

## INSIGHTS ON THE EUCHARIST IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL CHALLENGES FROM THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF MERCEDES CARRERAS HITOS (MADRE TRINIDAD)

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### ABSTRACT

Like the rest of the Christian world, the Iberian Peninsula has seen different ways of approaching and living the faith over the centuries, particularly of living the Eucharist. There have been many theologies, pastoral actions and episcopal guidelines on the importance of the Eucharist for the life of the believer, but undoubtedly there have been many more examples of life that, in the social and ecclesial background, have been shaping and transfiguring testimonies of the way of living the professed faith. Both in Spain and Portugal over the last century, there have been many people whose lives have contributed to the theological and pastoral development of the Eucharist. In a way, they were the pioneers of theologies that only found expression at the academic or teaching level decades later. One of the most notorious examples that marked both countries of the peninsula was Mother Trinidad. From her actions and life, it is possible to develop theological thinking on the Eucharist and on pastoral and theological practices that urgently need to be implemented today.

### Keywords

Madre Trinidad; Eucharist; Adoration; Christian credibility; Eucharistic fervour

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At the centre of Christian life and at the centre of an identity shaped by the Paschal Mystery is the Eucharist. Throughout the ages, the Eucharist has marked the rhythms of believers' lives, both through the encounter generated by the celebration, the communion of Christ's body and blood and his adoration. It should be noted that the phenomenon, devotion and practice of the Eucharist has varied over time. Sometimes the community of believers lived off this daily

nourishment, and sometimes the fear of receiving Communion unworthily led them to develop forms of adoration and contrition that sustained their union with the mystery of redemption.<sup>1</sup>

These ups and downs and different ways of thinking and living the Eucharist created the need for continuous theological and liturgical updating. At the same time, because of its importance to the life of the Church, the Eucharist has been a constant presence in the different councils and debates at the Magisterial level. In a way, the trivialisation of practices or the abandonment of an active and effective pastoral approach led to the need to continually emphasise the importance of the Eucharist. What was seen as obvious, central and unavoidable in the first centuries, is presented throughout history as something to be taken care of so as not to be forgotten. This is the only way to understand why, in our time, the Second Vatican Council still has the need to affirm the Eucharist as ‘the source and centre of all Christian life’ (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 11). What should be a lived reality for everyone who claims to be a believer, especially after modernity, is hostage to continuous confirmation that it is through living the Eucharist that ‘the Church of God is built up and grows without ceasing’.<sup>2</sup>

The Iberian Peninsula was no exception to the rest of the Christianised world and continued to be influenced by the pastoral ecclesial currents and movements of each era. It is therefore no coincidence that

the Second Vatican Council spoke clearly of the Church as the fundamental and universal sacrament of salvation. This concept must be taken seriously by theology. The ecclesial community as a whole is the matrix from which all the sacraments spring, which are therefore always sacraments of the Church, and especially that central sacrament which is the Eucharist. This relationship between the Eucharist and the Church is so deep and so

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<sup>1</sup> As Marcel Certeau warns, ‘at the turn of the twelfth century [...] the mystical body of the Eucharist (spoken of by the church as a visible body) was turned on its head: at the end of this pivotal century, the mystical body was the church and the major signifier that spoke of it was the visible corpus of the Eucharist. The opacification of the ecclesiastical institution due to political and sociological factors led to a fundamental upheaval. The church is no longer that which speaks in clarity of the mystery of the Eucharist; it comes to occupy the place of the very mystery of which the Eucharist speaks in transparency. The place of the mystical sign has been hijacked.’ Daniel Vidal, ‘Figures de la mystique: Le dit de Michel de Certeau,’ *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 58, no. 2 (1984). doi: 10.3406/assr. Cf. also: M. Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión* (Madrid: Crisandad, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 11.

intimate that neither the Eucharist could exist without the Church, nor can there be a Church without the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup>

The lives of countless Christians are clear examples of this being ‘Church-Sacrament’, linked to the Eucharist. For example, in Portugal, Alexandrina Maria da Costa (Blessed Alexandrina of Balazar)<sup>4</sup> and Fr Abílio Gomes Correia (beatification and canonisation process underway)<sup>5</sup> reflect an action and way of life that is in line with the Eucharistic movements in central Europe. However, in the Iberian context, there were unavoidable names that were a sign of contradiction, favouring and prioritising the Eucharistic life even when the ecclesial world seemed to want to go in another direction. Among these names, I would like to highlight that of Mercedes Carreras Hitos (Mother Trinidad).<sup>6</sup>

Mother Trinidad did not stand out for her brilliant theological knowledge of the Eucharist, or even for an impactful action that gave her fame in ecclesial circles. On the contrary, her humility and strength of faith transfigured practices within religious life without, however, going outside what was considered ‘usual’ in her time. His way of thinking and lifestyle serve today as a reference and pastoral methodology, both for a renewed understanding of Christian life, whose vital force comes from the Eucharist; and it opens doors to new paths to be developed in the field of practical and pastoral theology.

The aim of this article is to present a practical theology in which the Eucharist plays a central role. It will start from a generalised understanding of the theological and pastoral meaning of the centrality of the Eucharist in the Christian life, understanding in particular the way in which this centrality has been developed in believing communities and, specifically, in religious communities. From here, an approach will be made to contemporary Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula, with a special focus on the life of Mother Trinidad. The third and final part of the

<sup>5</sup> Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 235–236.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Alexandrina Maria da Costa* (1904–1955), *Leiga, da União dos Cooperadores Salesianos*, [https://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20040425\\_da-costa\\_po.html](https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20040425_da-costa_po.html); Alexandre Freire Duarte (ed.), *Obras completas de Alexandrina Maria da Costa: Autobiografia*, vol. 1 (Balasar: Fundação Alexandrina de Balasar: Faculdade de Teologia da UCP, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fernando Leite, *O cura de Ars português: P. Abílio Gomes Correia, 1882–1967* (Braga: A. O., 1982); António Costa Neiva, *Pe. Abílio G. Correia e Eucaristia* (Braga: Comissão Fabriqueira S. Mamede de Este, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Causa de Canonización Sierva de Dios. Madre Trinidad Carreras*, <https://www.madret Trinidadcarreras.com/>.

article will articulate the ways of thinking and living the Eucharist in the first centuries and the theological and pastoral dynamism that can be learnt and recovered from Mother Trinidad's actions and lifestyle. From this articulation, pastoral and theological paths and proposals will open up for a renewed Eucharistic praxis, where the Mystery of Christ regains its centrality in contemporary human lifestyles and mystery.

## **1. The Eucharist in the First Centuries and Its Pastoral Challenges**

The stories of the Passion of Christ and the salvific power of Christ's self-giving at the Last Supper were – and are – unavoidable dimensions in Christianity. The Eucharist, which nourished the first communities like daily bread, was the driving force behind an active and working faith, even in times of persecution and martyrdom. In these *agape* encounters, the community united with Christ's sufferings, but also with the mystery of his redemptive death. At the same time, as an expression of the transfiguration brought about by the communion of life with the Risen One, the community created and strengthened bonds, making charity and love of neighbour the only acceptable way of life for anyone who claimed to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Saviour (cf. Acts 2:42–47; Acts 4:32–35).<sup>7</sup>

With the expansion of Christianity and its imposition as the religion of the empire, the experience of the Eucharist departed from its initial intimacy. Little by little, the liturgical rite developed and the space for fraternal encounter diminished, reducing dialogue and the sharing of life based on listening to the word to a set of expressions and formulas designed to express faith. At the same time, Eucharistic communion, in the concrete form of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, went from being food to strengthen the sinner, helping him to overcome sin, to becoming a 'prize' for the pure, deserving of this salvific reward. The inversion of the meaning of the Eucharistic experience therefore oscillates between merit and fear. In a way, Christ's redemptive sacrifice seems to be transformed into a cruel business: if you live an exemplary life and fulfil the precepts of the Church, you have the right to receive the Communion of the consecrated species and access salvation; if you live what is considered a life of sin, then you have no right to receive the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 65–194.

Body of Christ or to receive the salvation offered (freely) on the cross. To do so is to run the risk of eternal damnation, in a process similar to that of Judaism described in Lev 16:2–13.<sup>8</sup>

What seems surprising is that, despite a certain perversion of the way of living and looking at the Eucharist, it remained central to the development of the spiritual life of Christians. From the continuity of practices linked to daily Communion to the expansion of frequent movements of Eucharistic adoration, there were many ways of maintaining the centrality of the Eucharist in ecclesial communities throughout the medieval period. In parallel with these community movements, religious life also took on a fundamental role in these practices. In fact, while there was an initial religious impulse linked to contemplation and daily communion, little by little, religious communities – especially women’s communities – were forced to find ways of subsisting that often took their members away from a practice of continuous adoration and/or daily participation in the Eucharist.

Progressively, outside the religious orders designated as ‘contemplative’, the space previously devoted to the Eucharist and adoration was replaced by social works: hospitals, centres for the poor, colleges, etc. This was a trend that spread and became a practice not only in religious orders but also in male conventual orders in which the religious were not ordained. This does not mean that Eucharistic participation was reduced to weekly practice or that there was no longer adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. What happened was a decrease in Eucharistic fervour and consequently a decrease in both the frequency and duration of Eucharistic practices.

Despite this decline in the intimate relationship of believers with the Eucharist, and despite the Christian schisms linked to the Eucharistic Sacrament, it is undeniable that it is an intrinsic requirement of ‘being Christian’ to have the Eucharist at the centre of their believing identity. It is no coincidence that, against the grain, ‘the tradition of the Church rightly maintains that Christ’s sacrifice is made present in a mysterious but real way in the celebration of the Eucharist and is therefore a re-presentation, or better still, a presence of the sacrifice of Jesus’.<sup>9</sup> It is in this certainty that many have struggled, despite the difficulties, to maintain such an intimate relationship with the Eucharist – both

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 195–362.

<sup>9</sup> Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 363.

through daily celebration and communion and through the daily practice of Eucharistic adoration. Take the example of Mother Trinidad who, even before her religious profession, emphasised the need for the Eucharist to always be her privileged food and, with Mary as her guide, saw the cross as her staff of choice.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Mother Trinidad and the Religious and Eucharistic Renewal in the Iberian Peninsula**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the reality of Christian life, as far as the Eucharist is concerned, seems to have been reduced to participating in the celebration on a weekly basis – on Sundays and feasts of vigil – with times of adoration being linked to specific feasts of the Universal Church (such as the feast of the Body of God) or feasts specific to particular Churches (feasts of the patron saint of the parish, diocese or country). In general, non-contemplative religious orders follow this same trend and, particularly in the Iberian Peninsula, they are linked to social works linked to health or education, depending on the charism of the founder and the needs of the context in which these congregations arise. In this respect, Mother Trinidad's personal story is very representative and, for this very reason, her life choices appear to be surprising and shaping a new and Iberian way of thinking and living the Eucharist in religious life.

Mother Trinidad del Purísimo Corazón de María was born in Monachil (Granada) – Spain, on 28 January 1879, and baptised with the name Mercedes Juliana Carreras Hitos. There was nothing special about this child that could have given her a great love and intimate relationship with the Eucharist from birth. However, it's worth noting that one day, after her first communion in 1887, when she saw the glow of fireflies, she ran to her mother with a metaphorical wish that somehow seemed to foreshadow her Eucharistic fervour: 'Mum, [she said] I wanted to be like this firefly on the key to the tabernacle, to take all the children inside and tell them how much Jesus loves them.'<sup>11</sup>

When her mother died, and as was the custom of the time in similar situations, Mercedes' father and grandmother sent her and her sister

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Madre Trinidad, *Escritos 2* (cadernos 2, 3, 4) (Madrid: Postulación de la Causa de M. Trinidad del Purísimo Corazón de María, 1995), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Madre Trinidad, *Escritos 6* (cadernos 15–25) (Madrid: Postulación de la Causa de M. Trinidad del Purísimo Corazón de María, 1997), 135.

to the Convent of St Agnes in Granada to study at the school. Although Mercedes was clear that her relationship with the convent and religious life was solely for study, her relationship with Jesus Christ soon intensified and her visits to the tabernacle multiplied. Little by little, the duration of these meetings increased and Mercedes found herself totally seduced by Jesus in the Eucharist. As this relationship intensified, Mercedes no longer wanted to be solely at the convent school. She left school and decided, aged just fourteen, to enter the Convent of St Anthony in Granada, where the Rule of St Clare was observed according to the Capuchin reform.<sup>12</sup> From the beginning, and especially during his time as a novice, his posture in the convent stood out for the long hours she spent in front of the tabernacle. It was there that his life and vocation took root, and she made her religious profession on 26 November 1897.<sup>13</sup>

Everything seemed to be going well, but Mother Trinidad's story takes a turn. Her Eucharistic fervour did not fit in with the way of life of her religious congregation. For her, religious life had to be guided by a continuous relationship with the Blessed Sacrament and so she proposed that the Capuchins implement and live Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in their convents. Her spiritual director – Fr Ambrose Valencina – encouraged her to follow this purpose. In a way, Mother Trinidad's restlessness, derived from her intimate relationship with Jesus and the Eucharist, also provoked inner questioning in those around her. However, the Capuchins, while recognising the importance of Adoration, saw the implementation of convents of perpetual Adoration as a burden that would, to a certain extent, jeopardise or even prevent regular observance.

Mother Trinidad remains faithful to her vocation and continues to try in a variety of ways to implement the regular practice of Adoration, notably when she is appointed prioress of the convent even before she is old enough to do so. Despite the apparent futility of her efforts, Mother Trinidad remains unwavering in her resolve. In particular, on the occasion of the celebration of the 7th centenary of the Approval of the Rule of St Clare, on 19 March 1912, after receiving Communion, Mother Trinidad felt the great call that the Lord was making to her: 'I want you to work to surround the Tabernacle with penitent souls, dedicated

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Madre Trinidad, *Escritos* 6, 17–145.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. C. Palomo Iglesias, *Vida y Obra de la Madre Trinidad Del Purísimo Corazón de María* (Madrid: Esclavas de la Santísima Eucaristía y de la Madre de Dios, 2000), 85–95.

to adoring me, day and night, in this Sacrament of love, which I instituted for the consolation and life of the souls who leave me abandoned, even those who are consecrated to me.’<sup>14</sup>

This call became a mission, and there are countless places where Mother Trinidad refers to them in her writings. This was the decisive factor that prompted a concrete and resolute step toward the establishment of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Unable to find the communal and canonical means to implement the reform within her congregation, yet certain of her calling to live out Eucharistic fervour, she spoke of these concerns to her confessor. Encouraged by his guidance and by the Eucharistic force that inhabited her, she ultimately made the painful decision to leave what she considered her beloved community, taking steps to establish a convent where the vow of Adoration would be fully realised.<sup>15</sup> This was no easy task, either personally or canonically. However, his strength and love for the community led to a generalised questioning of the importance of the Eucharist in Christian life and, specifically, in religious life.

After many attempts, finally on 11 April 1925, Mother Trinidad, in the company of eleven other nuns, left the Convent of San Antonio to form the first community of Capuchine Adorers in Chauchina, Granada. This community became the cradle and foundation of today’s Congregation of the Religious Slaves of the Most Holy Eucharist and of the Mother of God.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that, against the expectations of her time, Mother Trinidad left her community and embarked on a journey whose primary mission was to restore the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian life and specifically in religious life. Without denying the way of thinking about the religious life of her time, Trinidad did not abandon the mission linked to the colleges. On the contrary, she established colleges alongside each religious community. However, her vision was more daring, anticipating and intuiting a theology that would only be fully affirmed and ecclesially understood with the Second Vatican Council: social life and work are not obstacles to an intimate relationship with

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<sup>14</sup> Madre Trinidad, *Escritos 3* (cadernos 5, 6, 7) (Madrid: Postulación de la Causa de M. Trinidad del Purísimo Corazón de Maria, 1995), 81.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Madre Trinidad, *Escritos 1* (caderno 1) (Madrid: Postulación de la Causa de M. Trinidad del Purísimo Corazón de Maria 1995), 74.

<sup>16</sup> The Holy See granted definitive approval to the Congregation under the name ‘Handmaids of the Most Holy Eucharist and of the Mother of God’ on 10 January 1949.

God. Rather, they serve as the concrete expression of a faith that is actively lived and nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist.

In a way, Mother Trinidad responded to the calls of the contemporary Church, so threatened by the advances of secularisation and the mechanical ritualisation of acts of worship. Certainly, it cannot be denied that her life objectively embodied the appeals of John Paul II, who called for a faith nourished daily by the Eucharist and Adoration. If the Pope urged believers, and especially consecrated persons: 'Find him, dearly beloved, and contemplate him in a very special way in the Eucharist, celebrated and adored every day, as the source and summit of existence and apostolic action',<sup>17</sup> Mother Trinidad demonstrated just how far zeal and love for the Blessed Sacrament can reach and bear fruit.

Mother Trinidad travelled around Spain and Portugal. Wherever she went, she created communities and colleges, seeing these as places of service and the Eucharist as a privileged place of community and intimacy with God. The determination of the Eucharist and daily adoration for all the members of her congregation makes the Handmaids of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Mother of God a unique reference in the Iberian context and for the world. The Eucharist is no longer a 'footnote' in the life of the community. On the contrary, because it is central and a priority, its authentic daily living is the starting point and shaper of the agenda, both at the level of the convents and in the works linked to education.

In the same way, the obligation to have times of adoration leads to a constant presence of the community before the Blessed Sacrament, while at the same time guiding and helping each religious to have an intimate relationship with God. In this case, the real presence of Christ visibly becomes a 'personal presence' within religious communities. A presence that is felt beyond the convent walls, since schedules and other social actions depend on this priority of life. Only from this perspective can we understand her words when she exclaims:

O divine Eucharist, the throne of love where I see you radiant with glory, in union with the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, send to my soul the most pure waters of grace that flow from these three divine sources of grace and flood my soul with wisdom, purity and love. May I adore God as

<sup>17</sup> Cf. João Paulo II, 'Homília (2 de fevereiro de 2001),' *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 de fevereiro de 2001), 69.

if I really saw and heard him, because faith that is alive sees, hears, touches and embraces with greater certainty than if it saw.<sup>18</sup>

Even today, the Handmaids of the Most Holy Eucharist and of the Mother of God have the same Eucharistic fervour, making their daily actions – including works related to education – an echo and complement of the time spent with Jesus in the Eucharist. For the dozens of communities present in different parts of the world, the intimate life with the Eucharist and the life of Adoration continues to be ‘like a delicious bath of love in which one immerses oneself and sinks to the bottom... This real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist makes one feel and savour the gift of God intimately, making the soul enjoy and savour the sweetness of the beloved that it possesses and adores.’<sup>19</sup>

### **3. A Pastoral Care of the Eucharist or the Eucharist as a Pastoral *Locus*?**

Far from being a relic of the past, relevant only to a Christianised Iberia with different social rhythms, the commitment, devotion, and charism of Mother Trinidad remain vibrant and enduring. As in the past, and despite the rapid pace with which contemporary societies operate, the Handmaids of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Mother of God continue to live the centrality of the Eucharist as their essence and way of life. In their lives, they fulfil the wishes of their foundress when she said that her religious should be ‘the lightning rods of the world so that, perpetually prostrate at the feet of Jesus in the Eucharist, they may attract the blessings of heaven to the holy Church, our mother, which is persecuted by those who profess her faith’.<sup>20</sup>

Extending beyond the Iberian borders, where communities abound in both Spain and Portugal, the congregation today also has a presence in Cape Verde, Angola, Benin, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and East Timor. The mission linked to education continues to develop, both through the numerous colleges (a number that exceeds the number of communities) and through the active presence in university academic circles, contributing to theological knowledge and, through education,

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<sup>18</sup> Madre Trinidad, *Escritos* 6, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Madre Trinidad, *Escritos* 3, 90.

<sup>20</sup> Madre Trinidad, *Escritos* 4, 166.

expressing an intimate experience with the Blessed Sacrament. In such a secularised world where Eucharistic celebrations are often reduced to ‘fulfilling the precept’, this continues to be the proclamation and daily nourishment of the life and mission of these religious.

The love and relational intimacy with the Eucharist that so characterised Mother Trinidad’s life and work is still very much present in the current constitutions and directories of the Congregation, where it is clearly stated that ‘the Handmaid of the Eucharist must be an extension and prolongation of Jesus Christ the sacrifice’.<sup>21</sup> A gift of life, united to the sacrifice of the Redeemer, meant that to the classic vows of the evangelical counsels, the Congregation added a fourth vow specific to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Thus, giving continuity to the charism of the foundress, ‘the spirit of poverty, simplicity and self-denial, drawn from the primitive rule of St Clare... And the spirit of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, coming from the Seraphic St Francis of Assisi, continues to mark the spirit of the Congregation.’<sup>22</sup>

Mother Trinidad’s Eucharistic fervour represented a special and unique way of living the faith and doing pastoral work. Women’s religious congregations were already abundant in her time and, if analysed carefully, there seems to be little difference between her vision of religious life and that proposed in the Convent of San Antonio. However, her faith and love of the Eucharist made her pastoral proposal and her sense of consecrated life new, creative and daring. In theological terms, there seems to be an urgent need for the same attitude, both at the level of theological praxis and at the level of pastoral theology that does not stagnate in the face of the difficulties of a world in rapid movement.

Practical and pastoral theology often seem to want to align themselves with official figures and statistics: What percentage of Christians participate in the Eucharist daily? How many weekly? What is the frequency and regularity of personal moments of adoration? What are the reasons for doing so or for having abandoned the relationship with the Eucharist? Since these questions are pertinent and significant, we cannot think of a theological methodology or a pastoral praxis that only focuses on the form – by changing the times of the celebrations, changing the music or the homiletical style. All of this, while important, is not about the essence of life in God. All this is mediation

<sup>21</sup> Escravas da Santíssima Eucaristia e da Mãe de Deus, *Constituições* (1983), Art. 20, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Escravas da Santíssima Eucaristia e da Mãe de Deus, *Constituições* (1983), Art. 11, 13.

for something greater and more fruitful. There is an urgent need to implement a methodology similar to that of Mother Trinidad: a pastoral and theological understanding that leads to methodologies and praxis resulting from Eucharistic fervour and the authenticity of lived and nourished faith. As Michel de Certeau reminds us, there can be no separation between professed faith and sacramental life, lived faith. In this sense, it is important to conduct our practices bearing in mind that ‘Emmanuel is present locally, in the Eucharistic sacrament of his body, in the gathering of his faithful in church, in the gathering of his words and gestures. These are the sacraments of unity, reiterated, maintained, commented on and reinterpreted by the successors of the first apostolic community, the judges and guardians of the unifying faith.’<sup>23</sup>

Just as apathy and religious indifference seem to be gaining ground after the advances of modernity, so active, itinerant and persevering witnesses will be better able to respond to contemporary challenges than merely changing celebratory forms. The movement of surrendering one’s life, through an intimate relationship with the Eucharist, is in itself a primordial method for responding with love to the escalations of violence that seem to multiply every day. The coherence of life and the continuous exercise of a superabundance of love that springs from the Paschal Mystery, present in the Eucharist, allows the concrete passage from professed faith to lived and active faith. In this regard, Certeau uses the expression *les arts de faire* (the arts of doing), meaning something that is not material or directly accessible (living the faith), but leads to concrete action and a visible lifestyle.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the focus of pastoral theologies should be more on the witnessing action of believers than on the number of believers who continue to attend Eucharistic celebrations. From this first step, it would be possible to understand why there is a continuity of praxis.

This does not imply that we should overlook the increasingly widespread phenomenon of empty churches during Eucharistic celebrations. Rather, it calls for a shift in approach: to identify pastoral strategies that foster an intimate relationship with Jesus and the Eucharist, irrespective of the effort or risks involved. In following the example

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<sup>23</sup> Michel de Certeau (1925–1986), *L'étranger ou l'union dans la différence* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 42.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Patrick Royannais, ‘Michel de Certeau: l’anthropologie du croire et la théologie de la faiblesse de croire,’ *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 91, no. 4 (2003): 499–533. doi: 10.3917/rsr.054.0499.

of Mother Trinidad, it is possible to engage in credible pastoral work without departing from established social norms or canonical structures. What is impractical is the fatalistic contemplation of contemporary times, as if nothing could be done to stop the flight from God's love offered on the Cross and present in every tabernacle in the world. The first step will therefore be to leave the structural spheres of academia and the Church and start the whole pastoral and theological project from Eucharistic Adoration.

Only by embracing and living out of fervent zeal for the Blessed Sacrament is it truly possible

to enter with love into the sufferings of history, not to accuse, judge and condemn; nor, as has happened throughout the history of Reparation, to neutralise our enemies, to find a purifying force to help us free ourselves from evil and, at times, to channel our violence and inability to reconcile; but to enter with love into the sufferings of history, to live them from within, because only in this way is it possible to take them on, welcome them and turn them into bearers of meaning.<sup>25</sup>

My intention here is not to criticise current pastoral actions or the methodologies of pastoral theology but rather to warn that without an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, all actions become empty and fruitless. Perhaps the different vocations and charisms help make theology grow, but what we cannot do is close our eyes to these hidden treasures that, more implicitly or explicitly, have guided the way we live the faith that animates pastoral life and theology. The example of Mother Trinidad stands out precisely because of the consistency and coherence of her life: a life of self-giving that made religious life in the Iberian Peninsula shine and bear fruit. The Eucharist and Adoration were not for her, nor is it for her Congregation, a *plus* that helps to live the faith. Rather, this fervour seems like a fire capable of spreading and warming the cold and suffering realities of our time with love.<sup>26</sup>

This seems to connect in a unique way with the way in which the Second Vatican Council came to speak about and highlight the Eucharist when it defended that 'the liturgical celebration, especially

<sup>25</sup> N. Martínez-Gayol et al., *Retorno de Amor: Teología, Historia y Espiritualidad de la Reparación* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2008), 317.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Madre Trinidad, *Escritos 4*, 167.

that of the Eucharist, is the “source and summit”, the “center” of the Church’s liturgy and of the Christian life’.<sup>27</sup> This affirmation of the Church’s Magisterium remains a significant challenge, not only for believers within religious life but also for the broader Christian community. In fact, this ‘source and summit’ only has expression if the sacrament is recognised from the deepest sense of unity: the unity of internal coherence between professed faith and lived faith, and Christian unity, where everyone – regardless of the Christian denomination that gives them identity – can celebrate the faith around the same altar. It is possible that a pastoral path capable of placing the Eucharist as the true ‘source and summit’ of Christian life could lead to this unity between life and faith and between all Christians.

It is therefore important to note that Mother Trinidad’s methodological principle was not so much to find out how many convents of Perpetual Adoration existed, but rather to find ways in which many could exist. Mother Trinidad’s belief made her pastoral work credible and has allowed us to understand the theology behind her thinking to this day. In a way, she understood the sacrificial mystery present in what theology calls ‘transubstantiation’. Through transubstantiation, ‘the recapitulation or eschatological transformation of reality into the body in the fullness of Christ, into the kingdom of God, is anticipated and realised in the first fruits. Sacrifice is thus transubstantiating and transubstantiation is sacrificial: it is the Eucharistic presence of Christ’s sacrifice that gives rise to transubstantiation and not vice versa.’<sup>28</sup> In the same way, it is not through pastoral action – however intense and theologically complete it may be – that the experience of faith will be realised or its fruits produced. It is through a true and intimate encounter with Christ that theology can develop and open up pastoral paths leading to a life in God with a visible manifestation in today’s world.

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<sup>27</sup> André Tourneux, ‘Igreja e Eucaristia no Vaticano II,’ *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 112, no. 3 (1990), 352. See also: *PO*, 5; *PO*, 6, 14; *AG*, 9; *CD*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Gesteira Garza, *La eucaristía, misterio de comunión*, 10.