

Concept of Redemption: Development of Redemptive Works Initiated By John De Matha and “The Trinitarians”

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I. Introduction

The Scripture, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, present God as a liberator and Redeemer. The people of Old Testament experienced Yahweh as *go'el* in their exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, to a land promised by Yahweh Himself, a land flowing with honey and milk, a land of freedom and joy. In the New Testament Jesus Christ through the message, ministry and mission revealed Himself to be the Redeemer. His preferential option for the poor and oppressed of the society manifested itself in the way of his praxis and culminated in his death and resurrection. The tradition of the Catholic Church presents lives of men and women who responded to the redemptive mission of God in their own space and time; but my particular concentration will be on John de Matha, a master of theology at the University of Paris. He accepted the challenging call /role of the Redeemer-God to continue His redemptive mission by ransoming the captives of his time.

John de Matha grew up in a time when Europe was undergoing a lot of changes. The transitions affected both the Church and society. At the Church level, the Christians were seeking inspiration in their past and there was a special attraction to the primitive church in the Acts. The Holy Spirit used this occasion to make Him heard in the Church. We see in history, some religious returned to the origins of their existence and also the birth and development of new forms of religious life. There were also attempts on the part of the laity to find their own path in the Church. A great impact of 12th Century was a charitable-social concern as an ingredient of spirituality. Charity became a means to have access to salvation and holiness for laity. The laity were discovering in charity a program for their spirituality and salvation. There were increased donations to the church. No wonder that John de Matha through his new initiative succeeded in influencing a good number of lay people to collaborate with the work of redemption as the Order was born in this epoch of history.

It was a feudal society: a static pyramidal society of nobles, vassals, servants, slaves and captives. There was an eruption into the society of the first middle class of merchants, traders, artisans, etc. They introduced a new vision of church, society, man and history. If charity and redemption became two lungs of our existence it is because John de Matha was truly motivated and animated by the Spirit and he discerned what God's purpose was for sending him to the earth, reading the signs of time in Church and society. The Order's spirit, purpose and life-style stem "from the root of charity." Pope Innocent III, in his Bull "*Operante divine dispositionis*" of December 17, 1198 wrote: *Placed, as We are, at the summit of the Apostolic See by the efficacious mercy of God, it is our duty to lend our support to upright desires, and make them effective when they stem from the root of charity, especially in the case where what is sought are the interests of Jesus Christ and the common good is preferred to personal gain.*

John de Matha was moved by the personality of Jesus from his early childhood and as we journey through his life we come across many occasions where he found time to be alone with Jesus present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. It was during his first Holy Eucharistic celebration that he was deeply immersed in an encounter with the person of Christ and that transformed his life. He found time to retire to the woods to discern God's will for him and with the help of St. Felix and other hermits, the project of the Trinitarians was actualized. The life of Jesus challenged John so much that he dedicated his life to follow Christ radically by giving up his prestigious position in the Paris University. He imbibed the qualities of Jesus. *Christ the Lord, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself and took the form of a slave, he humbled himself by being obedient to death, even death on a cross* (Phil 2, 6-7), prompted by the message of Jesus John de Matha wrote in the Rule: "*The Brothers of the House of the Holy Trinity are to live in obedience to the prelate of their house – who shall be called Minister – in chastity and without personal possessions.*" (Rule 1).

Jesus was totally dependent on his Father and he said: "*Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow, they do not harvest nor do they store food in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than birds?*" (Mat 6, 26) and "*Truly I say to you: whenever you did this to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.*" (Mat 25, 40). Interiorizing the message of Jesus, John de Matha wrote in the Rule: *All the things, from whatever lawful source they may come, the Brothers are to divide into three equal parts. In so far as two parts will be sufficient, they are to provide for carrying on the works of mercy, as well as provide*

for a moderate sustenance for themselves and the required domestics. The third part is to be reserved for the ransom of captives who are incarcerated for the faith of Christ by pagans (Rule 2). God is the author of life and He knows what His children need. He provides for them with great generosity. We, as his children, need to bring glory to him through our life. While going through the history of the Order, I was stuck by a number of instances where John De Matha found it difficult to advance due to the obstacles that came his way but he placed his trust in the providence of God and God's providence never failed. Many were attracted to the way of life initiated by him and a good number of laity, realizing the relevance of the heroic mission of John de Matha, came forward to help him spiritually, physically, psychologically and financially. The Order faced all odds and challenges of the past eight centuries and still continues to bring glory to the Trinity through the redemptive mission: seeing Jesus in the broken, shattered, imprisoned, persecuted, addicted, ignorant, etc...

The mission of Jesus is enumerated: *“Be like the Son of Man who has come not to be served but to serve and give his life to redeem many.”*(Mt: 20, 28). It is the same mission of Jesus embarked by John de Matha and what distinguishes the Trinitarians from other religious Orders or Congregations is this mission: *“For the sake of the up building of the Church, the members of the Order share their lives with each other, consecrated themselves in a special way to the Trinity and take Christ the Redeemer as their primary model”* (Constitutions No, 1). The redemptive mission of Jesus was a fascination for John de Matha, so he wanted his followers to continue the same mission. *“Since God the Father, in the economy of our salvation, willed to reveal himself to us through the Son and the Holy Spirit, one and the same bond unites the Brothers equally to the Blessed Trinity and to Christ the Redeemer. This fact prompted our forefathers to take Christ the Redeemer as their model and, following his example with love and dedication, they carried out works of mercy, redeemed slaves with heroic virtue and cared for the sick, even who at times were afflicted with pestilence and constituted a risk to their very lives. And so, let our Brothers zealously strive to be as intensely compassionate as Christ the Redeemer; let them meditate constantly on the mystery of his passion.”*(Constitutions No, 51). Deeply committed to the Church and its mystery, the Brothers of the Trinitarian Order will share fully in that redemptive mission which the Lord Jesus received from his Father through the Holy Spirit, as it is stated in the Gospel: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of the sight to the blind and release to prisoners”* (Lk: 4, 18) (Constitutions 64).

This article will also examine how John de Matha and his followers who are called ‘The Trinitarians’ carry out the redemptive work in spite of the many vicissitudes down through the centuries.

II. Europe And The Mediterranean World In The 12th And 13th Centuries

The 12th century saw the western world divided into two great spheres. On the one side was the Christendom and on the other side was Islam. The two powers had been warring for centuries for the religious and political domination of the Mediterranean world. By the second half of the 12th century, the Muslims had conquered a vast area of the Mediterranean world and reached up to the gates of Constantinople. Westward they conquered Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, one half of Spain and the Balearic Islands. As these, once Christian lands had become Muslim regions, Christianity could not help but feel threatened by the successful militancy of Islam, which was now poised to assault what was left of the Byzantine Empire, the other half of Spain and Italy.¹

Crusades were the counter attack by Christianity to check the military advance of Islam. The primary aim of the Crusades was “the liberation of the Holy Land and the defences of the Christians and the Christian faith.” The crusades were truly religious and military expeditions which were summoned by Popes, solicited by itinerant preachers with the cry “*Deus vult*” (It is willed by God) and undertaken by European princes and kings from the end of the 11th century and through the 12th and 13th centuries. Although the crusades involved numerous factors besides religious, the religious motive was the main spring and most important sustaining element in these so-called “Holy Wars” against Islam. Without the religious ingredient, however, there would have been no crusades.²

Another interesting aspect is the emergence of a number of Military Religious Orders, whose primary purpose was the armed defences of the faith in the Holy Land and any Christian country threatened by the Muslims. These Military Orders lived a life of vowed chastity, poverty and obedience with military service. An allied ministry of the most of the Military Orders was the establishment of hospices and hospitals for assisting the pilgrims, the sick and the poor. Sporadically, the Military Orders ransomed Christian captives, especially members of their Orders or when militarily advantageous.

The 12th and 13th centuries witnessed significant socio-economic developments. The rise of nationalism destroyed the commonality of Christian faith, which held Europe together. The Crusades gave a great boost to trade and commerce across the Mediterranean. The old feudal society began to give way to a new socio-economic order, wherein trade and commerce displaced land ownership as the primary source of wealth. Trade and commerce contributed to the development of the great commercial cities of Europe, such as Milan, Paris,

Venice, Marseille, Barcelona, etc. Another by-product of trade and commerce was the development of a strong middle class that, besides controlling the economy, exerted considerable political power.

The contacts of the merchants and crusaders with the splendour and the riches of the Byzantine and Muslim East injected into the European society a taste for luxury, sensuality and a general fever for money. These factors, fanned by humanistic notions and the corruptions of the clergy, affected the religious and moral fabric of western society and produced a kind of neo-paganism that enervated whatever was left of the austere religiosity of the Carolingian era. The extraordinary emphasis and prominence given to the veneration of the saints, the Virgin Mary and relics gradually displaced Christ as the centre of worship and promoted an undue desire for the material aspects of religion.

Within the Church, the general tendency of the secular clergy was to enhance their authority and acquire maximum wealth and riches. The simoniac activity, the nepotism and the anti-celibacy abuses, which the Gregorian Reformation by Pope Gregory VII (1073 – 1085) vigorously curbed for a while, were again rampant among the clergy, both high and low. Similarly, most of the traditional religious Orders also exhibited a marked tendency for luxurious life, which very well reflected in their buildings, manner of dress and food. The abbots or superiors of the abbeys and monasteries were political princes and they had a large number of common people as their vassals. There was frequent tension between the rich ecclesiastical institutions and the civil authorities on the mass of poor subjects.³

Another important aspect noteworthy of this period is the emergence of a number of sects and heresies, such as, the Catari, the Waldensians, the Albigensians, Peter Abelard, Joachim of Fiore, etc. Almost all these heretical movements rejected the dogma of the Trinity, Eucharist and Redemption and condemned the great wealth and absolute power of the Church and the luxurious life style of the clergy.⁴ In such a context, to confront the pervasive worldliness of society and the corruption within the Church God awoke several religious groups and deeply rooted personalities: the Order of Grandmont, the Cartusians, the Cistercians, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Poor Catholics, the Trinitarians, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Mercedarians and various pauperistic movements. These groups and individuals, imbued with a strong evangelical spirit of poverty and simplicity, beckoned the Church and society to reform.

The greatest social scourge that afflicted the Christian world throughout the 12th and 13th centuries was perhaps, the large number of Christians that were being held captive by the Muslims. This was a consequence of the long and bitter contest, which was waged between Christian and the Muslim worlds. Throng of Christians from all regions of Europe left family and home to enlist in the Lord's wars, better known as the Crusades. Many of those who enlisted never returned. Those who died in battle were seen as having died for a holy cause and having received their crown of eternal glory. However, the thousands of Christians who were captured by the enemy of the faith could only look to future of endless sufferings either as captives of cruel masters or as slaves. Valued as saleable merchandise and cheap labour, they were routinely exposed on the slave markets of southern Spain, North Africa or the Near East. Christendom could find no easy way to eliminate or alleviate this social scourge until John de Matha and the Order of the Most Holy Trinity that he found made the ransom of Christian captives their cause and dedicated their lives and resources to it.⁵

III. John De Matha And The Beginnings Of The Trinitarians

Every authentic prophet is chosen by God for a precise mission. God himself sends him, making him see and know, through his Spirit, with strength and clarity, the divine will and his plan. John de Matha was a God-sent prophet who could see and know and thus read the signs of his time and respond to it proactively. We will see how courageously he incarnated the Scriptural theme of Redemptive-Liberation by founding the Trinitarian Order, drafting its Rule of life and giving it charismatic apostolic orientations. The aforementioned analysis of the geo-political, socio-economical, and religious and moral conditions of the 12th and 13th centuries revealed to us how urgent and relevant was the response of John de Matha. His untiring zeal for the redemption of the captives and the works of mercy makes him a 'redeemer' of his time. This charismatic legacy of John de Matha is embraced by every 'Trinitarian' and they incarnate the Redemptive love to the humanity reading the signs of the time.

III.1. John de Matha (1150 – 1213)

The charismatic visionary who conceived the idea of ransoming Christian captives and founding the Order of the Holy Trinity and of the Captives for this purpose was John de Matha, a master of theology at the University of Paris. We are not quite sure about the date and the place of birth of John de Matha or his early life that there are no contemporary biographies. The existing biographies written up to the beginning of the 20th century are devoid of serious historical criticism.⁶

If we accept the age of sixty as an approximation, which the respected historical Robert Gaguin assigned to John de Matha at the time of his death (1213), John's birth took place around the year 1153. It is more likely, however, that John de Matha was born in 1150, since, by statutes of University of Paris, he had to

be thirty-five years old in 1185, the year he became a doctor of theology.⁷ Gaguin and other writers state that John was from the region of Provence. About the family background of John de Matha also we are not very certain. A 17th century tradition identifies his parents as Eupheme or Eugene de Matha, a baron, and Martha de Fenouillet, a woman from a well-to-do family of Marseille. John's academic and professional orientation reveal that the de Matha family was socio-economically privileged, because only the sons of the rich and nobles had the opportunity of receiving a university education in the 11th and 12th century.

As a child in Provence, John must have heard many sad stories about people being carried away by marauding Saracens, the miseries that the Saracens inflicted on the Christian captives as well as seeing the Muslim slaves which the Christians captured in reprisal. In the words of the historian Deslandres: “There is no doubt that John, from his very adolescence, felt a desire to dedicate his life to the extraordinary task of ransoming captives, or, still better, to the exchange of captives between the two opposite shores of the Mediterranean.”⁸

Later, as a scholastic in Paris, he could not escape being deeply aware of the socio-political and religious problems of the day. These included the sad consequences of the ongoing armed confrontation between Islam and Christianity, the failures of the crusades and the horrible plight of Christian captives. No Christian nation of those days was immune to the sad consequences of battling with the Muslims. But Provence and other regions that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea were afflicted more than other areas with raids, plundering and seizures of people that the Saracens carried out from the coasts of North Africa. Therefore, it is not surprising that a man in Provence should have had the idea founding a religious Order dedicated to the ransom of Christian captives.

After attaining the doctorate in theology from the University of Paris, he taught under Maser Prevostin of Cremona. Since, as we have said, a doctoral candidate had to be at least 35 years old before attaining a doctorate, John's teaching carrier at the University of Paris can be placed between 1185 to 1195.⁹

III.2. An Extraordinary Event

The event which led John de Matha to found the Order of the Holy Trinity and of the Captives (Trinitarians) for the ransom of captives was an extraordinary vision of Christ the Lord that he experienced on January 28, 1193, during the celebration of his first Mass in Paris. This experience is authenticated by sources that are reliable, contemporary and external to the Order of the Holy Trinity and of the Captives.

Pope Innocent III is the first to allude to said extraordinary experience. In the prologue to the Trinitarian Rule, the pope writes: “Indeed, my beloved son in Christ, Brother Minister John, some time ago you approached us and took pain to humbly indicate to us your project, which is believed to have originated by divine inspiration.”¹⁰ After the death of the Founder, Pope Honorius III in his letter of February 9, 1217, almost verbatim repeated the words of Innocent III: “Indeed, when Brother John, your deceased Minister, long ago presented himself to our late predecessor, Pope Innocent II, he humbly proceeded to indicate to him his project, which is believed to have originated by inspiration....”¹¹

A 13th century writer clearly vouches for the extraordinary event that led John de Matha to establish the Order in the following manner:

*As the time approached (for Master John of Provence) to celebrate his first Mass, he asked the Lord to show him what Order he should join... On the day of the celebration, all important figures of Paris were present for the occasion. During the Mass, when he got to the secret part of the Mass, he begged the Lord to show him what Order he should enter for his salvation, if God so willed. So, when he lifted his eyes to heaven, he saw the majesty of God holding by hand two men chained at their legs; one was black and misshapen, the other white and emaciated.*¹²

A magnificent circular mosaic, created around the year 1210, at a time when both John de Matha and Innocent III were still alive, provides a graphic image of the *signum*- the inspirational sign-seen by John de Matha during his first Mass.¹³ The mosaic encrypts the vision of our founder in its richness. John de Matha did not want to limit the magnificent vision he received during his first mass (that is to say the charism of the Order) into mere words therefore, through the means of a mosaic he had left a heritage to the Order which cannot be ignored by any of its members. Above all it leaves a greatest responsibility to each of us to reflect upon the message it leaves to our social and cultural context. St. John de Matha was a great visionary of his time; that is why he could grasp the meaning of the vision in its fullness beyond barriers of race, language and culture. St. John a radical follower of his Master had taken human thinking to a whole new level even in the 12th century.¹⁴

The red circle and all within it represent the universe. A world that is filled with Christ, that is to say nothing can escape from the presence of Christ. Even a single minute matter is filled with Christ, so too a Muslim who is yet to realise that he too is in the world of Christ. But we are to spot that one of his feet seems to be outside the circle, which indicates that there is a movement towards Christ that has not reached in its fullness. We must observe that two persons are placed equally side by side of Christ. It is to show the equality among the humans. There should not exist discrimination among men due to race, language and culture. The picture of

Christ is three times bigger than the two captives placed on the sides of Christ, it symbolises the Trinity in the person of Christ. It reminds us of the Johanine theology which teaches us “whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn 14: 9) The throne where Christ seated is *cathedra* symbolising the throne of emperor which signifies *cathedra of justice*. We see two columns on which the throne of Christ is placed. There are five blocks in each of them which again contain five points in each of them. These five blocks on the columns signifies the Ten Commandments and the five points in each of them signify the five wounds of Christ. The place where the feet of Christ are placed symbolises the earth which reminds us of the Old Testament that says “the earth is my footstool”. (Is 66:1). Interestingly we find the cross the true throne of Christ in the seal, we could note 4 dots or 4 point on the horizontal and vertical to represent the cross the true throne of Christ. It is an image of Christ which transcends our thinking and takes us to a whole new level of thinking.¹⁵

The two captives on the sides of Christ are bound by chains. The Christian offers no resistance against Christ but leaves his hand freely to Christ. On the contrary the Muslim a bit rebellious to Christ and makes an attempt to withdraw his hand from Christ. This offers us three good reasons to be sure that it is a Christian: firstly the cross, secondly the hand and finally the chain that is bound to the throne of Christ. It is to be noted that chain of the Christian is opened but at the same time chain of the Muslim is bound to him and closed. The colours in the vestment of Christ signify his divinity and the humanity of Christ. The vestment of Christ has a characteristic of a stole used by a deacon which imparts a message Christ who is at the service of humanity. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10: 45) God assumes humanity in order to serve the humanity that is known as *kenosis* “but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” (Phil 2: 7).¹⁶

This heavenly sign became the seal of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives for the Redemption of Captives. This can be seen in the seals, which John himself used in the contracts and writings of 1203. The seal of the Ministers of the Order represents this vision: the Redeemer between two captives, one white and the other is black. Also the epitaph engraved on the tomb wherein the mortal remains of John de Matha were buried on December 21, 1213 bears the words: “...the Order of the Most Holy Trinity was founded by Brother John through a sign from God.”¹⁷

III.3. Approval of the Trinitarians by Pope Innocent III

The 12th and 13th centuries were the times when the power of the papacy was at its climax, the tension between Christianity and Islam was most intense, and the problem of the Christian captives was felt more strongly than ever within the church and society. John de Matha must have appeared as a God-sent prophet, when he presented himself to Pope Innocent III a few months after his election and expounded his project of founding a religious Order primarily committed to the ransoming of Christian captives. The pope liked this idea and he extended papal protection to the members and properties of the new community through his letter *Cum a nobis petitur* on May 16, 1198, even though it had not yet been officially recognized as such.¹⁸

From the letter dated December 17, 1198, we learn that John met with the Pope sometime during the spring of the year and the Pope postponed the approval of the new Order until he had learned more about John’s project. For this reason, the Pope sent back John to Paris with letters for Eudes de Sully, bishop of Paris (1196 – 1208), and Absalon, abbot of St. Victor (1198-1203). Both of them were asked to give more information about John’s motivation for the project, its usefulness, organization of Order’s members.

John met the Pope again in December with the sought reports and information and on the same month 17th 1198, the Pope issued the letter *Operante Divine Dispositionis* by which he approved the new Order and its Rule. The document addressed “to our beloved sons, Minister John and the Brothers of the Holy Trinity,” states the following reasons for approving John’s project: “it proceeds from the root of charity, it promotes the common good, and it seeks the Lord’s interest rather than any personal profit.”¹⁹

III. 4. Documented Activity of the Founder

John de Matha obtained three more letters of papal protection and privileges, before he actually began the ransoming works and establishing new houses. The letter dated January 4, 1199, reaffirmed the papal protection over the Order’s members and properties. The second letter of February 3, 1199 is a consistorial letter, which granted to the Order all the privileges, immunity and tax exemption enjoyed by other religious institutes. The third letter of March 8, 1199, is in essence, a letter of credentials that the Pope addressed to the King of Morocco, Abu Add Allah Muhammad al- Nasir, called Amir alMu’minim (Chief of the Believers). *Among the deeds of mercy recommended to his faithful by our Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, not the least place he assigned to the ransom of Captives. For this reason, we feel obliged to bestow our apostolic favour on those who engage in such and undertaking. Indeed, some men, among whom are the bearers of this letter, not long ago were divinely inspired to found and Order and (write) its Rule... Moreover, ... because it is often easier to free (someone) from captivity through an exchange rather than by an outright ransom payment, they have*

been authorized to ransom pagan captives from Christian (masters) and to exchange them for Christian captives awaiting ransom.²⁰

Two consistorial letters, the *Operante Patre luminum* of June 21, 1209, and the *Inter cetera beneficia* of July 12, 1209, close the series of extant letter that Innocent III addressed to John de Matha. The first letter lists 21 houses of the Order as having his patronage. The second letter indicates his diligent review of the Rule, his pleasure in seeing that the new Order “had extended its branches from sea to sea,” and the donation of the house of St. Thomas in Formis in Rome. After accepting the house of St. Thomas in Formis (formerly a Basilian or Benedictine abbey), the Founder made it his residence and remained there as Minister of the house and Major Minister of the Order until his death. There he opened a hospice-hospital and, around the year 1210, placed over the entry a large mosaic representing the vision he had experienced during his first Mass.²¹

There are no indications that John de Matha was personally involved in establishing other new foundations or that he undertook expeditions after moving to St. Thomas in Formis. As a Trinitarian breviary of the 16th century informs us, the Founder spent the last years of his life in intense prayer and penance, encouraging his religious to carry out ransoming missions and assist the crusaders, especially the wounded. The Order had about 30 foundations, at the time of the Founder’s death. All those houses were active in the ransoming of Christian captives, at least by collecting funds. Many of the houses had hospices and/or hospitals attached. Most had also churches.

According to tradition, John de Matha died on December 17, 1213, on the 15th anniversary of the approval of the Order, at St. Thomas in Formis. The epitaph placed on his tomb shows that he was buried four days later:

*In the year of the Lord’s incarnation 1197, during the first year of the pontificate of the Lord Pope Innocent III, on December 17, the Order of the Holy Trinity and of the Captives was founded by Brother John with a proper Rule granted to him by the Apostolic See. The same Brother John was buried in this place on December 21, in the year of the Lord 1213.*²²

IV. The Features Of The Trinitarian Rule

The Trinitarian Rule is a fundamental document for understanding anything said or written about its Founder, the Order and its apostolic activity. Since it is the only book written by him that we have, the study of it is essential in understanding the personality and mind of John de Matha. Moreover, it is the most important document that enshrines the charism, the spirituality, the communitarian life and the ransoming action of the Trinitarian Order. In addition, the Trinitarian Rule holds a unique place not only in the history of religious Orders but also in the development of religious life. Its uniqueness is that it added fresh impetus to the trend of combining active with religious life, a trend already began by the Hospitaller and Military Orders during the middle of 12th century.

The uniqueness of the Trinitarian Rule consists in making the ransom of Christian captives the specific and primary apostolate of the Order. The mandate in the Rule to set apart one third of all income and revenues that comes to the Order for the ransom of captives reveals the intensity of the Order’s commitment to this apostolate. The other two thirds, as the Rule puts it: *Insofar as two parts will be sufficient, they are to provide for carrying on the works of mercy, as well as provide for a moderate sustenance for themselves and the required domestics.*²³ “This tangible investment in favour of charity was a practice proper to the Trinitarian redeemers, as it deeply affected the economy of all their houses. We can indeed say that it was an exclusive peculiarity of the Trinitarian Order, for there are no traces of it in Rules of other religious Orders.”²⁴ The second article of the Rule makes clear the heart of the Founder on this mathematical division. The article mandated the Brothers to refuse any offering from donors who would not allow setting apart a third part for the ransom of captives. With regard to the works of mercy, the Rule specifically singled out the gracious reception of guests, the proper care of the sick, assistance to the poor, and the sheltering of the wayfarers who came knocking at the doors of the hospice-hospital of the Order.

The ransoming activity and the works of mercy are to be understood as a radical “obedience to the conviction of Jesus that the goodness and justice of God cannot reign among men, without defending the abandoned, the oppressed and the disinherited and cast out, without struggling for those who have no other defender.”²⁵

V. Trinitarian Apostolic Orientations: The Ransom Of Captives And The Works Of Mercy

At the outset itself, we need to clarify the notion of captivity, which is totally different from that of the notions of slavery and feudal servitude. The society and the Church of the Middle Ages had accepted the two institutions of slavery and feudal servitude. Juridically speaking, a slave was a person who was born in the social state of slavery or who had been cast into such a state. A captive was usually a prisoner of war or someone who had been forcibly sequestered by a hostile party and had not yet been cast into slavery or servitude. The norms regulating slavery and servitude were clearly codified in medieval law. On the contrary, a

captive's condition implied the arbitrary loss of human rights and the privileges that were proper to the person or to his/her rank.

Since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, there had been constant fight between Muslims and Christians. The sad consequence of this warring was the rise in the number of captives in both camps. Many a time the Muslims were victorious and thousands of Christians were made captives. The Christian world as well as the Muslim world agonized over the physical suffering inflicted on these captives, who were also seen in danger of losing their faith. Other sources of captives were the increased activity of navigation and commerce, the frequent raids effected by pirates on coastal towns of Christian countries and the seizure of people, especially young men and women who were sources of profit and means of satisfying the demands for cheap labour and pleasure.

The sensitivity of the Christian world for the plight of the Christian captives boosted the rise of organizations that committed to their liberation and redemption. The Military Orders like the Order of the Holy Sepulcher (1110), the Order of St. John in Jerusalem (1113), the Templars (1119), the Tontonic Order of St. Mary (ca. 1190) and many others had been relatively active in the ransoming of Christian captives since the last decade of the 12th century.²⁶ But their primary purpose was to combat Islam and arrest advance by military means. Most of the time these Military Orders tried to retrieve its members who had been captured by the enemy. However, because of their ability to carry out ransoms and their being positioned along the Christian-Muslim frontiers, the Military Orders were occasionally requested to ransom other Christian captives too. In general, the ransoming activities of the Military Orders were selective. Another widespread activity of the Military Order was the running of hospice-hospitals, where they cared for their wounded and sick members. They also engaged in works of mercy such as giving arms to the poor, offering hospitality to travellers and pilgrims and assisting the local sick.

The Military Order could be said to be the forerunners of the Trinitarian Order, in many respects. “The Trinitarians, however, were the first to present the Christian world with a totally non-military approach to Islam and to devise a systematic plan for confronting and alleviating the problem of captivity.”²⁷ Their programme of action was quite simple and logical: first of all they would carry out an intensive fund raising activity; secondly, a group of Trinitarian ransomers, equipped with safe-conducts for travelling through foreign or hostile countries, would undertake ransoming expeditions to Muslim regions; thirdly, once there, they ransomed as many Christian captives as possible through the payment of sums of money or by exchanging Muslim captives for Christian ones; and finally, they would bring the freed captives to the nearest hospice-hospital of the Order, where captives, especially the sick, would be cared for until they were able to return to their families.

The ransoming of Christian captives through the payments of ransom was very effective. Paradoxically, however, it proved counter-productive. The certainty of an eventual ransom prompted the Muslim to hold for ransom as many Christians as they could seize.

The mandate in the Trinitarian Rule to set apart one third of all goods and revenues, clearly indicated the Order's radical commitment to the world of ransom. The participants or the ransomers included the Ministers of the Order, the procurators for the ransom, the fundraisers, the promulgators of indulgences, the preachers, and the announcers of the upcoming ransom expeditions. Besides these members of the Order, an endless number of other persons- clerics and lay, single and married- took part in the ancillary activities which preceded, accompanied and followed the actual ransoming operations. However, the most outstanding collaborators in the ransoming activity of the Order were the members of the Trinitarian Confraternity.

Generally, most of the Trinitarian houses had hospices-hospitals attached to it for the care of the local sick, the poor and the wayfarers. Usually, the hospice-hospital could accommodate twelve and rarely more than twenty-five. The entire responsibility of its administration rested upon the minister and the house chapter. The staff usually included one or two Brothers, the Sisters, some *donati* and/or *donatae* (lay men and women who had given themselves and their possessions to the Order), the *converse* (lay persons or clerics who, wishing to live and intensely Christian or penitential life or to strengthen their spiritual conversion, embraced a life of prayer and penance in a monastery), and the household workers.²⁸ The economy of any hospice-hospital depended on the two thirds of the gross income of the community as well as by contributions given specifically for the benefit of the hospice-hospital. There is no evidence of medical doctors being present in these institutions. The many hospice-hospitals that were managed by the Trinitarians during the first half-century of the Order's history prove that the hospice-hospital ministry was an integral part of the Order's original apostolate.

VI. The Golden Period Of The Trinitarian's History (1213-1314)

The period between 1213 and 1314 can be rightly called the golden era of the Order's history for the following reasons: the first hundred years after the death of the founder was characterized by preserving the fidelity to the charism of the founder, rapid expansion of the Order, steady endorsement by the Popes, and a large patronage from kings, bishops, princes and other influential individuals. The challenging life style, the

ransoming activities and service to the poor and the sick invited much attention and cooperation from outside the Order. As a result, the confraternity grew, the number of benefactors, both lay and clerical, increased and donation and legacies were poured in.

The first century following the death of the founder was characterized by rapid geographical and numerical growth of the Order. It expanded first toward the south of France. Then, in the Mediterranean coastline, it spread as far south into Spain and Portugal as the Moorish occupation of those countries allowed. The next expansion was directed northward into England, Scotland, Belgium and Luxembourg. The rationale behind most of the foundations was the suitability and importance of a place in relation to the Order's aims of ransoming captives and performing works of charity. However, in many instances, the foundations were simply the result of properties donated by benefactors or churches offered by Bishops.

A survey of the growth of the Order shows that it grew quickly during the 13th century from the small Brotherhood of Cerfroid into an international organization. What can be documented is that the Order had some 25 houses by 1213, the year of John de Matha's death. The consistorial letter of Pope Honorius III on April 25, 1219, barely six years after the founder's death, lists 43 Trinitarian houses. The list also mentions 17 hospice-hospitals and 23 churches of the order, without pretence of being exhaustive. By the middle of the 13th century the Order's foundations numbered 82 and by the end of the same century 138.

VII. Age Of Crises And Changes (1314 -1429)

The 14th century witnessed great changes and crises taking place in the European society. Urban commercialism supplanted rural feudalism, the general culture shifted from traditional religiosity to humanistic secularism, nationalistic rivalry kept the European nations warring against each other, and the Black Plague mercilessly decimated most countries. The church, with its spiritual power and sociological prestige, had kept Europe together during the previous centuries. Now the rising of nationalism and the formation of national states threatened its influence and authority over the factional jurisdiction of Europe. During this century papacy declined, and the shifting of papacy to Avignon (1309 – 1376) also affected church and its institutions very adversely. Again, the schism of the Western Church (1378-1417) marked a very deep low for the papacy and the church. These factors that adversely influence the church had made its effects also upon the Trinitarian Order. As a result of the schism within the Western Church, the Order also was divided by some adhering to the antipope in Avignon and others being loyal to the Pope in Rome.

The growth of the Order during this period in no way matched that of the previous hundred years. About ten new foundations were established. A larger number of houses were closed or destroyed because of wars, fires and plagues. The Order's limited financial resources and lack of personnel prevented the rebuilding or reopening of many of the houses. The more important new foundations of this period were those of Avignon (1353) in France, Ingham (1360) in England and Salamanca (1393) in Spain.

VIII. The Age Of Reforms (1429-1599)

The one hundred and seventy years that encompass this period saw the Order undergoing profound changes. The diversification, which began with the introduction of provincial constitutions in 1429, developed into reform initiatives and terminated with the irreparable breakup of the Order in 1599, when the Spanish Reform was approved to form a separate entity, independent from the existing judicial structure of the Order.

The Rule of 1267 and the Statutes and Constitutions of 1429 formed the general legislation of the Order, during this period. The introduction of Provincial Constitutions during this period quickened the decentralisation of the Order's government and increased the autonomy of the provinces. In the realm of the apostolate, the Order continued the ransoming of captives and the ministry to the sick, the poor and the pilgrims in the hospice-hospitals of the Order. However, there were times when Trinitarians were restricted from ransoming captives by the ruling monarchs, who made this ministry an almost exclusive reserve to Mercedarians. Although the ministry to the sick and the poor flourished during the first half of this period, it began to vanish towards the end of this period. To a great extent, this was due to the rigid conventual life enjoined by the Council of Trent on religious.

From the middle to the end of this period, an ever-increasing restlessness for reform affected all religious Orders. Among the Trinitarians, first some individuals, then communities and finally provincial chapters began to advocate a stricter conventual life, more assiduous common prayer, longer meditation times and more faithful adherence to the prescribed penitential practices. The cloister was strictly enforced. The Brothers, the Sisters, the *donati* and *donatae*, and the domestics ceased to live and work together within the compounds of Trinitarian houses. As a consequence, the service to the poor, the sick, the travellers and the freed captives, which had characterized many Trinitarian communities since the beginning of the Order, had to be curtailed or terminated.

The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) demanded reform in Religious Orders. At the time of the Council, it was noted that the ransoming work of the Order had been suspended in many jurisdictions for decades that

many hospitals were no longer functioning, the numerous houses were virtually empty, and the religious in many houses lacked the spiritual and moral discipline which had previously existed. Reform in the Trinitarian Order began in Portugal, and eventually spread to the Provinces of present day Spain and to France. The spiritual, moral and communal life improved and the ransoming work of the Order was revitalized. During this period, Miguel de Cervantes, the famous Spanish author was ransomed.²⁹

VIII.1. John Baptist of the Conception (1561-1613): The Reformer of the Trinitarians

The man who is rightly known as the Reformer of the Order is John Baptist of the Conception, who was ordained a priest in 1585. Though he had felt attracted to the recollect life, his successful career as a preacher kept him from taking the step. However, something unusual happened early in February 1596. As he was travelling from Seville to Andujar he was struck down by a furious wind accompanied by lightning, thunder and hailstones. This he thought, as a sign of God's will in his regard and he vows to live a reformed life in the house of the recollects. Thus John Baptist embraced the recollection and moved to Valdepenas on 26th, 1596.³⁰

Three months later he was elected Minister of Valdepenas. John Baptist's first task as minister was to enforce strict implementation of Fr. Diego de Guzman's statutes of Valdepenas, which called for the unmitigated observance of the primitive Rule and a genuine life of poverty, humility and austerity. The recollects were to give up honorific titles and address each other simply as Brothers. They were to wear rough woollen habits, their bedding was to be made up of bare planks of wood; they were to be 'discalced' that is to say, they were to wear crude sandals and never shoes. Daily, two hours were to be given to meditation, and all were obliged to take part in the choral recitation of the Divine Office. Fasting and silence were to be kept scrupulously as prescribed in the Rule. The care of the sick and service to the poor were to be the primary occupations of the community. Soon this austere and prayerful life style attracted many of the friars who favoured recollection. But, almost as quickly, those who joined found the life at Valdepenas too austere and went back. This situation was further aggravated by the lack of support from local and provincial ministers. Even the commissary general accused John Baptist of excessive austerity.

In the face of these setbacks and on the advice of some sympathizing Trinitarians and Discalced Carmelite friars, John Baptist decided to go to Rome. His intent was to petition the Holy See for an indult of autonomy on behalf of those who wanted to embrace the reform and three houses of the recollection. He arrived Rome on March 21, 1598, and the negotiations with the Holy See lasted eighteen months. Finally, August 20, 1599, Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), eager to implement the directives of the Council of Trent, granted John Baptist his request and authorized the establishment of "the Congregation of the Discalced and Reformed Brothers of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity."³¹

As was expected, the establishment of independent reformed houses increased the sense of division and the rivalry within the Order. Arriving in Madrid, John Baptist presented the papal brief to the Nuncio, who ordered its execution in full. He appointed Fr. Elias of St. Martin, prior general of the Discalced Carmelites, as the canonical visitator to oversee the implementation of the papal brief. On December 8, 1599, John Baptist vowed obedience to Fr. Elias and began his novitiate as the first Discalced Trinitarian, assuming the name of John Baptist of the Conception.³²

The Papal Brief *Ad militantis Ecclesiae* had marked out three houses for the Discalced Reform in Spain: Valdepenas, Ronda and Biemparada. Now, John Baptist arrived at Valdepenas on March 18, 1600, with his first followers, Fr. Clement of St. Mary and two novices, but they were denied admission to the house. John Baptist appealed to the local government authorities and took possession of the house. In four months, the Valdepenas community had grown to sixteen members. Peace, however, was shattered when the recollects who were forced to leave broke into the house and tried to harm John Baptist and others on November 7, 1600. Fortunately, they were saved by the timely intervention of the local authorities.

On February 11, 1601, Fr. Elias moved to Valdepenas and assumed full charge of the formation of the novices and the administration of the house. This enabled the Reformer to embark on an intensive activity of expanding the reform beyond Valdepenas. Within five years the Discalced had seven houses. The Reformer had to face many objections from all sides in establishing the eighth foundation at Valladolid. According to the papal brief, on having the eighth foundation the Discalced could have their first Provincial Chapter, elect their own Minister provincial and become a totally independent province of the Order. Finally he accomplished this difficult task with the help of Duke of Lerma. Thus on September 10, 1605, the Reform had at last attained the longed autonomy by establishing the eighth house in Valladolid. He died in Cordoba on February 14, 1613.³³

IX. The Age Of Tension And Suppressions (1599- Mid 19th Century)

The principle features of this period were: the consolidation of the reform movements, the growth of the Spanish Discalced, the Order acquiring the classification of mendicant, and the transformation of the French Trinitarians into Canons Regular. During this period the history of the Order deals with three discordant groups of Trinitarians: the Calced, the Reformed and the Discalced.

X. Restoration And Expansion Of The Trinitarians (Mid 19th Century To 1999)

Aware of the social changes and developments the Order began to re-evaluate and redefine its ministry. Thus the 1907 edition of the *Constitutions*, for the first time in the history of the Order, omitted the ransoming of captives as one of its apostolate. Reflecting the general mind-set that slavery was a thing of the past, the 1933 *Constitutions* declared that the physical redemption of captives had terminated. Henceforth, the purpose of the Order would be: a) the sanctification of its members; b) the internal and external devotion to the Most Holy Trinity; c) the spiritual liberation of humanity from the slavery of sin and error through pastoral ministry and missionary apostolate.³⁴

In Italy, the Trinitarians who ministered to the faithful as secular priests, during the suppression of religious Orders proved to be the seedlings for the revival of the Order, when the time became favourable. By the turn of the century, there were 11 communities in Italy. In Spain, the restoration of all religious Orders coincided with the restoration of the monarchy in 1875 with King Alphonse XII's coming to power. By 1897, the Trinitarians had eleven houses in Spain. Soon they elected their own minister general. This resulted in a schism and tension within the Order. For there were two minister generals, one in Spain and the other in Rome for the Italians. A protest on the part of the Italian Trinitarians led to the reunion of the Order in 1900, when a joint general chapter elected the Italian Gregorio of Jesus and Mary as the only Minister General of the Order.

The restoration of the Order in France is closely connected with the stories of the two houses: Faucon and Cerfroid. These houses were under the direct jurisdiction of the Minister General until 1989, when they were constituted as General Delegation, with proper statutes. Faucon occupied a sentimental spot in the hearts of all Trinitarians, as it was traditionally believed to be the birth place of John de Matha. Fearing the anti-clerical French government, Fr. Antonio of the Mother of God, the Minister General (1853-1867), persuaded Prince Torlonia to acquire the Faucon property for the Torlonia family and, then, cede its perpetual use to the Order. Thus in 1859, Fr. Antonio took possession of the property. But in 1900, the French government suspecting the Trinitarians to be plotting the national security expelled them from France. The Trinitarian Sisters of St. Martha cared for this place until 1905. Thereupon, it was entrusted to the local pastor by the Torlonia family, who kept it until 1960, when the Canadian Trinitarians took it over, remodelled the building and opened it as a guest house for retreatants and vocations.

Fr. Calliste of Divine Providence bought the House of the Trinity at Cerfroid in 1867, as a private citizen. But the Franco-German war of 1870-1871 and the Second World War devastated it. In 1944 Cerfroid was nothing more than crumbling walls and the government was about to take over it as an abandoned property. Word of it reached the Mother General of the Trinitarian Sisters of Valence and they restored it and kept it until 1986, when a community of Trinitarian friars was re-established at Cerfroid. Currently, it functions as a house of formation, a retreat house, a guest house and as the residence for the friars and sisters who perform pastoral work in the area. Though part of the French General Delegation, Cerfroid has been declared to belong to the entire Order.

In 1900, the Trinitarians expelled from Faucon reached Austria and opened a house there. Five years later the Austrian Trinitarians were invited by the Archbishop of Luov to assume the pastoral care of eight villages in Rumania. Though small in number and very poor, the Austrian Trinitarians contributed to the international expansion of the Order. The World War II dealt a severe blow to the Order in Austria. Presently, the Austrian Trinitarians form a delegation general with only two houses.

X.1. The Expansion of the Trinitarians

The restored and unified Order never achieved the vitality that it had at its beginning, when the ransoming of captives was a pressing social need. Yet, the few Trinitarians who survived the 19th century suppressions transmitted their great love for the Order to subsequent generations of the Order. They, on their part with great zeal and dedication, have laboured to revitalise the Order and to expand it. Throngs of courageous Trinitarians left behind their home lands to establish the Order in Cuba (1895), Colombia (1895), Austria (1900), Chile (1902), the United States (1911), Argentina (1913), France (1922), Canada (1924), Madagascar (1926), Peru (1959), Puerto Rico (1969), Colombia (1969), Brazil (1974), Guatemala (1975), Mexico (1978), Papua New Guinea (1982), Bolivia (1983), India (1986), Germany (1986), and Poland (1987).³⁵

X.2. The Trinitarians Since Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) called for all the religious Orders to renew their life and ministry in the light of the Gospel, the Charism of their founders and the needs of the times. As a result, the Order embarked on a thorough analysis of its identity, purpose and service to the Church and society.

In 1965 an extraordinary general chapter was summoned in Rome to programme the revising of the legislation of the Order. An important modification, made on the existing Constitution was the broadening the specific purpose of the Order. According to the *Constitutions* of 1933, *the special purpose of our Order is the internal and external devotion to the Most Holy Trinity, for whose honour and glory our religious are to*

perform all undertakings of the active and contemplative life that are common to other religious Orders.³⁶ The 1965 Chapter broadened the purpose of the Trinitarians to include a commitment to bring the benefits of Christ's redemption to humanity through a variety of apostolic and charitable works.³⁷ To this end, every province was to set up a Secretariat for Works of Charity and to undertake some concrete charitable work.

The work of drafting the new Constitutions of the Trinitarians was entrusted to the *General Commission for the revision of the Trinitarians' legislation* and they completed the work by 1968. This new Constitution was approved *ad experimentum* by the extraordinary General Chapter of 1969. The new Constitutions reflecting the mind of the 1965 and 1969 General Chapters, identified the following specific fields for the Trinitarians' apostolic and charitable ministry: a) assistance to the persecuted for their faith in Christ or for justice; b) assistance to the poor, the sick, the immigrants and the homeless; c) foreign missions; d) ministry to the imprisoned; e) education of youth; f) ecumenism; g) pastoral ministry.³⁸ Later, the 1983 General Chapter drafted the definitive Constitutions of the Order, which preserved many elements of the experimental Constitutions. In 1983 Constitutions were approved by the Holy See on December 17, 1984 and was promulgated on Trinity Sunday, June 2, 1985.

X.3. Redemptive Mission: Works of Charity and Mercy

After the publication of the new Constitutions a general effort was made throughout the Order to comply with the directives that called upon the provinces to undertake charitable activities that reflected the original charism of the Order. To this end, a partial “conversion” of the traditional, pastoral and educative apostolate has taken place, and all provinces have undertaken projects that actually aid the poor, the sick and the less fortunate of the society.

In the Province of the Holy Spirit, Southern Spain, the Trinitarians, in collaboration with the Trinitarian Sisters and members of the Trinitarian lay associations, operate a large centre in Cordoba that feed the poor, cares for the aged, shelters the homeless and assist immigrants from Latin America and North Africa. In the same city, they direct the *Proyecto Hombre*, which focuses on helping the very poor, the marginalized, the drug addicts, the delinquent youth, abandoned or abused children, gypsies, broken families, illiterate, etc. Likewise, in Madrid, the Trinitarians collaborate with sister and members of the Trinitarian Laity in operating the Ave Maria soup kitchen. Priests of this Province provide sacramental ministry to 6 poor parishes, 3 hospitals and 10 prisons in Southern Spain and a parish for immigrants in Frankfurt, Germany.³⁹

In the Provincial Vicariate of South America, which is staffed mostly by the religious from the Province of the Holy Spirit, the charitable activity of the Trinitarians – priests, brothers, sisters and members of the Trinitarian Laity – is incredibly intense. In Lima, Peru, they operate 4 soup kitchens that feed daily an average of 800 people. They have set up 3 *consultorios medicos* that provide free health care and medications to about 150 people every day. They have organized 3 sewing shops which enable needy women to gain a livelihood by sewing large quantities of clothe, commissioned by wholesale merchants. Jaen, deeply in the forest of Northern Peru, the *Centro Trinitario de Asistencia* is, at once, a food distribution centre, a *consultorio medico*, a pharmacy and a recreational and catechetical youth centre.⁴⁰

In the Province of the Immaculate Conception, Northern Spain, the Trinitarians have converted the main facilities of their former Minor Seminary in Gexto-Algorta into the clinic *Fundacion Argia*, where the poor and mentally sick individuals are given free assistance. Another building in the same Seminary shelters and assist destitute aged people.

In the Provincial Vicariate of Puerto Rico and Columbia, which is staffed by the religious from the Province of the Immaculate Conception, the Trinitarians have been quite active in charitable activities. In Ponce, P.R., their project *Urbanizacion Delicious* helps drug addicts. A much larger charitable activity is carried out in Columbia. It comprises a soup kitchen that daily feed 1000 poor children, a geriatric clinic that assists destitute old men and women and a medical centre that provides free medical care to the needy.

In the Province of St. John de Matha, which covers central and northern Italy, the Trinitarians direct the *Istituto Medico-Psico Pedagogico Santa Maria della Pace* in Medea, which houses and assists an average of 85 psychologically disabled boys and girls. In Canada, the religious of the Province of the Sacred Heart of Jesus directs the operation of *Maison de Pere*, Montreal. This charitable enterprise, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Montreal, is made up of a large centre that feeds the poor and of other centers that houses over night vagrant and homeless man. *Fondation Les Amis du Pere Armand Gagne* is another praiseworthy organization founded and directed by the Trinitarian Father Armand Gagne, performs a long list of charitable activities.⁴¹ It aids individuals who are persecuted for their faith in Christ and gives financial assistance to endangered Church institutions.

In the USA, the Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary sponsors and operates Redeemer House in Baltimore City. This facility houses, feeds and gives psychological assistance to an average of 10 men. Generally, these are homeless individuals who need time, space and a supportive environment for reconstructing their shattered lives. The majority of the Province is involved in staffing poor parishes. Individual ministries

provide sacramental service to the inmates of several prisons, spiritual solace to the sick in hospitals and psychological counselling to the clergy.

In Madagascar, the works of mercy carried out by the Trinitarian Father Angelo Buccarello who passed away a few months ago is a model of organized charitable activity for Trinitarians everywhere. His *Apostolat Catholique des Prisons* (ACP) has a staff of about 100 co-workers. His charitable activity for the imprisoned, the poor and the sick is duplicated to a more or less extent by the Trinitarian Missionaries in Madagascar.⁴²

The extraordinary General Chapter of 1999 has erected the organization called Trinitarian International Solidarity – SIT – as a strong and concrete commitment, in the spirit of St. John de Matha and in genuine Trinitarian redemptive tradition. It aims to offer a service of mercy and redemption to “the excluded and oppressed of our society and, in a special way, the persecuted or those discriminated against because of the religious faith, of their faithfulness to their conscience or to the values of the Gospel.”⁴³

XI. Conclusion

This article was an analysis of the development of the “Trinitarian-Redemptive Project” (1198 to 2015), through the centuries. History has shown us the rise and ebb through which the redemptive plan of God was carried out and preserved to this day. During the golden era of the Trinitarians’ history, we saw how they were characterised by their fidelity to the original charism, the rapid expansion of the Trinitarians, steady endorsements by ecclesiastical as well as civil authorities, etc. We have also seen how the trends of the times, the reform movements and the religious suppressions have negatively affected the Trinitarians and its life. Moreover, how infidelity to the original charism, turning backs to the “signs” of the time, etc., made the situation of the Trinitarians worse. Even in their failures and infidelity, the redemptive plan of God was ever active and He raised committed men to reform and to revitalise the Trinitarians even at the point of its extinction. Moreover, this study makes me grateful to the father founder, John de Matha, and to his principal collaborator, Felix of Valois, to the Reformer John Baptist of the Conception, and to the numerous “witnesses” of the Trinitarians and of the entire Family who knew how to generously plant the redemptive charity in the furrows of a history of more than eight centuries, returning liberty and dignity to many thousands of captives and the poor. Thus, we are able to rediscover the love and mercy of the God of Jesus, the only God, sensitive to the cry of the oppressed, with a “passion” for the liberty of man, His image and likeness.

The world needs the work of redemption. The Church wants the Trinitarians and above all people who are under various kinds of bondage clamour for the Trinitarians’ presence. We cannot be silent and passive to the cry of those who are in desperate need. A Trinitarian presence is inevitable in this modern era; their redemptive charism is more relevant in this epoch as the Holy Catholic Church commemorates the great Jubilee Year of Mercy. A Trinitarian presence is a loving presence; a Trinitarian presence is a giving presence; a Trinitarian presence is a healing presence. This is what Jesus did and what John De Matha envisaged in the Rule and mosaic of the Order. The beautiful mosaic of the Order elaborates that a Trinitarian has a lot to contribute to this broken world and to the wounded humanity. In order to efficiently carry out redemptive-charity, Jesus the redeemer has to become the centre of our life as it was in the life of John de Matha. Pope Francis exhorted Catholics at the end of the year of Faith to make Jesus as the centre of their life: centre of their thoughts, words and actions. When Jesus becomes the centre of our thoughts, our thoughts become Christian thoughts and thoughts of Jesus. When Jesus becomes the centre of our words, our words become Christian words and words of Jesus. When Jesus becomes the centre of our actions, our actions become Christian actions and actions of Jesus. Thus a Trinitarian will become a real redeemer in this world like John De Matha who paved a way before us to follow. A Trinitarian can bring a new vision of the world and man by bringing out a new age in religious life responding to the need of the time. A Trinitarian converted to the gospel lives in the world as a prophet and redeemer in order to liberate the captives, poor, addicted and persecuted.

I believe the process of redemption initiated by John de Matha and the ‘Trinitarians’ can be coined as follows: with the cruelty of Crusades in its climax, there was a need for redemption. Christians were captured and ill-treated and even incarcerated, so the pre-redemptive process was relevant. John de Matha was a witness of these inhuman sufferings of people and he wanted to reach out to them. The image of God in the Old Testament, the God who was with the suffering humanity and Jesus in the New Testament, who broke his body and shed his blood, was an inspiration for him. He initiated the process of redemption and there were two options of response he could make: they are pro-redemptive response or counter-redemptive response. The response of John de Matha and ‘The Trinitarians’ were a pro-redemptive response. The outcome of this process was post-redemptive process where they could see the slaves set free and living a meaningful human life. The Trinitarians continue the same redemptive work among the people who are addicted to alcohol, bad habits, illiterate, persecuted, sick etc... People who undergo this process experience peace and redemption. Both the Semitic religions and Indian religions emphasise the importance of going out of oneself through charitable works, sacrifices and prayer to experience. John de Matha and the Trinitarians have proved it through their work

and mission modelling Jesus who sacrificed his life for redemption of humanity a great model of altruism and sacrifice.

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