Barcelona; in 1925 she moved to Zaragoza to study Chemistry.

The Chemistry school in Zaragoza had a great reputation at the beginning of the century due to some excellent teachers, as Rocasolano, Savirón o Rius, who knew how to raise the academic level through some really dynamic classes. Not in vain, Chemistry was considered at the time as "the degree of the future".



María at University

The presence of women at University was also a novelty, with only three female students! Out of them, only María obtained her degree in 1930.

During her College years, in Barcelona as well as in Zaragoza, she actively participated in Catholic Action and all types of apostolic works. She not only went to the poor boroughs of the city to teach catechism and to try to raise the cultural standards of those who wanted to, but her work also extended to encourage the piety amongst her classmates, who cared for her deeply. Her brother Angel's friends, talking about her, commented that she was the most delightful person they knew.

Her spiritual directors (who were Jesuits, both in Barcelona and Zaragoza), trained her, according to her testimony, as if she was a novice. Consequently, her enthusiasm for the Ignatian Spirituality increased day by day.

We have saved some notes from that period which show the desire this university student had to devote herself to our Lord:

"Saying yes to whatever God demanded from me, and always, only for pure love, for being His will; being entirely His, with no reserve, forever, only to please Him..."

The calling she felt, when she was 14 years old, to be consecrated to God has been maturing, and she can clearly see that our Lord wants her to be Ignatian. During those university years in Zaragoza she meets the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of Ignatian spirit, and she asks to be admitted to their Order. Several of her friends, who



also frequented the Handmaids, driven by her enthusiasm, joined the Institute, but María did not.

What is the reason for it? The young girl could not give any logical human explication, but it is certain that she feels within her that God our Lord does not want her to become a “Handmaid”. Her spiritual director does not understand her; he believes that her decision to not join the Institute is due to an excessive love for her parents. That was a moment of intensive suffering.

So far she had lived with enthusiasm all God’s things. Prayer and apostolic work were a continuous source of joy and profound peace. But, suddenly, she finds herself plunged into absolute darkness. She cannot see anything, she cannot understand anything, nothing seems to make sense to her. It was a time of desolation and darkness. It was a test that God allowed to make her grow in faith and love.

To her parents’ surprise, who had already granted her permission to join the Handmaids, María does not mention the subject, although she strongly feels, deep down inside her and with a strenght that doesn’t let her doubt, that God wants her for Him. In this position, the great love that she feels for her parents becomes very painful to the young girl. In her diary we read a revealing confession: *“Family life was absolutely delightful, but it was not made for me”*.

It was not easy to make such a decision, and even less to carry it out. The first thing that she did was to leave her parents’ house definitively in order to break up all human and family bonds. From now on, her life will only be to seek God’s will and fulfil it, with simplicity, without exaggerations. There will not be any more external obstacles. María Félix breaks loose...



III MEANWHILE THE WAY GETS CLEAR...

LÉRIDA: YOUTH EDUCATION (1930 - 1934)

María has obtained her degree and she intends to put it to use in God's service.

The beginning of this period coincides with a change in the political situation of Spain. At the end of 1929, the prosperity of the "happy 20's" was collapsing. The fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship in January 1930, gives way to the Second Republic. Terrorism and general strikes return again, the Government and the Courts pass anticlerical laws: lay education, withdrawal of crucifixes from schools...

María trembled with indignation at the outrages that were being carried out in this time of real religious prosecution. The burning of churches and convents, and the expulsion of the Jesuits distressed her vividly. Through these and other events, together with her encounters with the right people, God is going to prepare her to carry out His work.



With great satisfaction from her parents, she decides to accept an appointment, offered at the Secondary School Institute of Lérida, as an assistant to her former teacher of Physics and Chemistry.

During this time she was able to witness the huge influence that the school had on the education of children and young people. Each teacher contributed to mould the minds of the children in some way; others by the influence moved their hearts. With great concern she saw how these youngsters, often unaware, were being educated without any reference to God, and were indoctrinated into a practical atheism.

María's response will be categorical: first of all, with her example. (On one occasion, the mother of one of her pupils, when she saw her, couldn't help exclaiming: "Now this is a teacher!"). After that, in a more visible way, opening a small Academy or School.

When the first rumours began to spread the new that the Republic was going to outlaw all schools run by religious orders, she immediately felt the need to maintain at least a stronghold where the teaching of the Christian doctrine could be preserved. This is why, after consulting her spiritual director Juan Serrat, S.I., she decides "to open an Academy for older girls". This is how the "Academia Nueva" was born and would remain open for the next three years.

It was a time of economic hardship. Perhaps this is why her confidence in the Divine Providence stood out. Despite the lack of resources, María responds with a total abandonment, as we can see in this anecdote taken from her diary:

"Just after the opening of the Academy, before the beginning of the term, a bill from the electrician for fifty pesetas came due. That was a real fortune for me at the time, since I hadn't had a cent to my name for a long time. But I had never seen a bill returned without payment, and I didn't dare ask if I could delay payment. So I took the invoice and told the attendant to wait for a minute. I went to kneel down before a figure of Christ that dominated one of the lounges, and I prayed to our Lord:



– You pay it! I can't...

Suddenly, someone rang the doorbell again. It was the housemaid of a lady who had come to register her daughter at the school. She handed me an envelope that contained the monthly fees. Exactly fifty pesetas. I gave them to the attendant and went back to devoutly kiss the crucifixo."

THE FIRST INNER SIGN OF "OUR CALLING" (1932)

It is during this period that God lets María feel what she called the first intimation of "our calling".



Chapel of the Holy Family School, Lérida

It was July 31st, 1932, on the Saint Ignatius of Loyola's festivity. She was attending a retreat guided by Father Serrat, S.I. at the chapel of the Holy Family School. The priest spoke about the life and work of Saint Ignatius and the Providence of God whilst rousing the foundation of

the Company of Jesus just when the Church most needed it. María, as so happened every time she heard about Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits, felt an extraordinary fervour. When the talk finished she lingered for a while in the chapel, by the shrine, with the intention of meeting her friends later on. While she was there, and according to her personal notes:

"I felt transported, elated in the divine presence: as if I had been displaced from this world to another one. I sensed God and I felt submerged in light and bliss. And then, this became engraved in my soul: that I will also live the Rules and Constitutions of Saint Ignatius like the Company of Jesus does, and that there will be many girls who will follow this way of life. Our Lord assured me of that. He promised it to me. And



that conveyed to me a total certainty about it, even greater than that which results from any proof.

I came out of the chapel with great calmness, with deep quietness. And what amazed me most was that I didn't feel amazed at all. For me it was something natural, obvious, an easy thing: a Company of Jesus for women. As if I had thought this same thing all my life, as if it were a universal truth.

I didn't see anything and didn't hear anything with my physical senses. It was a truth that passed right in to my soul without even going through the doors of my senses, possessing it in such a way as to give up any power without a struggle."

Although from this time onwards she was sure that she would fulfil her fully Ignatian calling, there was a long way between that and the foundation of a new Order.

It was true that some youngsters were gathering around her, but their idea wasn't to found a new Religious Order. In fact, what María wanted was to find a Sisterhood entirely akin to the Company of Jesus.

FIRST COMPANION: CARMEN AIGE

At that time, through her spiritual director F. Serrat, she met Carmen Aige Corbella (1909 - 1989). Carmen was a young lady from a good upper class family from Lérida, who had received an expensive education corresponding to her social status at a school run by the Sisterhood of Jesus and Mary in Tarragona. Her culture was vast, she mastered French and had made the most of her classes in drawing and painting. However, she had no plans to obtain any sort of a degree.

Despite appearances, as soon as María saw her, she became aware of the rich human qualities of Carmen's personality. This is how María describes her in her notes:

"She was a rough diamond set in a mundane world of a jewel: serious, straight as an arrow, solid as a rock and with firm moral principles.



Under her cold disguise, she was a tender, pious, vehement and passionate person, made to rule and command, and willing to sacrifice herself before giving in. Externally she was neat, elegant, a convinced servant of decorum because of her artistic temperament and personal dignity; a keeper of social status and conventions by education and calculation."

She was her first companion. Bonded by the same ideals, María always found in her a faithful collaborator, sensible and dynamic, in whom she entirely trusted. Both of them complemented and needed each other to do the work that our Lord wanted to carry out in His Church.



Carmen Aige Corbella

THE VOW OF 1934

In the academic year 1933 - 1934, their Bishop gave them permission to have the Blessed Sacrament inside the Academy. During the month of July, like in previous years, María and Carmen joyfully prepared for the feast of Saint Ignatius. During the reading of his life, our Lord inspired them

"[both] to take a special vow that bonded us more to our Lord and helped us to continue the path we had started... We specified the points of our vow, although what we wanted was to tie ourselves forever to the sole and exclusive service of God our Lord, following the Company of Jesus in everything."

They consulted with Father Serrat, who gave his approval to their wishes, and agreed to take their vows on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Not long after this, they felt a great joy when they discovered that that same day was the four hundred anniversary of the vow that St. Ignatius and his first companions took in Montmartre (Paris). They always considered this coincidence as a mercy of God, and a confirmation of their vocation.

They renovated this vow year after year, and later on more companions joined them: Victorina Jené, Montserrat Amigó, María Amor Sarret...

ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR APOSTLESHIP (1934 - 1936)

The Spanish political situation was calmer. When María and Carmen knew that the religious schools could remain open, they realised that the Academy didn't meet a need for an apostleship in Lérida. Their lives then revolved around one question: What did the Lord want from them?

And the answer was clear:

"He wanted us to be His, he wanted us to be Ignatian. Regarding this we had no doubt. Nor did we doubt that He wanted us to receive a good education so that we would be able to work in those environments and with people whose behaviours could influence positively or negatively the Roman Catholic Church."

Moved by this need of a better academic qualification for apostolic work, they moved to Madrid in 1934 and joined the Central University. Carmen would study Philosophy, and María would enrol for her doctorate.

They had confession with Father Enrique Herrera Oria, S.I., and joined the Marian Sodality of the Handmaids.

They remained there for only two years. In July 1936, precisely on the day before the outbreak of the Civil War, María reunites with her family in Barcelona. Following the advice of her spiritual director,



Carmen had returned to Lérida some days earlier.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR (1936 - 1939)

The Civil War serves as a forced interruption in the story of her life. During the conflict, María actively participated in helping persecuted priests, who were being harassed because of their faith. Putting her life at risk, she distributed the Sacred Communion to those who asked for it and taught at Academy Lauria, where the Jesuits not only provided secondary school level studies to pupils of religious schools, but had also created a true operations centre. They organized a lot of apostolic activities there, despite the

religious persecution, so as to guarantee that everyone could maintain their spiritual lives with the aid of the sacraments.

In those years of profanation of churches and convents, a great love for the Eucharist had been growing inside her. An anecdote appears in her diary that helps us to better understand María's feelings during these difficult times:

"One day the air raid sirens sounded. I was walking along the street not far from home. The bombs of the national Air Force were blasting everywhere around me. My family, frightened, ran to the nearest shelter. They dragged me along with them. But as soon as I could I slipped away and ran home to look for the Holy Sacrament I kept in a jewellery-box. Under the



With her brother Ángel



frightful uproar of the bombs, I ran along the street, alone and anguished. When I returned to the shelter, with the Holy Sacrament hidden next to my chest, I walked along the same solitary lane, under the same deafening blasts with an infinite joy and reverence. It was not that I thought He would save me from death, nor even the feeling that I didn't fear death with Him at my side. My satisfaction was to save my Lord from the fire, the rubble, the irreverence."



IV TOWARD THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMPANY

THE SEARCH OF "OUR VOCATION"

When the Civil War ended, this small group of university students who wanted to live the same vocation was coming together.

On August 15th, 1939 there were six young ladies who renovated their promise of fidelity and asked for grace to *"remain faithful to «our vocation» of the greater glory of God"*.

That same year, in September, María opened the "Re-Vir-Cien" (Religion, Virtue and Science) Academy in the Gran Via of Barcelona. The older teenage girls who were too old to attend religious schools, came here for their classes instead.

Soon after, she moves to the Academy, which became a true meeting place for all these young women.



Directly, and also through the Jesuit Fathers they found out the existence of diverse apostolic movements of Ignatian spirituality, but none of them were suited to their vocation. María writes in her personal notes:

"I don't know whether this can be understood, nor will I be able to explain it. But it is true that we were looking for our Company as if it already existed and, at the same time, unconsciously... , without necessarily thinking about a foundation, we were looking for partners to form one".

In April 1940, María and Carmen travelled to Palma de Mallorca where they had heard of the existence of three young ladies who wished to devote themselves to work for God, helping in missions and living according to the Company's practices.

But the union wasn't possible, for the missionary ideal amongst the infidels prevailed in them. María's Ignatian spirit led her to serve Christ in his Church *"doing good to all, believers and unbelievers, with loving obedience to the heavenly Father"*². From the spirit which encouraged those youngsters from Mallorca, would born the Missionary Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

DELIBERATION AND EXERCISES (1939 - 1940)

Father Serrat, who directed them spiritually, decided to speak to his superior about María's and her companions' ideal and purposes with the objective of having him guide them. Father Alfredo Mondría, Provincial of the Jesuit Province of Aragon, informed them about a French Institute (Daughters of the Heart of Mary, founded in 1790 by F. Clorivière, S.I. and Mlle. de Ciccé) to see if their vocation could be accomplished there.

With the most genuine Ignatian spirit, during the following two weeks, between prayers and penance, these young women pondered whether to join the French Institute or not. Without any mutual exchange

² MARÍA FÉLIX, C.S., *Constituciones de la Compañía del Salvador*, P. II, Art. 2, n. 54.



of opinion, they knew that their inclination had to be towards not founding, in order to be certain that they were not self-seeking. On July 1st, in the Feast of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, each one gave her opinion, which María wrote down in her diary:

“Those gathered said that they thought it was the greater glory of God to continue along the path they had started, because they didn’t think that our vocation conformed with that French Society”.

She suggested her companions to reconsider it once again, but their answer was the same.

Once the result of the deliberation had been communicated to the Father Provincial, they decided to take part in the month-long Spiritual Exercises to know with more certainty the Divine Will. Yet, due to the economic situation, the time was reduced to ten days. The Exercises took place from August 5th to August 15th, 1940. On Assumption day, nine young women consecrated to God in the same way they had been doing it since 1934.

As a result of these Exercises, María writes in her intimate notes:

“Hesitant vocations have been strengthened and confirmed. We have been enlightened and reassured in how best to serve God along this path He calls us to. For the first time, a summary of our vocation has been made.”

PERMISSION TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY (1940)

The Jesuit Provincial entrusted them to the hands of the Bishop. As the Episcopal See was vacant due to the martyrdom of the previous Bishop, the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese received them with open arms on October 11th, 1940, feast day of the Divine Maternity of Mary. He sanctioned their way of life, and gave them permission to live in community. However, as the Academy did not have the required conditions, he told them to look for *“a tower with a garden, fresh air and sun”*.



They came out feeling very comforted, while giving thanks to God: The first canonical steps of the Company of the Saviour were being taken!

Soon they found such a tower, a building at 59, Ganduxer Street, in the Bonanova district, where they started to live on November 4th. In this first house they established the Novitiate and a Residence Hall.

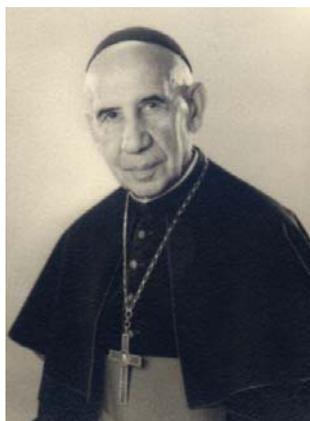
F. CÁNDIDO MAZÓN, S.I., AND MSGR. GREGORIO MODREGO



Rvd. F. Cándido Mazón, S.I.

Through the kindness of the Jesuit Provincial, God our Lord granted them a father, counsellor and master in the person of Father Cándido Mazón Aula, S.I. (1900 - 1976).

In addition to helping Mother Félix in the writing of the Constitutions, he educated all of them in the spirit and proper customs of an Order that wanted to live the charisma of St. Ignatius of Loyola.



Msgr. Gregorio Modrego

Thanks to his wise and sensible intervention we keep the autobiographical notes of the Mother and the origins of our Company.

In 1943 Msgr. Gregorio Modrego Casás was named head Bishop of Barcelona. The Company of the Saviour owes him tremendous gratitude, veneration and everlasting affection. He supervised the formulation of



the Constitutions and the religious education of the sisterhood, becoming a real father to all of them.

Mother Félix, in gratitude and with humility, called him the “founder of the Company”, even in official documents.

CANONIC APPROVAL AND VOWS OF THE FIRST SISTERS

The Holy See approved the Company of the Saviour as a Religious Congregation of diocesan law by a decree dated January 1952, the year of the 35th International Eucharistic Congress, celebrated in Barcelona.



Mothe María Félix recieves the profession of M. Aige.

On January 2nd, the first seventeen sisters took their vows during a Mass celebrated by Msgr. Gregorio Modrego at the Episcopal Palace chapel.

The choice of the name “Company of the Saviour” was also made following the Ignatian tradition. It was 1942. After a few days of special prayer and penance, they wrote the selected name on a scrap of paper. Mother María Félix had the certainty, as happened to Saint Ignatius,



Rome, June 25th, 2000

that it was God our Lord who wanted this name for His Company. That year May 24th coincided with the solemnity of the Pentecost, and Mother María Félix wrote:

"I feel an immense joy to finally have a name and be called 'Company of the Saviour'. It is a name of light and sweetness; it contains all the mysteries of God's love, all the plans of our Divine Captain, symbol of the Divine ideal, and I could continue saying things like these forever... Thank you, Jesus, my Saviour..."

On May 25th, 1986, solemnity of Pentecost, the Company of the Saviour obtained, by the grace of God, pontifical approval from the Holy See.

The Mother devoted all her life to writing up the Constitutions of the Company of the Saviour. When she was 92, she enjoyed the satisfaction of travelling to Rome and personally handed them over to the Pope. She then received the communion from the Holy Father, John Paul II, during the closing Mass of the 47th International Eucharistic Congress on June 25th, 2000.



V FOUNDATIONS

Even before obtaining the highly desired canonic approval as a Religious Institute, the young women who surrounded María and who until then had lived at the Barcelona Mother House, opened in 1940, begun to separate themselves to open up new houses. By doing this, they fulfilled the Company's own universal vocation, whose only purpose is the greater glory of God anywhere in the world.

IN SPAIN

BARCELONA: The first house of the Company clearly reflects the open and generous spirit of María Félix. In fact, when she barely had income to modestly sustain her first companions, she didn't hesitate to rent a beautiful house at 59, Ganduxer Street, in the district of Bonanova, so as to establish the Novitiate and a female students' residence in 1946. It became the first university hall in the city named "Mater Salvatoris". The residence is now located at Emancipación Street.



For some years, despite a lot of material and human difficulties, the Company of the Saviour became responsible over a particular social work: the Schools of Grace, located in one of the most popular Barcelona neighbourhoods. There they taught Primary Education to the girls of



University Hall, Barcelona

the area. On Sunday afternoons, they organised, with great success, a Christian Sunday School for the young working-class women. Catechism and lectures alternated with plenty of activities, such as charity plays, to which the families of the girls were regularly invited.

MADRID: Initially, in 1946, the House in Madrid opened as a Residence Hall. It was located in the Metropolitan Park, at 5, Sierra Street. In 1945 it began to work as a School, and in 1965, when the number of students increased, it was moved to Aravaca.



"Mater Salvatoris" School, Madrid

This School in Madrid – as it can be seen today – was devised by Mother Félix. Being a person ahead of her time, she conceived an ambitious project centred around various pavilions, inspired by the American college system that she had seen during her years in



the United States. At a time when this type of structure was still unknown in Spain – state high schools were always big buildings in the middle of the cities – Mother Félix ventured to found a School in the suburbs, where the girls would benefit from fresh air and enjoy open spaces.



“Rosalar”, Training Centre and Generalate

In 1967, the Company of the Saviour’s novitiate convent was also moved to Aravaca. The house called “Rosalar”, at Tapia de Casariego Street, next to the School, was converted after that into an internal Training Centre and from 1970 onwards, it also became the Generalate.

In 1996 the University Hall “Mater Salvatoris”, which had been included in the initial project, was also inaugurated.

LÉRIDA: The School of Lérida was opened by petition of a group of families of the city, who wanted their daughters to be educated under the guidance of María Félix. Her reputation as a great teacher hadn’t diminished in spite of the long time that had passed since her first classes in the Institute



“Mater Salvatoris” School, Lérida



of Secondary Teaching, back in the thirties. Once the permission of the Bishop was obtained, it was opened at Ricardo Viñes Square. Some years later, in 1969, it would be moved to Plá de Monsó, in the outskirts of the city. The project of the School of Lérida– various pavilions separated by large green spaces– was also planned by Mother María Félix.

This first “Mater Salvatoris” School bore the stamp of its Foundress. One of the most significant details, proof of the Mother’s open-mindedness, was the firm decision to integrate all the pupils in a traditional school, regardless of their social extraction.

MOTA DEL MARQUÉS, VALLADOLID: The House in Mota del Marqués is the one that suffered more transformations since its origins. In 1954, when the Mother acquired this house to lodge the Novitiate, the young novices nicknamed it “the Mice’s Palace”. It was a total wreck. With a lot of enthusiasm



House of Spirituality in Mota del Marqués

and no funding, Mother María Félix and Mother Carmen Aige started to work with great effort to set up a School in the old house and a little apostolic training house, as well as the Novitiate, which would later be moved to Madrid in 1967. The house then became a boarding school until 1995, when, with the

Bishop’s permission, it was designated as House of Spirituality.



IN AMERICA

But our Lord wanted the Company of the Saviour spread beyond the Spanish borders. H.H. Pío XII made a call to all the Spanish religious orders to evangelise South America. It was a unique occasion to show their loyalty to the promise of special obedience to the Holy Father, which is nowadays taken by all the mothers of the Company as a vow. The country selected was Venezuela, no doubt because Father Mazón, who had always been very close to the Company, had been appointed Father Provincial there.

VENEZUELA

The young “junioras” (young religious in formation) dreamed of establishing missions in America, in the communist Russia, in the whole world...

On August 22nd, 1957, the feast day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mothers María Félix and Carmen Aige stepped on to American soil for the first time. These were the first steps of the missionary Company of the Saviour.

CARACAS: Soon after, the sisters of the Company appointed to the new foundation arrived in Caracas, capital city of Venezuela, with the intention



“Mater Salvatoris” School, Caracas

of aiding the needy. For these young missionaries, the craving to announce Jesus Christ in places where poverty was more at hand was a true necessity.

When they arrived in the city, the Archbishop gave them a very different task: “Do



open the best school in town”, he told them. He had also assigned them a very concrete location: the suburb Las Mercedes. In this area there was no Catholic school, and a lot of Christian families took their children to a protestant school situated in the neighbourhood. The effects of an education separated from the Church’s life were beginning to show, and the Archbishop entrusted the Company with the education and care of those youngsters whom nobody looked after.

Mother Félix, despite the lack of economic resources, didn’t spare expenses, by trusting instead in the Divine Providence. That is how the Mater Salvatoris School was eventually opened in Caracas.



Mission of the Company of the Saviour

However, for a long time the care of the needy focused on the collaboration with social projects, such as the “Schools of Faith and Joy”, where the sisters of the Company of the Saviour taught children of poor or outcast families.

At the same time, and by request of their own Bishops, the company opened the houses of Tamare (Zulia State, Venezuela) and



Cerro Chato (Uruguay). In Tamare they educated the working-class children of that oil producing region. In both places they taught catechism to adults and children, helping to raise their cultural and Christian levels, and with the same burning zeal of St. Francis Xavier.

MARACAIBO: The foundation of this house has also its origin in the obedience to the Church Hierarchy. In 1966, Monsignor Domingo Roa, Archbishop of Maracaibo, asked the sisters of the Company in Tamare to take charge of the school that the Ursulines were giving up, although that meant closing the house in Tamare, so dear to all of them. This is how, in the year 1966 - 1967, they started, with enthusiasm and effort, the typical training of the Mater Salvatoris Schools.



"Mater Salvatoris" School, Maracaibo

THE UNITED STATES The founding of the Company in the United States in 1961, is the direct result of a very remarkable quality of our Mother: her generosity.

Once in Caracas airport the Mother met an unknown priest that seemed to be waiting for someone to pick him up. She approached him and offered him transport and lodging at the school. This priest was Rv. F. Peyton, C.S.C., who had just arrived



Bridgeport House, USA



to start his first “Rosary crusade” in this country. From that very moment, the friendship between F. Peyton and the Company of the Saviour did nothing but grow. It was through him that the Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut, let the sisters of the Company work in a Parish School for the education of African-American and Puerto Rican children.

SAN JUAN OF PUERTO RICO

The last foundation of the Company of the Saviour was the House of San Juan of Puerto Rico, opened in 1975. The General Superior was Mother Carmen Aige Corbella. Today, the Mater Salvatoris School in the island consists of a nursery and an Elementary School.



“Mater Salvatoris” School, San Juan



VI LOVE IN DEEDS AND WORDS

This is how the Company of the Saviour was growing to work for the glory of God “amongst believers and unbelievers” just as it can be read in its Constitutions.

The Mater Salvatoris Schools, known as centres where academic and human education is a way of preparing the sowing of the Christian seed in pupils, very soon had Marian Sodalties, where the young who desired it could happily and faithfully live following Christ, according to the Ignatian spirituality.

Mother Félix was very concerned with the education of young people who were to found true Christian families. She profoundly rejoiced when she saw that the youngsters were happy after attending Spiritual Exercises or after a pilgrimage. She enjoyed seeing their desire of living a Christian life in their studies, their professional and personal environment, and their decision to live a pure courtship and a Christian marriage...



She particularly loved priesthood. Her preoccupation with their care was not the fruit of a special human delicacy, which she had, but a profoundly supernatural understanding of their ministry. The Mother recognised the person of Christ in them, and hence her continuous care and attention.



May, 1999, Madrid

However, who lacked her love? No doubt her heart was big, very big, and all those who met her can testify to this. As a meaningful example, one of the most repeated remarks of those who met her, even occasionally, was: "She loved me in a special way..." A priest said about her, completely convinced, that she was a clear image of God. And it is true that this quality of God's love, which is always of personal predilection, was present in our Mother in a natural way, as she was.

She never sought any special treatment, nor did she allow her nuns to call her Foundress. She didn't consent to any favouritism due to her age, her health or her post (she was General Superior for 19 years and soul of the Order all her life, as well as Vicar of the General Superior, Local Superior and Master of Novices).



What was written about St. Ignatius of Loyola is applicable to her extraordinary strength of spirit in times of difficulties and illnesses: *“He didn’t lack the necessary vigour for the governance of the Company. His will and strength of spirit, together with the other gifts of nature and grace, more than overcame his poor health. It is known, when St. Ignatius was ill, that the Fathers at the Roman House thought: ‘Let us beg God that a difficult task should arise so that our Father will soon be out of bed and recover’”*³.

Mother María Félix, who died while she was still Vicar of the General Superior, passed the last years of her life *“hidden with Christ in God”*⁴, without forgetting to pass on to her daughters the charisma she had received from God our Lord, to whom she had been ever faithful.

3. ALDAMA, Antonio M.^o de, S.J., Comentario a la IX parte de las Constituciones: el General de la Compañía de Jesús. Su persona, su gobierno. CIS, Roma 1982, p. 56.

4. Col. 3,3.



VII SAINTLY DEATH AND MANIFESTATIONS OF VENERATION

Her death, as her life, was very simple. We could almost say that she passed away tiptoeing... Mother María Félix didn't want to disturb. For all her daughters in the houses of Madrid, it was an enormous consolation to pray by her side in the last moments of her life and see her receive the last Sacraments.

January 12th, 2001, has remained engraved in our hearts. The natural human grief caused by the loss of a much loved Mother was mixed with a profound supernatural joy. Hundreds of people of all ages – children and youngsters, men and



Company of the Saviour Cemetery



women, whole families – came to pray by her body until the late hours that night.

Spontaneously, priests and other people of faith commended themselves to her, and a lot of them passed medals and rosaries over the

body of the Mother. One could sense it in the environment, and it could even be heard that we were attending the funeral of a saint. Soon after, the first news of difficult cases committed to her protection were received, and so did some favours obtained by her intercession.



The grave of Mother María Félix



Funeral Mass celebrated in Madrid

On January 22nd, 2001, the funeral for Mother María Félix was celebrated at the parish church of Santa María de Caná, in Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid. The Mass was presided by the Most Reverend Antonio M.^o Rouco Varela, Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid, and concelebrated with Bishop of Córdoba the Most Reverend Francisco Javier Martínez, as well as many priests who wanted to join in prayer for the eternal rest of her soul.



The affection of our Pastors who paternally presided the funerals in the dioceses where the Company has houses provided much comfort for all her daughters. It was a recognition for the same charisma of obedience, support and love to the Church, which God entrusted the Mother with and which she passed on to us with her example.

Awaiting the resurrection of the dead, her remains rest in the Company of the Saviour's cemetery at the House of Mota del Marqués. A few days before her death, she had visited the works of the cemetery and urged its ending, as if she foresaw the hour of her departure to meet Christ.

The spontaneous manifestation of veneration to the Mother was also a reason for joy for her spiritual daughters who, in a certain way, felt orphan. We were completely sure that she would continue helping the Company from Heaven, as well as each one of us, with the same strength and delicacy with which she had always acted. With her aid we hoped that, like herself, we would always seek and search for the greater glory of God.

PRAYER

for private devotion

Merciful Father, Your Son, our divine Saviour, glorified You by lovingly fulfilling Your will even unto death. You inspired in Your daughter María an ardent desire to glorify You and to closely follow Jesus Christ, by cooperating in the redemption of the world through the Company of the Saviour which she founded. Grant us, through her intercession, the favour we ask of You, so that the Church, which she ardently loved as the Spouse of Christ, will raise her to the honour of the altars, for Your greater glory. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory.

In conformity with the decree of Pope Urban VIII, in no way do we presume to anticipate the Church's judgement.



CHRONOLOGY

1907 August, 25th: She is born in Albelda, Huesca.

1922 Holy Week: First Spiritual Exercises. She feels the call to a consecrated life.

1930 Degree in Chemistry (University of Zaragoza).

1932 She opens the "Academia Nueva" in Lérida.

July, 31st: First inner sign of her specific vocation.

1934 August, 15th: María Félix and Carmen Aige make a private vow in which they promise to devote their lives to God's service, following the spirit of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

1939 She opens the "Re-Vir-Cien" Academy in Barcelona.

1940 August, 15th: After ten days at a Spiritual Exercises retreat, in which they strengthen their vocations, they renew their vows with another eight companions.

October, 11th: The Apostolic Administrator of Barcelona gives them permission to live in community.

She opens the students Residence "Bonanova".



1944 June, 12th: Dr. Modrego establishes the Pious Union Company of the Saviour.

July, 31st: She privately makes her temporary profession, together with some of the first companions.

1946 Foundation in Madrid.

Bonanova Residence becomes University Residence, renamed *Mater Salvatoris*.

1948 Foundation of the *Mater Salvatoris* School in Lérida.

1952 The Company of the Saviour is established as a religious Institute of Diocesan Law.

She is elected General Superior of the Company, and re-elected until 1971.

February, 2nd: She makes her perpetual profession.

1954 Foundation of *Mater Salvatoris* School in Madrid.

Foundation of the House in Mota del Marqués, Valladolid.

1957 February, 2nd: She makes the special promise of obedience to the Pope.

1958 Foundation of the *Mater Salvatoris* School in Caracas (Venezuela).

1961 Foundation in Bridgeport, Connecticut (U.S.A.).

1965 She suffers a stroke.

1966 Foundation of the *Mater Salvatoris* School in Maracaibo (Venezuela).



1970 The Generalate is moved to Aravaca, Madrid. There she will live until her death.

1975 Foundation of the *Mater Salvatoris* School in San Juan of Puerto Rico.

1986 May, 25th: The Company of the Saviour is created Institute of Pontifical Law.

1996 Inauguration of the University College *Mater Salvatoris* in Madrid.

2001 January, 12th: She dies a saintly death in Madrid.

A.M.D.G.





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