



“Let yourself be transformed” ... for a style of Pauline life

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The *Preparatory Document* affirms that “there is a scarcity of testimony and little rootedness in Pauline spirituality,” and asks, “How can we recover the spiritual roots of our Pauline life and of our apostolate?”

This statement and the following question have brought me to revisit the roots that are at the origin of our spirituality in the Church. I especially refer to the books of Canon Chiesa. The first of these books is *Gesù Cristo Re*, destined to prolong the 1925 Jubilee, commenting on the Encyclical *Quas primas* with which Pius XI closed that Holy Year.¹

With regards “recovering the radical spirituality of our Pauline life”, we find in this book a valid help. A little pamphlet of 56 pages, it presents in five chapters an anthropological-spiritual vision which was surely nurtured in common by Canon Chiesa and Don Alberione: “The reign of Jesus Christ in us”, “The reign of God in the mind”, “Extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in the will”, “the reign of Jesus Christ in the Hearts”, and “the reign of Jesus Christ in our body”.

Through a language of very linear discourse, Canon Chiesa deepens, in some twenty pages, the various steps of the journey for the advent of the reign of Jesus Christ in us. Towards the end, he summarizes it this way: “Hence, Jesus will reign within us when all the faculties are established in proper order in us. Senses and parts, phantasy and heart under the will, the will under reason, and this under the will or the pleasure of God” (p. 243).

Francesco Chiesa then dedicates some ten pages on the reign of God in the mind: “Education should start from instruction. Nothing can be willed and judged without being known. *Nil volitum quin praecognitum*, runs the proverb. Thus, the reign of Christ ought to start from the mind. Before being Christian life, it should be Christian idea. Without idea, life would be lacking in foundation” (p. 247). But the Christian idea or truth finds its foundation in the teaching of Jesus Christ, King of the mind, “fullness of

¹ F. CHIESA, *Gesù Cristo Re*, Pia Società S. Paolo, Alba, 1926, pp. 326.

wisdom and divine science”, to be received through faith and lived in the light of the Old and New Testaments and by the Christian Tradition. Canon Chiesa comments, “It is necessary that our faith be constant, in all the phases: in youth as in adolescence, in prime of age as in old age; in all places, with every kind of persons and amidst every sort of oppositions” (p. 253).

The successive chapter discusses the extension of the Reign of Jesus Christ in the will, considered as “the queen of human faculties”. which is “like the capital city, the center of the Reign. Whoever arrives here takes in hand the reins of the government. He is the pilot who directs the flight, the driver who runs the car” (p. 235). The itinerary made by the operation of the will is described thus: “the action of the will is preceded by the exercise of intelligence” in view of focusing on a goal, which is called *intention*. It then looks for the means and enters into the period of *deliberation*. From the means considered, the will selects one: thus, it arrives at what is called *choice* of the will; it then concludes with *proposition* or *resolution*” (p. 259). Having reached this point, the will can be reinforced before fellow human beings through the *promise*, or before God through the *vows* (p. 258).

The points of this itinerary are put in connection with the will of God so that his Reign may be established in the human will: “The will of God is manifested in three principal ways: in the commandments, in the examples and in the events. The first and the second ways are called the will of the sense; the third is the will of consent” (p. 259). Submission to the will of God ought to be *universal* as regards the commandments; *strong* in execution and *pure* in intention.

The Reign of God, therefore, in the mind, the will, and then, the Reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts.

Regarding the Reign of God in the hearts, Canon Chiesa starts from this affirmation: “The will is the queen of all human faculties; however, she is a queen very much disturbed and bothered in the exercise of its authority. She can be disturbed by ignorance, prejudices, and errors of the intellect [...] But she has an enemy that is worst of all, that gathers to himself an infinite multitude of companions, and thus able many times to remove the queen from her throne, and to turn into his treasures the whole government of the human being. This great danger comes from the heart” (p. 266).

Considered psychologically, the heart is the center of affective life and we can distinguish here various levels or strata, starting from the deepest which is made up of *tendencies*. Above these are the *inclinations*, and over them are the *passions* which occupy the central and principal part of the heart. From the passion come the various and changing multitude of *sentiments* and *affections*” (pp. 267-268).

Canon Chiesa then presented the teachings of St. Francis de Sales, in Teotimo, on the twelve passions. Six are of the *concupiscent* desire (love and hatred, desire and aversion, sadness and delight). Six are of *irascible* feeling (hope and desperation, bravery and fear, anger and satisfaction).

These twelve passions “are like twelve generals, fighting men under the *generalissimo*, which is love. Each of them has under him an army of captains and soldiers; for example, the seven capital vices who are seven captains of the general *Love*” (p. 268). It may happen, however, that “every passion tries to dominate others, and when it succeeds, it becomes the *predominant passion*. Then, it begins to be tyrannical not only to others, but to the very will itself, and there is no excess into which the man might not fall” (p. 269).

How then can the Reign of Jesus be established in the heart? Canon Chiesa answers: “The will is the queen by right; but the heart is her favorite. To dominate the heart is to dominate the human person.” This deals with a “*dominion of industry*,” given the fact that the army of passions is under the *generalissimo* who is love. “If divine love dominates the heart, we can say without fear: do whatever you want. We are certain that it will not do anything other than good” (p. 271).

The book *Gesù Cristo Re* then proceeds to consider the affirmation of the Encyclical *Quas primas* according to which “it is necessary that Jesus Christ reign in the body and its members which ought to serve as instruments in the internal holiness of the souls”

Starting from the affirmation that “every cognition begins from the senses, and every expression ends in the body and its parts”, Canon Chiesa deals with two parts: the hands and the feet. And then he proceeds to the senses: the eyes, ears, tongue, mouth, smell and taste of all that is around the body and its parts. Because “as the Reign of God embraces the mind, the heart, the will, so also it will extend to the dependents of the will which are the body parts” (p. 282), including the time when they ought to undergo *flagellation* and the *crowning of thorns*, like Jesus (p. 285).

Canon Chiesa can finally conclude the whole proposed itinerary by affirming, “Here is the genuine truthfulness of these famous words: *Vivo autem iam ego, vivit vero in me Christus* (Gal 2:20). I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And thus, is this all? The Reign of Jesus Christ that begins in the mind passes on to the will, descends to the heart in order to pass to and irradiate the body and its parts. It is the complete realization of the Reign of God in us!” (p. 286).

We have just celebrated the Centenary of the Pact or the Secret of Success, a time in which thousands of times it resounded in our hearts and in communitarian prayers. That “*Quare primum regnum Dei et iustitiam eius*” (“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”) constitutes the formula of *Exchange*, the original nucleus of the Pact and the foundation of spirituality and of the Pauline apostolate.

Now, we find ourselves in this journey of preparation for the General Chapter which involves the whole Congregation in the synodal task of transforming the mind or way of thinking in order to face especially the five challenges that confront us.

While we run through the book *Gesù Cristo Re*, motivated by the serious affirmation that “*there is lack of testimony and little rootedness in the Pauline spirituality*”, I always carry with me the remembrance of the text in which Don Alberione, for a very positive journey of conversion, indicates three penitences, so that Jesus Christ may reign in us, in the mind, in the will, in the heart, in the body, taking us, in a synodal task, to “*recover the radical spirituality of our Pauline life and of our apostolate*”. Here is the text:

THREE PENITENCES

They are included in our Constitutions:

The first is common to all religious: the common life lived lovingly, constantly, joyously.

The second is dominant: the development of personality, thus to progress ever more, developing the gifts and the attitudes: of nature and grace. Always better intelligence in things of service of God and of the apostolate. Always more agile and industrious in the tasks. Always more fervent in the practices of piety and in religious observance.

The third, to apply, use, converge all for the glory of God, for the apostolate, to store up treasures for paradise. Always onward, progress always, preparation always for life in heaven which awaits us. The holy torment of one who aspires higher; of one who strives forward; of one who runs and uses modern means. Persons who journey; who each day end with spirit and action; who feel that they live with usefulness their days.

Our penitences are not to weaken us, to make us feel exhausted, to compromise our health, the attitudes, the energies the mind, of the body... Instead, they are a continuous study of making them increase, of using them all for God, for the soul, for sanctification².

² G. ALBERIONE, *Tre penitenze*, in *San Paolo*, Aprile 1949, p. 2, c. 2; PRIMO MAESTRO, in *Regina degli Apostoli*, Aprile 1949.