3rd Circular Letter of the Directress General of the Sodality of St. Peter Claver to the Extern Members and Promotors,

concerning the Papal *BRIEF*, 10th June 1904.

Dear Externs and Promotors!

I am turning once again to you with this short circular, to share with you the joy which overflows from my heart and the hearts of my Sodalists.

The Holy Father, Pope Pius X, has heard my humble prayer and with an *“Apostolic Brief”* has placed our Sodality under the protection of Our Lady of Good Counsel and St Peter Claver. What a special grace! May we come to grasp its significance, deeply understand its importance and draw practical conclusions from it, not just for today, but for our whole lives.

In sending you the translation of this “Brief”, I also want to write here a few thoughts that came to me on receiving this precious gift.

As the Saviour hung on the Cross, during the hours of His tremendous and loving sacrifice, He, felt the urgency – He the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who has the power to command – to give to poor humanity, that which was most precious to Him, that is the love and protection of His Mother by saying; ‘Woman, behold your Son – Son, behold your mother!’ (Jn 19:26-27). From this moment on, John took care of Mary.

The divine Heart of Jesus, who loves us (the *“Brief”* was emanated on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) knows our little Sodality. He knows well of the trials against which we have to battle sometimes, whether from without or because of the limited number of our members. Therefore, we need an extraordinary Guide and Protectress so that the sapling of this little Sodality may grow to be a tall tree, which casts its shadow over the whole of Africa. The Sodality and its members acknowledge this and have long since chosen Our Lady of Good Counsel as their guide. In various important endeavours, such as the missionary printing press, or the founding of the house in Rome and in other internal matters, the aid of Our Lady, under the title of Good Counsel, was always trustingly sought and she always showed herself to be a faithful counsellor. But our devotion had not been ratified by the highest Authorities so then, if I may say so, we had no special right to the counsel of Mary.

Now the *“Apostolic Brief”,* that bears the date of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, changed that. It was no longer Jesus, suffering on the cross, but His Vicar here on Earth, our dear and good, Pius X, precisely him, in virtue of his Papal authority, saw fit to turn to Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, and referring to the Sodality of St Peter Claver, which was born just 10 years before, said: ‘Behold your daughters!’; and to us Sodalists, Externs and Promotors, he said: ‘Behold your Mother, your Protectress and Guide!’

Dear friends, who would not want to accept such a Mother, as Mary, Mother of Good Counsel with rejoicing? Our Lady of Good Counsel in a very special way is now ours. And we are now hers, we are daughters of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Through the voice of His Vicar on earth, the Lord himself, has made us in a certain sense, daughters of Mary, we and those who will come after us for all time. Let us welcome her. Let us welcome her well. Let us hold on firmly to her, so that she will remain always with us and counsel us, and help us in the important, in fact, in the most important task that has been proposed to us: Work for the Salvation of Souls.

How necessary is Her protection and Her guidance!

How difficult can it be at times, to inflame hearts for Africa, to fill them with enthusiasm for something so far away, to move them to generosity for the poor missionaries and even poorer Africans! Even believing Catholics, cordial friends of mankind, who often give particular attention to poverty in their own country, faced with the material misery and even greater spiritual misery of their brothers and sisters in far off Africa, remain insensitive: ‘What does this have to do with me?’ O Mary, take our cause into your hands, or better still the cause of the miserable. Say just one word! guide them! And the hearts that yesterday where cold will today beat with compassionate love for Africa; the purses, yesterday closed, will today be opened with generosity to alleviate the bodily and spiritual necessities in that dark part of the world.

Do you see then, dear Extern Members and dear Promotors, who very often work for our holy cause, what a powerful Advocate you have had in Mary Mother of Good Counsel?!

May Mary guide not only us who are at the service of Her Son; but let us pray that she will guide also those who are being called by God to this Sodality, who have not yet found the way or who are lacking courage and generosity to set out on the way they already know. Precisely to these souls, may, Our Lady, show the way, so that the number of labourers in the vineyard of Her Son may grow. And still more, may she guide the laity, who live in the world, and who could, as Extern Members or Promotors, render great service to the Work, which until now they have not accomplished, either because of ignorance, negligence or seeking human esteem and other similar things. May Mary also guide you and lead you to a Work, through which, in a relatively easy way, you can fill heaven with souls and have the guarantee of saving your own. As St Augustine of Hippo said; ‘If you have saved one soul, you have predestined your own.’

This then, would be the first grace that has been granted to us through the *“Apostolic Brief”:* Our Lady of Good Counsel, our Patron and our Mother.

Nonetheless the Holy Father also gave us a Teacher, or better still, a Saint, having confirmed St. Peter Claver, who from the very beginning was chosen by us, as our Patron and Model. Another immeasurable grace!

If we hoped, until now, on the grounds of our work in aid of the poor in Africa, that we would be looked upon with love and aided in our mission by St Peter Claver, who was himself, such a great Apostle of the Africans, and hoped that he might grant us his protection, with how much more faith now can we rely on his aid after this approval of the Holy Father?

A thought comes into my mind here, that you might find shocking, but still I would like to express it. Wouldn’t St. Peter Claver, remember the vow he made while still on earth, as a member of the Society of Jesus, namely, to be ready to be sent wherever the Pope might call him? Now, the Holy Father speaks to him; ‘Peter, into your care I entrust the Sodality which bears your name. Go unseen wherever the Sodality dwells. Guard it and protect it and make fruitful their work for the good of all the Africans’. Would St Peter Claver not answer this call? Has his love for the African people diminished now that he lives transfigured? Or would he not stand attentively by the side of the Sodality that is entrusted to him and continues, in some way, his work on earth?

Let us abandon ourselves to this hope! St Peter Claver is still today, an obedient son of the Pope. According to the will of the Holy Father, from this moment, St. Peter Claver will now cast his protective cloak over us and gives us a special right to his patronage and help, in our work for the good of the African people.

However, he must not only protect us, but even more than before, he must be our model and teacher. Teacher of what? The Church praises his spirit of self-renunciation and heroic charity. Aren’t these precisely the virtues most necessary for our vocation and our work?

Abnegation is necessary. That is the renunciation of self, with all of its illusions, selfish desires and demands, which too often contradict the interests of Jesus and of souls. Instead of egoism, we are called to a charitable love which leads us to great works, that never says “enough is enough”, that heroic charity which moved St Peter Claver to spend 40 years at the service of slaves. A charity that should also move us to unceasing and assiduous work in the service of the African missions. A charity that makes us tireless when it comes to winning over benefactors for the missions, promotors of the Sodality and subscribers to our magazines.

Let us study well, St. Peter Claver’s abnegation, charity and patience! We will never finish reading this stupendous book! Let us honour and imitate him and not just ‘read’ him. Though we have no direct encounters with slaves in our work like our great model, even so, in our work patience is sometimes put to the test and our professional works require no less abnegation. If though, we have the necessary charity, all becomes easy.

I have already expressed therefore, with what we must repay, desire to repay, the Good Lord for the two great graces contained in this *“Apostolic Brief”*, because God measures exactly” he wants us to correspond to what he has given us.

He has given us Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Peter Claver and with this He asks us in every moment to do what Mary counsels us. Blessed are we, now and for eternity, if we do it! He asks us also, to follow in the footsteps of him who has been given to us as an example and teacher. In so doing, we will make the Sodality more worthy of its great patron! As St Peter Claver opened up the gates of heaven to hundreds of thousands of Africans by the waters of Baptism, so too shall we in the Sodality, by procuring help for the missions, gain for heaven thousands and thousands of Africans.

Finally, the Sodality, then, will contribute to actualising Pope Pius X’s, who emanated this *“Brief”,* plan of his pontificate: *Instaurare Omnia in Christo…*To restore all things in Christ.

May the once Christian land of Africa be won once again for Christ and renewed in Christ!

I will finish these wishes, dear Promotors, thanking you for all of your sacrifices, efforts and works that you have performed out of love for the African missions on behalf of the Sodality over the last year. In so doing, you have undoubtedly and concretely contributed to the grace which God has sent us via this *“Apostolic Brief”.* May God reward you eternally for everything!

In exchange, I and my Sodalists, as an expression of our gratitude, will pray for you without ceasing, for your families, and for all of your temporal and spiritual intentions.

I bid you also pray an Ave for me. I am in great need of it!

Your little servant in the Lord,

Maria Theresa Ledóchowska.

Rome, on the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, 29th June 1904.