

Fr. Ildefonso Moral, C.M. (1835-1907)

Apostle of the Laity and of Social Action

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Province of Mexico

First Steps of a Traveling Missionary: Spain - the Philippines - Spain

As Fr. Moral said in Mexico: *I am from Old Castilla*, from Burgos. He was born on 21 January 1835 in Salazar de Anaya. There he learned to read and write and at the age of 12 entered the diocesan seminary of Burgos where he undertook the greater part of his studies. The last part of his theological career was completed in Toledo where, together with other seminarians, he was considered part of the family of Fray Cirilo Alameda y Brea, the Archbishop of Burgos, who was elevated to cardinal and transferred to the diocese of Toledo. He completed his studies at the age of 23, but before ordination decided to enter the Congregation of the Mission and was received on 15 July 1858. Perhaps this decision was made in order to follow the path of other companions and priests from



Burgos, who had entered the Congregation before him. He completed the Internal Seminary and returned to Toledo where he was ordained on 16 March 1861 by his former benefactor. He was 26 years old.¹

¹ BRUNO ÁLVAREZ, C.M., *Noticia biográfica del R.P. Ildefonso Moral, escrita por un misionero*, Printing Workshops of P. Rodríguez, Puerta Falsa de Santo

He began to teach philosophy to the students at the Central House in Madrid. Immediately his superiors considered him for the position of director of the Internal Seminary and he was transferred to Paris to learn the traditions and the spirit of the Motherhouse. This rapid ascent is not surprising. His few, but well-informed, biographers coincide in their affirmation of the fact that he inherited a solid piety from his family. This should not surprise us for even now we see Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI honor saints and blessed who come from rural, simple, frugal and hardworking family roots. It seems that Ildefonso had a certain natural predisposition to piety and because of this was also able to influence others in the development of a like piety. His theological formation was solid and we see this reflected in later years in his conferences to the laity. He read the works of the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Augustine whom he cited frequently. He also read the classical spiritual Spanish writings, especially those of St. Theresa of Avila, whom he cited in his conferences.

On 22 July 1862, an expedition of Spanish Sisters set ashore in Manila. They were accompanied by two great missionaries: Fr. Ildefonso Moral and Fr. Gregorio Velasco. There in the Philippines, in addition to his primary ministry of supporting Fr. Velasco in his work with the Daughters of Charity, he was very involved in seminary formation and ministry with the laity, especially with the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In the seminaries he was either rector or spiritual director, but always a professor. He served in the seminaries of Manila, Jaro, Nueva Segovia and again, in 1877, in Manila. After 23 years of fruitful missionary ministry, it became evident that his health had diminished and so, in 1885, his superiors asked him to return to Madrid. For the next five years he assisted the Provincial, Fr. Máller, was director of students and dedicated himself totally to hearing confessions and guiding countless lay people. In 1890 he was named superior of the house of Andujar. It is probable that neither his superiors nor he himself suspected that this was setting him on a course toward the Port of Cádiz, on a course that would lead him to an ocean voyage, except this time it would involve crossing the Atlantic Ocean and his destiny was America.

Domingo, Mexico, 1908, 23 pp. Cf. *Anales*, 1910, pp. 113-135; *Historia de los PP. Paules y las Hijas de la Caridad en las Islas Filipinas*, 1913, VI-X; VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *Historia de la Familia Vicentina en México: 1844-1994*, Vol. II, chapter 35, "Un Visitador," pp. 51-61.

Named Visitor of the Mexican Province

This destiny was very fortuitous but at the same time most providential. From its beginning (1847), the Mexican Province had sought personnel among native vocations and from volunteers from Catalonia. In 1861 this situation changed with the triumph of the Liberals who dispossessed the missionaries from the Church and the Central House of the Holy Spirit — buildings that were located in the heart of the city. Fr. Antonio Learreta wrote about this situation in a report to his superiors: *The Holy Spirit flew off and we remained on the moon of Valencia*. This Calvary of *walking on the moon of Valencia* would last for 30 years, during which time the missionaries experienced plunder (as already mentioned), expulsion of the Daughters of Charity (1875), weariness, discomfort, discouragement, disunity, polemics, and the dispersion of the missionaries. Despite all these difficulties the problem that was strangling the province was the lack of personnel. No channels existed to bring in personnel from other provinces, nor were there ways to compensate for this by improvising with native vocations. Repeated petitions for assistance were directed to the Superior General, Fr. Fiat, who turned toward the flourishing Province of Prussia, which had taken refuge in Belgium. As a result of a petition that was made to Fr. Vogels, the Visitor, Fr. Godofredo Heck was named Visitor of Mexico (30 January 1890 - 11 July 1891). The same year that he was named Visitor, Fr. Heck made a quick trip to Belgium and then returned with six missionaries: one priest, one ordinand, two students, and two brothers. Perhaps because of a mistake, this first effort to aid the Mexican Province was not successful. The German missionaries disembarked at the Port of Progreso and remained in Yucatan, a place with a very warm climate but also, at the time, a very unhealthy place. Fr. Schilhab, recently ordained in Mérida, died on 11 December 1890 as a result of yellow fever. The group became discouraged and returned to Europe. Fr. Heck remained in Mexico, but was unable to change the situation.

Finally, Providence opened a path during the 1890 General Assembly in Paris. The delegates from Mexico, Frs. Juan Huerta and Miguel Rubí were insistent before the Superior General about the serious situation of their province and they asked him to intercede on their behalf with Fr. Máller, so that the Province of Spain would provide personnel to their province. The Superior General had no other path but to show that he was convinced and thus an agreement was reached with Spain, which would send personnel to the Province of Mexico. The wheels were placed in motion. At the beginning or middle of 1891, Fr. Ildefonso, named Visitor of Mexico and Fr. Heladio Arnáiz, the Vice-Visitor of Madrid, traveled to Paris to arrive at an agreement for this new cooperation with Mexico. There

are various drafts of this agreement that established the following points: Mexico preserved its character as an autonomous canonical province; it would be affiliated with Spain only in regard to the sending of personnel; Mexico promised to pay an unspecified amount of money for each group of missionaries that was received.² By necessity the Province of Mexico changed course and set out in a new direction. We can now read about this in a recent publication: *“Even though it ended with weakness, yet an unquestionable glorious phase of the Mexican Province had been completed. From the beginning, and against all odds, the province had set out on a decisive course and had created and maintained this course of action in all the works of the Congregation. There was discouragement because they had to have it and it was paid for with inevitable consequences.”* As a complement the following is cited: *“From the time of the birth of the gospel we are accustomed to those situations that are most difficult to understand, situations of darkness and agony that occur on the path that we have set out for ourselves. But the light always returns. Thanks to God a small but great man named Ildefonso Moral came to bring this new light and this new flame and he was able to rely on human help,”* that is, missionaries who came from Spain.³

Encounter with Mexico

In October Fr. Ildefonso and Fr. Arnáiz set forth from the Port of Cádiz and entered Veracruz in the beginning of November. During the night of 6 November, they took the Veracruz-Mexico train and arrived in Mexico City the following day at seven o'clock in the morning. Some missionaries received them by boarding the train two or three stops before their arrival in Mexico City, while another group welcomed them at the Nonoalco Station. In Mexico City they traveled to the Central House in carriage and then to the church of San Lorenzo where Fr. Ildefonso celebrated the Mass at eight o'clock. The church was filled with almost a thousand people who were members of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and other lay persons who were associated with the missionaries. The reception of communion was prolonged and there were not enough hosts. Two hundred-fifty persons had to wait for a second Mass that was solemnly celebrated by Fr. Arnáiz at nine-thirty in the morning. Fr Moral did not hide the immense joy that he experienced

² Concerning the critical situation and the negotiations see, VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *op. cit.*, I, chapter 11, “Seis Visitadores (1845-1891),” pp. 189-218; I, chapter 12, “Cuatro criticas y cuatro comisarios,” pp. 219-232.

³ VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *op. cit.*, I, p. 218.

as a result of meeting such a large group of lay people. Immediately he asked for detailed information about these Associations and these reports led him to direct these groups with joy and tireless zeal.

The Vincentian Lay Groups in Mexico

The Vincentian lay groups in Mexico have a very fortunate history. They were well received by the Mexican laity, by the archbishops and bishops and by the diocesan and religious clergy. Furthermore, very soon they became required in the parishes and, despite continual revolutionary threats during the 19th century, their steady growth surprised even the missionaries. Without a doubt it can be said that the missionaries were the founders of the Vincentian Associations but their propagators, and later their diocesan and local directors, were in large number members of the diocesan and religious clergy. *Las Memorias Anuales* of the Confraternities provide testimony to this fact by expressing over and over again their gratitude to the archbishops, bishops, pastors and chaplains spread throughout the Republic.

A group of Catholics led by Dr. Andrade (1809-1848) established the Confraternities of Blessed Ozanam between 15-22 December 1844 (a time when the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity had recently arrived). Even though this Association never attained more than 2,000 members, they struggled greatly to recruit members for their cause. Their work was frequently recognized and applauded by Fr. Ildefonso. In 1857 their quarterly publication, *Boletín*, appeared.

On 2 February 1862, Fr. Antonio Learreta and the Daughters of Charity established the first Association of the Daughters of Mary in El Colegio San Vicente in the city of Mexico. Soon this Association was spread to all the houses and works of the Daughters throughout the Republic. Due to the expulsion of the Daughters in 1875, the Holy See issued a rescript in 1877 that made the Visitors of the missionaries the canonical directors of the Association with the right to direct the existing groups and establish new groups with the consent of the bishops. The establishment of this Association in the parishes was the beginning of its great expansion and of its wonderful and well-merited history that has been written into the story of the Church of Mexico because of their witness of Christian life and their apostolate of catechesis and charity. In 1852 the first edition of their monthly bulletin appeared.

In February 1848, Fr. Juan Figuerola established the first Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity in Puebla. Later other missionaries did the same in their houses and on the missions. On 2 August 1863, the missionary, Fr. Francisco Muñoz de la Cruz, established the Confraternity in El Sagrario Metropolitano in the city of Mexico. This initiative was so successful among the pastors of the

city that in less than a year the Association was established in at least ten of the 12 city parishes. The Association in Toluca was extended to the neighboring towns. From the center of the country it began to spread out to Guadalajara and in 1864 was established in San Luis Potosí. This surprise enlivened the zeal of the missionaries and in the middle of 1868 a Central Council was established with a corresponding secretary. In July of the same year, the first General Assembly was convoked and the first number of *La Memoria* was printed and sent to the Associations, the houses of the Daughters of Charity and other strategic States of the Republic. The following year the Rule was published and this act created a foundation for the establishment of a National Association that experienced great expansion despite the obstacles of war. The national character of the Association would have another very important consequence for the theme that is dealt with in this article: the importance of the Visitors as Directors General of the Associations.⁴

The Lay Apostolate of Fr. Ildefonso

His pastoral ministry with the laity was centered on the following points: presiding at their general assemblies, giving doctrinal conferences and providing them with encouragement in their apostolate. He also gave their monthly or annual retreats and maintained continual communication with them through circular letters which were published in their bulletins. These letters gave them practical guidance in the areas of creating diocesan centers and the participation of the Marian youth in the works of the Confraternities of Charity. He also focused on frequent visits to the various Associations in order to draw closer to them and encourage them. He would visit the archbishops and bishops who gave much support to the Vincentian lay groups. We have just briefly outlined some of the salient characteristics of his immense pastoral ministry.

The Daughters of Mary: A Greeting of Peace

Perhaps the most beloved group and that which deserved all of his care was that of the Marian Youth. Fr. Moral was greatly concerned about the young people because, in his perception, they had to endure a secular education and environment that was promoted by the government through the reform laws which outlawed the Church and her institutions.

⁴ Concerning the history of the lay Vincentians in Mexico see VICENTE DE DIOS, *op. cit.*, I, chapters 29, 30 and 31; II, chapters 64, 65 and 66.

His first contact and presentation to this group was made through means of a circular letter dated 23 January 1892.⁵ This was directed to the Association that, according to the catalogue of 1891, had 12,500 members — the majority of whom were young people. Notice the greeting in his letter: *I greet you with the greeting of Jesus Christ: peace be with you!* (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19-21). Objectively speaking this greeting could be seen as communicating a message to the country where the *Porfirina Peace* concealed a continual hidden violence. This greeting could also be seen as a sign for the missionaries who had spent many years in anguish and worry. This message reflected the personality of the new Visitor and Director General of the Mexican Vincentian Family. Fr. Moral was a missionary with a deep interior life and as a result he was a person of interior and exterior peace. Therefore he goes deeper into the theme: *“According to St. Augustine, this peace of Jesus Christ perfects every action and all the intentions of those who possess this peace. This peace fills our hearts with joy and makes our hearts overflow with jubilation and holy joy because it illuminates the understanding with supernatural light which enables us to see all things in God. Only in God can our hearts find true happiness. This interior vision confirms the soul and the mind so that the individual seeks only God. This light of God’s grace, which gives supernatural life to our souls, unites us with his divine majesty and inclines the soul to love all things that the Lord loves and to abhor all that the Lord detests. The soul that is freed from a disordered love of self and all other creatures and the soul that is enriched with divine love is able to exclaim with the sacred joy of St. Theresa: ‘The one who loves God lacks nothing; God alone is sufficient.’ He then refers once again to St. Augustine: ‘Everyone desires peace but not everyone desires that which is necessary to acquire this peace.’”*⁶

The Marian Youth Group Supports the Confraternities of Charity

Aware of the numerous young people, who were active in the Association, and desiring to free them from the danger of a complacent and narcissistic piety, he wrote another circular letter to the Association and recommended that these young people, when they reached the age of 20 (without abandoning their membership in the Marian Youth Group) should join the Confraternity of Charity, so

⁵ *Boletín de las Hijas de María Immaculada (Bol. HMI)*, 1892, pp. 21-25.

⁶ Other themes that he touched on: “La sencillez,” Assembly of 31 May 1896, *Bol. HMI*, 1896, pp. 145-154; “La verdadera devoción,” Receiving the members of the Daughters of Mary in San Lorenzo, 8 December 1896, *Bol. HMI*, 1896, pp. 6-13; “La perfección cristiana,” General Assembly in San Lorenzo, 31 May 1898, *Bol. HMI*, 1898, pp. 204-212.

that in this way you might show, in a practical way, your love to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin... serving them, as much as possible in the person of the poor, especially those who are ill. He motivated them by citing Mt 25:36-40. He also made this same recommendation to the Daughters of Mary who were married.⁷ At the beginning of the 20th century this Association had 445 centers and 32,233 members — this number included aspirants.⁸

Encounter with the Confraternities of Charity

We have knowledge about these encounters because of *Las Memorias* of the Confraternities that have preserved nine conferences that were given by Fr. Moral. The first conference was given during the Assembly of 24 January 1893.⁹ The ninth conference was given during the Assembly of 31 December 1906 and then, because he was now seriously ill, this was the last Assembly at which he was able to be present.¹⁰ Of these nine conferences, two were dedicated to the life of St. Vincent, one to the origins of the Vincentian Confraternities, another to the origin and development of the Association in Mexico. In his conference of 1904, he spoke explicitly about the spirit of the Confraternities and his final intervention of 1906 was dedicated to the theme of the supremacy of charity and followed closely the text of the 13th chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The remainder of his conferences were variations on the messages contained in his conferences of 1904 and 1906. There was one constant in the conferences that Fr. Moral gave to the three Vincentian groups: God is the foundation and this God is essentially participative and communicative charity. Without distinction, Fr. Moral promoted the laity and the various pious associations, e.g., the Confraternity of the Holy Agony, the Archdiocesan Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, etc., because he saw that it was important for people to draw near to God and to live in God's grace. When speaking to the Vincentian Associations he was insistent on the fact that love is indivisible: those who love God must also love the neighbor and vice versa. He warned them of the danger of falling into the temptation of a piety that offered them solace through their participation in long ceremonies in which they were able to listen to soothing melodies and contemplate the Baroque adornments of the churches.

⁷ Circular Letter of 1 June 1892, *Bol. HMI*, 1892, pp. 101-108.

⁸ *Bol. HMI*, "Algo sobre las Hijas de María en la República Mexicana," 1902, p. 150.

⁹ *Memoria de las Cofradías de Caridad de SVP en México (Mem. 1892)*, pp. 3-24.

¹⁰ *Mem. 1906*, pp. III-XII.

When he first spoke to the Association there were 16,407 members divided into 38 Central Councils — 17 were diocesan groups (at the time there were 20 dioceses in Mexico)¹¹ and the remainder were autonomous councils with no diocesan character. In 1906, the last year in which he participated in their Assembly, their membership had risen to 39,912¹² with a presence in eight archdioceses and 20 dioceses, that is, they were present in every ecclesiastical jurisdiction except that of the Apostolic Vicariate of Baja California. There were also two autonomous central councils, one in Toluca and the other in Guanajuato.¹³

Encounter with the St. Vincent de Paul Society

We find the first mention of his encounters with the St. Vincent de Paul Society referred to in the Assembly of Sunday, 19 July 1896. *"From the time that I began to dwell in this land of Mexico, this is the sixth time that you have called me to preside at your assembly. Your practice of charity is very obvious and the proof of this is seen in a fact about which I want to remind you. Recently the Ladies of Charity, who cultivate this virtue of charity under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul published their annual bulletin. We read there that half of the monies collected by these associations come from Mexico. This is a powerful reality especially when we consider the fact that the circumstances and the present situation of the country are not very prosperous."*¹⁴

In the first assembly of 1898 which was held on the first Sunday of Lent, Fr. Ildefonso expressed once again his joy at being able to participate in these meetings: *"Mr. President, I have the great honor and joy to find myself with you and among the various people with whom I have lived in five parts of the world. I have never seen such faith and charity as I have found in this country. It is impossible then that God would abandon this nation that is so charitable. To see the works that are undertaken by the Conferences, over which you so worthily preside and to see the work that is done by the Ladies of Charity, one can only exclaim: 'Digitus Dei est hic!' (The hand of God is seen here!)."*¹⁵

¹¹ *Mem.* 1892, "Estados Generales, 1890-1891; 1891-1892."

¹² *Mem.* 1906, p. XI.

¹³ *Mem.* 1906, "Estado General de la Asociación 1905-1906"; cf. GUTIÉRREZ CASILLAS, S.J., *Historia de la Iglesia en México*, Ed. Porrúa, Mexico, 1974, pp. 336-341.

¹⁴ *Boletín de la Sociedad de SVP en México (Bol. SSVp)*, February 1897, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵ *Bol. SSVp*, April 1898, p. 101.

Reflecting on the gospel passage that refers to the temptations of Jesus, he explained the spiritual application of this passage, but also insisted on this social issue: *the greatest temptation that we experience today is that of secular schools.*¹⁶ Then he expressed his joy at seeing the presence of young men in the Assembly *who are engaged in learning charity from their elders.* He recommended that *they become concerned with founding educational institutions, learning from the work of nature, which continually reproduces and renews itself by the seed that is planted and cultivated with painstaking care.*¹⁷ Insisting on this theme he later stated: education and civil and religious schools *are in my judgment one of the most important realities because the Christian future of nations depends on the religious instruction of people from their infancy.*¹⁸ He concluded by saying: *This is a great work — a work par excellence.*¹⁹

In the Assembly that was held on 25 July 1897, he dealt with the theme of charity. He said that charity is freedom, soul, life, union, and grace. This was affirmed by St. Augustine, who also referred to charity as universal and undivided love. Charity is the source of holiness and gives meaning and wholeness to the apostolate. Charity is the source of happiness so that *as long as we dwell with God, God also dwells with us.*²⁰ God watches over his followers in such a way that the soul that is united to God is also watched over and cared for by God. God directs the events but the soul is not aware of this intervention and so attributes it to coincidence. But for Christians there is no such thing as coincidence. St. Teresa of Avila said: *Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes. Patient endurance attains all things. Whom God possesses nothing is wanting. Alone God suffices.*²¹ Everything leads to love. *Let us not forget that all the virtues lead to charity and if this does not happen then there is only the appearance of virtue. As the waters of the river flow out into the sea, so too, all the virtues lead to charity. St. Paul says that if we have faith but are lacking in charity then we are nothing.*²² Fr. Moral spoke of committed people in the apostolate who nevertheless lived in a vacuum and sadness. He said that they are *souls who are attached to exterior matters; they have no depth and for this reason they do not take advantage of these charitable acts. Let them examine themselves and purify themselves of their faults so that their*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁸ *Bol. SSVP*, 3 ép., April 1898, p. 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁰ *Bol. SSVP*, September 1897, p. 272.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 277; cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, Nos. 16-18.

*work of mercy might be fruitful. To state this positively: so that charity might be true charity it is necessary that the soul be in a state of friendship and grace with God.*²³ This is the road of faith and happiness and for this reason he said: *live a life of faith and the works you undertake will not be burdensome but very easy to carry out.*²⁴ For Vincentians there is a direct relationship between worship and service. *"I know of no other association like yours that is more appropriate to work out one's salvation. In other associations, the members dedicate themselves to the practice of excellent works, such as participating in great Church functions, truly something very meritorious, but this entails little work for those persons. As a result such works are not as advantageous as the works of those persons who are inspired by charity to go, not to entertain themselves with the sounds of harmonious music, not to see the churches beautifully adorned... rather you go tirelessly and listen to the needs of your suffering sisters and brothers. You go to see unclean insects, inseparable from misery, and, lastly, to place your intellectual faculties to procure, through all the means that charity inspires, the salvation of the persons assisted."*²⁵ He spoke to them about the virulence of the liberal press and the influence of the secular and prep schools and the young people who lose their faith. He asked them for their assistance in establishing an educational center that would provide people with good ideas and true knowledge.²⁶

Retreat Center and Shelter for the Poor Young Girls

During the decade of the 1890s a new class of wealthy persons immigrated to the south of the city where exclusive neighborhoods were built, for example, Juárez, Roma, Las Lomas de Chapultepec, etc. The poor lived in the northeast, in the area that today is known as Colonia Tepito. Artisans, workers, traveling salesmen, and small businessmen lived there. The unemployed and thieves sought shelter there. Vincentian literature and other sources of the time refer to this region as a zone of moral, educational and material misery. These sources describe the fear that was created there and the rejection that was experienced by those who walked the streets barefooted, ragged and filled with parasites.²⁷

²³ Assembly of the First Sunday of Lent, 27 February 1898, *Bol. SSVP*, April 1898, p. 106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁵ *Bol. SSVP*, September 1898, p. 260.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161 (261).

²⁷ JONHATAN KANDELL, *La capital. La historia de la ciudad de México*, Javier Vergara Editor, S.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1990, chapter 14, "El amo de México," pp. 366-376.

Between 1897-1898, Fr. Moral obtained 4200 square meters of land in this zone of misery and marginalization. This land was acquired at the cost of 4,000 pesos. According to the project that he had in mind, the land would be divided in the following way: 1200 square meters for the retreat house, 2700 for the shelter for the girls and 630 for the establishment of a public chapel that would be built in the center of the project. On 23 January 1899, two first stones were put in place and the construction of the two buildings was begun at the same time. A five-cent coin was buried beneath each of these stones — a symbol of the money that was on hand at the beginning of this ambitious project. From the beginning, the number of workers increased and decreased according to the resources that were at hand — but the work never stopped. In four years and nine months a two-story building (70 rooms) was completed. For some time the shelter remained with one floor.

On 18 November 1903, Archbishop Próspero María Alarcón blessed both buildings in the presence of Fr. Moral, the Daughters of Mary, and a select group of benefactors and friends. The Director General did not want noise or a large gathering of invited guests. From 16-25 December, Fr. Ildefonso directed the first retreat that was given to the members of the Central Council and the dignitaries of the groups of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, who came from the city and the surrounding area. As time progressed this same service was later provided to the clergy, seminarians and lay people.²⁸

On 8 September 1904, Fr. Moral blessed the image of Mary Immaculate and this image was placed in the retreat house.²⁹ It is possible that this was the last public act of his involvement with this project that was not yet completed. Contributions continued to enable him to complete this project and he dreamed of other projects: that the retreats would be given to the laity at no cost to them (except for some special cases); the acquisition of an adjoining piece of land where all the works of the Congregation could be located; and thus this center would become a permanent mission. This tireless, soft-spoken missionary, this missionary, who when dealing with the cause of the poor never stopped dreaming, began to become ill around the end of 1905 or the beginning of 1906. Finally, he found it impossible to leave his room because his legs could not sustain him any longer. He died on 13 November 1907.

²⁸ *Bol. HMI*, 1904, V.C.I., "Historia de la Casa de Ejercicios," pp. 169-174 and 202-204; *Bol. HMI*, 1905, p. 360; VICENTE DE DIOS, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, chapter 66, pp. 672-674 and 674-675.

²⁹ *Bol. HMI*, 1904, pp. 269-376.

The Work Continues

Despite the illness and the death of Fr. Ildefonso, the work of the shelter continued. The blessings and the inaugurations were multiplied as each floor of the building was completed. On 12 May 1907, Archbishop Alarcón blessed *La Escuela Gratuita* (the first floor) that was established for poor girls... *here the name of Fr. Moral was forever engraved as its illustrious founder.*³⁰

The Apostolic Delegate, Bishop José Ridolfi, was publicly invited by Fr. Daydí, director of the school (an invitation that was published in the Catholic newspaper *El País* on 24 July), to participate in the solemn blessing of the shelter for young girls. This blessing took place on 23 August 1908 and the work of this shelter was begun with 12 young girls living at the shelter (on the second floor of the building). Fr. Daydí's style was very evident in the blessing ceremony. A great celebration was organized³¹ and his lengthy discourse was published in the Catholic Newspaper, *El Tiempo*, on 29 September.

Fr. Daydí Speaks

Less than a year ago one could see walking on the streets of Mexico a priest of humble appearance, affable countenance and noble demeanor. This priest, whose name is on everyone's lips, was Rev. Ildefonso Moral, director of the admirable society of the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. He walked with quick steps and seemed to take in everything that passed around him and was obviously concerned with an idea. The Ladies of Charity had grown tremendously and did good work throughout the Republic. This humble priest and tireless fighter was a true father of the poor. The Ladies of Charity were indebted to him for their admirable organization and because of their structure they were numbered among the best in the world. The constant concern of this good son of St. Vincent de Paul was the needs of the poor. He worked for them; he devised ingenious combinations for them; he watched over them; he developed incredible activity for them. He knocked on the doors of the wealthy and begged alms for his beloved children: the poor. It must be stated that this good priest possessed the secret that allowed him to move the hearts of the wealthy from whom he was always able to obtain abundant assistance for those in need.

Gentlemen, we owe to him the initiative for the establishment of this house which we inaugurate today. The sad lot of the workers and their daughters who grew up in situations of poverty touched his heart.

³⁰ Bol. HMI., 1907, "Dia 12 de mayo de 1907," pp. 168-169.

³¹ Bol. HMI., October 1908, pp. 289-306.

He saw these poor people roaming idly through the streets of the capital. They needed bread, clothing, shoes and, even more sadly, they needed bread to nourish their souls — moral education. But instead they received unwholesome impressions and terrible example that, at an early age, led them to the ways of vice and corruption. How could the lot of these people be made better? This was the question that Fr. Moral anguished over without finding a satisfactory answer.

Gentlemen, charity does not know the meaning of the word impossible. Fr. Moral conceived the bold idea of establishing a house to gather together the greatest possible number of these poor girls — a place where they could be fed, clothed, educated and assured an honorable future.

When Fr. Moral thought of the idea of this magnificent work, what funds did he have at his disposal? I will tell you, but before I do so, I beg you not to laugh! When this good priest set out with Christian boldness to make this work a reality he had in hand a donation of “un real y medio,” a donation that had been given to him.

If Fr. Moral were a financier, he would surely have been sent to an insane asylum because of this project. But Fr. Moral was not a financier, but a priest of Jesus Christ and a son of the apostle of charity, St. Vincent de Paul, and, gentlemen, charity does not calculate with the mind, but only consults with the heart, and the heart of this good priest was great and embraced the needs and miseries of all those who suffered.

Very soon, gentlemen, that “real y medio” became fruitful through the warmth of charity and was watered with the tears of suffering. It soon was changed into cement and walls and classrooms. Noble and humble souls generously opened their hands and through their donations assisted this humble priest. Some people generously donated the land and others assisted him with building materials. Some people endorsed this work with large sums of money and thus the workers were able to be paid... and the miracle of this charity became a reality for we have before our eyes this building which has been constructed to lodge these poor girls.

This was the final charitable work of Fr. Moral. In the final years of his life, he concentrated all his effort and love to the realization of this project. This work was in the forefront of his mind and he spoke about it to anyone who would listen to him.

One day Fr. Moral greeted me with obvious joy: “God is good!” he told me, “God is good! He just sent me a great donation. This has come at a most convenient time, since I had no more funds for the project!” And, as though there were some remorse for the joy that he felt, he added with the liveliness that was unique to him: “I want nothing for myself... nothing... nothing! I need nothing! Everything is for the poor!”

As he lay on his deathbed and suffered the cruel pains of the illness which led him to his grave, Fr. Moral always thought of this house and made a thousand plans that he wanted to accomplish.

One morning when I entered his poor and very small room I asked him: "How do you feel Fr. Moral?" "I feel better, Father; I feel better, thanks to God. Sit down and let us talk for a while. Look, they tell me they are finishing the work on the house. Go and look at it! Go and look at it! One of these days when I have a little more strength, we will go together to look at the house.... Right now, I cannot go because my legs will not allow me to move. When I stand up, I fall.... Look, this house is a great concern of mine. It is near completion, that is, we now have a cage, but... how are we going to feed the birds? How are we going to sustain the poor children?... we have no funds!"... I said: "Do not worry about this, Fr. Moral, do not worry. God will provide just as he has provided up to the present time. What funds did you have when you began this work? And, beginning to laugh, the good elder said, Real y medio!"... "It is true God will provide; God will provide! This is his work; this is his work!... God has raised it up and God will sustain it!"...³²

The Missionaries Crown the Work

The missionaries of the Central House gave themselves to the task of finishing the work of Fr. Moral. Fr. Daydí was put in charge of this work — a different style but the same spirit. Daydí had a modern vision of social relationships and how to complete the work of his Visitor and friend. On 9 August 1909, with a group of priests from the community, some members of the Confraternities of Charity, and with some businessmen and their financing, the *Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada* was established with an initial financing of 50,000 pesos. The objective of this undertaking was to direct the production of the Workshop House Shelter and to bring about the commercialization of the shelter in cooperation with some of the large commercial businesses. Another step was taken on 19 August of the same year when the Confraternity of Charity of St. Philomena was established. While all of this was happening the Poor Girls' Shelter of St. Vincent de Paul received 115 young women who boarded there and 315 others who traveled there and attended the public school. A group of 75 of these girls was selected and trained in the use of the machinery and the means of production in small industries, such as, lace work, embroidering and sewing, washing, ironing and folding.

³² *Bol. HMI*, 1908, pp. 290-293.

Last Solemn Blessing: Third Floor

On 24 February 1910 the new Archbishop of Mexico, José Mora y del Río, a champion of Catholic social action, as expressed in *Rerum Novarum*, blessed the third floor where the workshops were installed.³³ This was another great celebration. Fr. Álvarez, C.M. (Visitor), missionaries, priests associated with the Confraternities of Charity, the Minister from Spain, members of the Cooperative Society, representatives of the Catholic Workers' Union,³⁴ workers and families of the young girls, members of high society, participated in this celebration. After a brief festival that was organized by the children, Bishop Mora y del Río went up to the third floor and pushed a button that started all the machinery. The missionaries had more than fulfilled the expectations of their Visitor and guide, in the province, for 16 years.

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

³³ *Fiesta de la caridad. Los hijos de San Vicente están de plácemes*, report of the newspaper *El Tiempo*, in its edition of 21 February 1910, reprinted in the *Bol. HMI*, April 1910, pp. 122-128.

³⁴ Concerning the Unión Católica de Obreros: CEBALLOS RAMÍREZ MANUEL, *La Encíclica Rerum Novarum y los trabajadores en la ciudad de México (1891-1913)*, Col. Diálogo y autocrítica, n. 2, Imdosoc, México, 1986, 41 pp.