

François-Xavier Amherdt  
The University of Fribourg, Switzerland

## **The (Second) Catechetical Conversion and Pastoral Care: an Easter Action**

When we are immersed in catechetical or pastoral activity, sometimes we can be convinced that the success of our mission depends on us, on our theological knowledge, on our teaching skills, and on our interpersonal skills. Being highly prepared, and academic or ecclesial recognition, we thrust ourselves into an assault against contemporary indifference, with a certainty at heart that our youthful enthusiasm will inevitably win the support of our interlocutors. We rely primarily on our own strength and are confident of being filled with a jealous zeal for the Lord, like the prophet Elijah in his early years.

We are of course willing to seek the support of the Holy Spirit in coming to assist our efforts. We experience what we might call a “swimming spirituality”, that is to say a kind of commitment which essentially lies in our own power, the power of our arms and our legs, and it is this that will allow us to cross the river or body of water that is entrusted to our care.

### **1. A First Conversion**

Our momentum is the result of a long way of preparation. It comes from our desire to put ourselves at the Lord’s service supported by a family and a community environment conducive of or provoked by an encounter or by a milestone. Hence the result is our will to start our training and finish it off, in a path which is oriented by our teachers and guides. We gladly have a memory of this time of ministerial engagement, lived at the seminary, in an institute or of a training itinerary for future pastoral workers and catechists, lay people, deacons or priests.

We look forward to this type of life devoted to the Lord, and we are convinced that nothing can shake us because we have a strong initiation, the support of brothers and sisters involved in the same service that we are entering into, and the supervision of the universal Church and its Tradition. Since others have done this before us: why cannot we?

## 2. A Copernican Revolution

Then, using the words of René Voillaume,<sup>1</sup> at some point, at the “*appointed time*” (Rom 13, 11), a “*second call*” is inevitable heard. “Second” or “a second time” because there may be several different stages of our development, since it is a “*permanent conversion*”, as Philippe Bacq and Christoph Theobald clearly specify.<sup>2</sup> This “*second conversion*,” according to the vocabulary of Louis Lallemand,<sup>3</sup> applies in general to both pastoral and educational work for the development of spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> It involves a real “*Copernican Revolution*” in the words of André Sève.<sup>5</sup> It is a genuine change of mentality: it is a movement from a ministry or Christian life, where we are the ones who are leading the boat, to an existence when the Spirit takes the lead.

All spiritual traditions fit within this, be it the classic theology of St Thomas, speaking of a “*new invisible mission of the Spirit*” or a “*new state of grace*,”<sup>6</sup> the contemplative design of the mystic Teresa of Avila, the passage in the “*Four*

---

<sup>1</sup> As in his letter of 17<sup>th</sup> March 1957, R. Voillaume, *Lettres aux fraternités*, T. I, Paris, Cerf, 1960, pp. 11–34. Voir aussi B. Peyrous, *L'itinéraire de la vie spirituelle. Comment vivre avec Dieu?*, Paris, Éd. de l'Emmanuel, 2012<sup>2</sup>, chap. 9, “Le „second appel”, pp. 209–233.

<sup>2</sup> P. Bacq, “Ouverture”, in: P. Bacq et C. Theobald (dir.), *Passeurs d'Évangile. Autour d'une pastorale d'engendrement*, coll. “Théologies pratiques”, Bruxelles / Montréal / Paris, Lumen Vitae / Novalis / L'Atelier, 2008, pp. 5–14, here p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Jesuit Father of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: L. Lallemand, *La doctrine spirituelle*, coll. “Christus”, n. 3, Paris, DDB, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> For the notion of the “second conversion”, see amongst others: F. R. Wilhélem, *Le temps des discernements. Renouveau in l'Esprit*, coll. “Les petits traités spirituels”, Série II “Renouveau et charismes”, Nouan-le-Fuzelier, Éd. des Béatitudes, 2007; A. Gromolard, *La seconde conversion. De la dépression religieuse à la liberté spirituelle*, Paris, DDB, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> A. Sève, *30 minutes pour Dieu*, Paris, Centurion, pp. 5–11.

<sup>6</sup> Saint Thomas d'Aquin, *Somme théologique. Prima Pars*, q. 43, a. 6, ad 2.

*Mansions*”,<sup>7</sup> the tilting state of “friend and servant,” according to the formula of Georgette Blaquièrre,<sup>8</sup> or the more recent terminology with the charismatic renewal of the “*outpouring of the Spirit*.”<sup>9</sup>

### 3. An active surrender to the Spirit

Such radical self-surrender of one’s projects in the hands of God requires a real roundabout turn, for our natural inclination spontaneously leads us to retain ourselves as stewards of our action and our future. This voluntary withdrawal can be caused by events such as an occurrence of a pastoral failure or the feeling that we find ourselves in a deadlock. It is also sometimes the result of spiritual maturity and of an awareness that our baptism and vocation lead us to deliver ourselves into the hands of the Lord. Is this not what Saint Paul proclaims solemnly: “All those led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God” (Rom 8, 14)?

We are either convinced that the proclamation of the Gospel and the proclamation of the Kingdom are based on the quality of our programming and relevance of our catechetical methodologies, or we accept the action of grace in us, given day after day and a terrain which is at its disposition. What counts as to whether we convert or not is that we basically remain oriented towards God by faith, hope and love, the three theological virtues, which are like a satellite dish always oriented in the direction of the airwaves. When in our being pastors and catechists, God’s grace finds an effective collaboration with the gifts of the Spirit, it operates its work of transformation within us, it continues to guide us and surprise us to the point we slowly manage to say: “I live, but it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. My present life, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2, 20).

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. sainte Thérèse d’Avila, *Autobiographie*, chap. 14–15.

<sup>8</sup> Echoing the words of Jn 15,5: “Je ne vous appelle plus serviteurs mais amis, parce que tout ce que j’ai reçu de mon Père, je vous l’ai fait connaître”, in l’article de G. Blaquièrre, *La seconde conversion*, “Tychique”, n. 130, (1997), pp. 4–14.

<sup>9</sup> A.M. de Monléon, *Rendez témoignage. Le Renouveau charismatique catholique*, Paris, Mame 1998, p. 54; D. Biju-Duval, *L’effusion de l’Esprit Saint. Une grâce à découvrir*, Paris, Éd. de l’Emmanuel, 2008.

Leaving us conducting our ministry, we gradually realize divine filiation, which was already indicated in baptism. We become one with God: “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor 6, 17). For the Spirit “benefits” of this docility of our heart to purify it, configure it to Christ the pastor and the teacher, and to act through it.<sup>10</sup> Since the being is transformed, its faculties and concrete actions are themselves changed and somehow “deified”. Father Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus says in his spiritual itinerary, *I want to see God*. He was inspired by the great masters of Carmel, quoting St John of the Cross: “From this it follows that the operations of the soul which are in unison come from the Holy Spirit and therefore they are divine.”<sup>11</sup> It is the intimate union with Christ who is the source of the terrain of renewal in our ministry.

#### 4. A new birth

Was not this the ultimate call of Jesus to Nicodemus to be “reborn of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3,3-7)? “*Reborn*”, affirms Father Francis Regis Wilhélem, member of the Institute of Notre-Dame de Vie (Our Lady of Life), “means to accept first to receive from above, and to receive grace freely. This alone produces this rebirth and then gives it a real and concrete direction by putting itself entirely at its disposal.”<sup>12</sup> Nothing is voluntary in this pastoral surrender to the Spirit, but it is a humble response in gratitude to the divine initiative that fills us with the joy of the Gospel,<sup>13</sup> and a simple and full cooperation of all our being to the Lord’s work in us.<sup>14</sup> It is useless to see an orientation that we should face with hardened determination, or a resolution which we promise us to keep up to with the strength of our fists.

---

<sup>10</sup> See my book with Pierre Vianin, *À l’école du Christ pédagogue. Comment enseigner à la suite du maître?*, coll. “Perspectives pastorales”, n. 5, St-Maurice, Saint-Augustin, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Père Marie-Eugène de l’Enfant Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu*, Venasque, Éd. du Carmel, 2014<sup>2</sup>, pp. 915; 1014 et 1064, citant saint Jean de la Croix, *Œuvres complètes. La montée du Carmel*, Paris, Cerf, 1990, 1.3, chap. 2, p. 789.

<sup>12</sup> F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l’Esprit*, coll. “Paroles de lumière”, Paris, Le Sarmant / Fayard 1997, pp. 53–54.

<sup>13</sup> According to the title of the Pope Francis’ first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Rome, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l’Esprit*, p. 174.

It is exactly the opposite: everything can come only from Christ himself, whose voice whispers in the ear of our hearts, now as before he addressed Simon the fisherman who had caught nothing all night long: “Put out into the deep” (Lk 5, 4). What Peter and his companions did brought a modest contribution, which as we know resulted in abundance (cf. Lk 5, 6). It is moreover not “by chance” that John Paul II has made this injunction of the Lord “*Duc in Altum*” the leitmotif of his apostolic letter to the Church, to all pastoral operators and to all Christians in the new millennium: “Let us go forward in hope.”<sup>15</sup> This exhortation continues to resonate today.

## 5. A “Joyful Renunciation”

This is exactly what André Fossion advocates for the spirituality of catechists, namely a “*happy renunciation*” (une “*heureuse démaîtrise*”).<sup>16</sup> As John XXIII delightfully speaks of his dream and task, he says that evangelization belongs to God, it is he alone who makes the grain which we have spread grow widely (cf. Mk 4, 26–27): “The good Pope John could not sleep, and the voice of the Father in heaven came in a dream: – Angelo, Angelo! (This was his baptismal name) – Yes Lord, speak, your servant is listening. – Who leads the Church, Angelo? – It is you, Lord! – So, sleep, Angelo, sleep!”

It is a convenient thing to leave our pastoral omnipotence or our all-catechetical control – even unconsciously – and to switch to the “spirituality of windsurfing”.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, smart dispositions in catechesis, coordinated and outward-looking, initiating, kerygmatic, mystagogical and intergenerational

---

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, Rome 2001, n. 1 (Introduction), and n. 58 (Conclusion).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. especially A. Fossion, *Dieu toujours recommencé. Essai sur la catéchèse contemporaine*, coll. “Théologies pratiques”, Bruxelles / Montréal / Paris / Genève, Lumen Vitae / Novalis / Cerf / Labor et Fides, 1997, pp. 52–53.

<sup>17</sup> See the testimony of the French priest Joël Guibert, *Renâitre d'en haut. Une vie renouvelée par l'Esprit Saint*, Paris, Éd. de l'Emmanuel, 2000, qui parle lui aussi de “*deuxième conversion*” ou “*second souffle de l'Esprit*” afin de désigner cette nouvelle logique consistant à “*basculer*” en Dieu pour s'abandonner à l'Esprit (cf. pp. 125–127): elle n'est pas “*chasse-gardée pour consacrés*” ou agents pastoraux, mais elle vaut pour tout homme parce qu’ “*inscrite et „livrée” avec le baptême*” (p. 6).

of the first, second and third proclamation remain indispensable.<sup>18</sup> But our organizational and educational concepts will remain “lifeless sails” if they are not inflated by the wind of the Spirit, who “blows where he wills, without we knowing from where it comes or where it goes” (Jn 3, 8).

## 6. “Smugglers”

This requires the pastoral workers’ unprecedented provision, of a top to bottom reversal: they enter a path of a Covenant with God and cooperate fully with the will of the Spirit. We cannot “transmit” the faith and we cannot bring about a personal encounter with Christ. We are only “transmitters of the Gospel” (“passeurs d’Évangile”) by the quality of human relations and evangelical attitudes we introduce.<sup>19</sup> A. Fossion maliciously notes that “We do not produce new Christians as Michelin manufactures tires.”<sup>20</sup> That is God’s action alone: we can ensure that the conditions that make faith intelligible and desirable are present.<sup>21</sup>

In its nature, the catechetical mission is expected to open up an essential place for the unexpected, to the “event” (from the Latin *ex-venire* – coming unexpectedly) at the unsettling initiative of the Spirit. A new believer, child, youth or adult, “re-beginner” in faith, is always a surprise. The “second conversion” in our pastoral work is to give rise to the surprises of the Spirit and to undertake

<sup>18</sup> The Argentine pontiff advocated moreover in his encyclical letter *The Joy of the Gospel* n. 166–168. See for example in this regard, the highly relevant and valuable recent book by E. Biemmi, *La seconde annonce. La grâce de recommencer*, coll. “Pédagogie catéchétique”, n. 29, Bruxelles, Lumen Vitae, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> C. Theobald, “C’est aujourd’hui „le moment favorable”. *Pour un diagnostic théologique du temps présent*”, in: P. Bacq et C. Theobald (dir.), *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile. Vers une pastorale d’engendrement*, coll. “Théologies pratiques”, Bruxelles / Montréal / Paris, Lumen Vitae / Novalis / L’Atelier, 2004, pp. 47–72, here p. 66; C. Theobald, *L’Évangile et l’Église*, in: *Passeurs d’Évangile*, pp. 17–40, ici p. 30; O. Ribadeau-Dumas et P. Bacq, *L’Évangile en pastorale*, in *Passeurs d’Évangile*, pp. 41–56, here p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> A. Fossion, *Évangéliser de manière évangélique*, in: *Passeurs d’Évangile*, pp. 57–72, here p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> See part of the recent book published in honour of A. Fossion and his work, *Dieu désirable. Proposition de la foi et initiation*, coll. “Pédagogie catéchétique”, n. 35, Bruxelles / Montréal, Lumen Vitae / Novalis, 2010, directed by H. Derroite, G. Routhier et J. P. Laurent, *Un christianisme infiniment précieux : Mélanges de théologie pratique offerts au Père André Fossion*, coll. “Théologies pratiques”, Bruxelles, Lumen Vitae, 2015 (“Développer une théologie de la catéchèse raisonnée et libre”, pp. 97–204).

all chances of being fecund.<sup>22</sup> It is up to us to move from efficient-control to fertile-renunciation.<sup>23</sup> It is up to us to respect the “*primacy of grace*,” as John Paul II<sup>24</sup> and Francis<sup>25</sup> invite us.

Since in pastoral ministry, we always run the risk of remaining “semi-Pelagian,” F. R. Wilhélem wisely asserted at a retreat for priests preached in the Abbey of St-Maurice (Switzerland) in July 2009, under the title “Living in the grace of Pentecost”: “We theoretically count on God, but as for the organization of pastoral ministry, we still rely on our beautiful human projects, we only demand the ratification of the Lord ...”!

## 7. A Baptismal Disposition

Nothing either elitist in this “renunciation” of catechists, since there is really a fundamental evangelical approach for all: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it” (Lk 9, 24). God wants to be everything to everyone, lay and consecrated, married or single. He chose to be “*unique*” in each and every one of them.<sup>26</sup>

There is here no “reserved area” for religious persons or ordained ministers, since this self-donation in fact corresponds to the baptismal consecration. Vatican II, in the middle of chapter V of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which is on the universal call to holiness, did nothing more but reactivate what the Church Fathers had already said to the faithful of their time. Augustine also says: “You may be afraid of losing yourself by giving yourself, but it is in just giving yourself that you will lose yourself.”<sup>27</sup> This is the offering of ourselves which, in both pastoral terms and in normal existence reaches to the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. my book with M. A. de Matteo, *S'ouvrir à la fécondité de l'Esprit. Fondements d'une pastorale d'engagement*. Préface de Mgr Vincent Jordy, coll. “Perspectives pastorales”, n. 4, St-Maurice, Saint-Augustin, 2009. All of this contribution is based on chapter 4 of the book, “À la source de la vie chrétienne et apostolique: déployer la grâce du baptême”, pp. 84–124.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Fossion, *L'évangélisation comme surprise*, “*Lumen Vitae*” 59 (2006), pp. 35–44, here pp. 36–38.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 112.

<sup>26</sup> G. Blaquièrre, *La seconde conversion*, pp. 8–11.

<sup>27</sup> St Augustine, *Sermon*, 34.

milestone of a “new birth.” As Father Marie-Eugène concludes: “Giving oneself to Christ, a complete self-giving is a deeply Christian disposition. One identifies with Christ in profundity and without this any imitation of Jesus is superficial and perhaps a vain external formalism. To be of Christ, one must surrender himself to God because we are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.”<sup>28</sup>

## 8. Strength in Weakness

In pastoral ministry as in other areas, “there is no question of the man who wants or gives, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom 9, 16). We must still accept our poverty and powerlessness as evangelizers, to accommodate the Lord’s mercy. How are we to live the “second conversion” if we are not living the consequences of Christ’s affirmation to his disciples that: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15, 5)? How are we to live the “second begetting” if we do not acknowledge the fundamental vanity of our own human endeavours which lack being rooted in the Spirit?<sup>29</sup> How can we hear the “second call” if not at the centre of a radical spiritual experience of poverty? As explained by Father Marie-Eugène: “We must feel our poverty to call God. When one feels strong, s/he works using his/her strength. When one feels his poverty, one is forced to continually call God [...]. Holiness consists in such a state of poverty that at any time one is forced to ask all the Holy Spirit, act under his dependence arm, and entrusted to his assistance, convinced that without grace one can do nothing ...”<sup>30</sup>

This is Pauline apostolic spirituality which is thus a recall into this notion of “second conversion”: “Oh! not I, but the grace of God which is in me!” (1 Cor 15, 10) Is not by measuring our inability in our sphere that we can pass the “effervescent adolescence” to move to a “mature in the apostolate” by trusting ourselves and abandoning ourselves to God who accompanies our action and instils faith in those we encounter?<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Père Marie-Eugène de l’Enfant Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 328.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. especially A. Fossion, *Quelle annonce d’Évangile pour notre temps?*, in: *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile*, pp. 78–79.

<sup>30</sup> Conference of the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1959, unpublished notes, cited in: F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l’Esprit*, pp. 190–191.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. P. A. Giguère, *Catéchèse et maturité de la foi*, coll. “Théologies pratiques”, Bruxelles / Montréal, Lumen Vitae / Novalis, 2002, pp. 86–88.



## 9. A "Passover of Action"

This does not happen without purification, as the vine does not give good fruit without pruning (Jn 15, 2). But such "work" is not a punishment, it is rather a reward. As it was for Paul, the divine pedagogy wants to make us "chosen instruments" (Acts 9, 15), shaping us by his Spirit. It is love which purifies us, so that "we may walk in his presence and be perfect," according to the exhortation given to Abraham (Gen 17, 1).

Continuing the reflection of St John of the Cross on the "nights" of contemplation (nights of the senses and nights of the Spirit),<sup>32</sup> F. R. Wilhelem speaks of "nights of action" contemplated under the triple effect of "*purification (reorientation, detachment), processing (adaptation, accommodation) and union (fertility)*,"<sup>33</sup> in order to grow in the theological virtues and lead to a more effective docility to the Spirit in our ministry. Father Marie-Eugene says that, "Whoever emerges victorious from the test, necessarily becomes an apostle, a coach."<sup>34</sup>

This "passing over of action" translates into three signs, similar to those John of the Cross describes the nights of the contemplative life: the inability in one's sphere that the apostle feels and that pushes him to change the "center of gravity" (guillemet fermant sur la même ligne) (1<sup>st</sup> sign), a disgust one feels for the tasks assigned to him/her (2<sup>nd</sup> sign), but at the same time there is a foundation of trust and serenity that paradoxically remains<sup>35</sup> as a "basis of maturity achieved in terms of identity"<sup>36</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup> sign). Such purification work is the fundamental experience of the Apostolic trials of Paul when he exclaims: "*For the very greatness of the revelations I received, I should not be exalted myself, because a thorn in the flesh was given to me as a messenger of Satan to remind me that I should not be exalted. In this regard, thrice I besought the Lord that this may be taken away from me (2<sup>nd</sup> sign). The Lord told me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (1<sup>st</sup> sign). It is therefore of great courage to me that I glory in my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (3<sup>rd</sup> sign). Therefore I am*

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *La montée du Carmel*, Livre I, ch. 1/27.

<sup>33</sup> F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, p. 206.

<sup>34</sup> Père Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, pp. 210–226.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, p. 217, quoting some "Retraites sacerdotales inédites" of Father Marie-Eugène (dated 1962 and 1966).

*satisfied with weaknesses, insults, persecution and anguish endured for Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong*” (we highlight and make explicit 2 Cor 12, 7–10).

Here we touch the fundamental contradiction of all apostolic life, one that is aware of having been “seized by Christ” (Phil 3, 12) and led by the Spirit: it is in powerlessness that the apostle that manifests God’s strength. It is when human beings understand that they are no match to the immense challenges of evangelization that they lower their guard and let themselves be kneaded by the Spirit, as the clay is by the potter. It is in giving back Isaac to God that Abraham confirms that he is truly a father in the name of God and not in his own name (cf. Gen 22, 1–19).<sup>37</sup> As stated by the Apostle to the Gentiles: “We still rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produce perseverance, perseverance is proven through virtue, virtue is tested in hope. And hope does not disappoint, because love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5, 3–5).

## 10. Begetting by Osmosis

Through this “Passover of the Ministry”, today’s apostle is perfected from within and leads to a “new birth” by the giving over of his heart in God, diving into the mystery of Christ and of the Church, with the enormous desire to work in the service of God and in the harmony of his contemplation and commitment to the same humble and burning love for the Lord and for his brothers.<sup>38</sup> It is to the extent that it catches the “love sickness”<sup>39</sup> of Paul, of Mary Magdalene and of many other evangelical figures, and then work for the proclamation of the Kingdom and of the Gospel “in season and out of season”(2 Tim 4, 2). Teresa of Avila is fascinated by the journey of the Samaritan woman who, sinful as she was, has left himself be taken up by the words of the Master to the point of going to communicate his “*divine intoxication*” to her fellow countrymen and women.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. D. Barthélemy, *Dieu et son image*, coll. “Foi vivante”, Paris, Cerf, 1970, pp. 61–62.74.

<sup>38</sup> To successively repeat the description of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> mansions according to Theresa of Avila, Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l’Esprit*, pp. 57–154.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Sainte Thérèse d’Avila, *Le chemin de la perfection*, 40/3/506; or *Autobiographie*, 21/7/143.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Pensées sur l’amour de Dieu*, 7/6/603.

It is especially through the radiation of this unity that the Christian can testify to the presence that dwells within his/her in the depths. An apostolate “by osmosis” as the scent of flowers that attracts without saying anything. The Spanish Carmelite describes with relish a person marked by divine love as on who “begins to help others without hardly realizing it, without doing anything himself; then they realize it because the fragrance of flowers is already so strong that they want to approach it.”<sup>41</sup>

This is the source of all pastoral engendering, it is the origin of all fruitfulness (Jn 15, 5): the more the union with Christ is deeper, the more human and ecclesial radiation is powerful, it is realized by visible encounters with people or through invisible relationships forged in the communion of saints.<sup>42</sup> A pastoral fragrance which makes it possible to feel the fragrance of God (cf. 2 Cor 2, 14–15). Let us listen to the other Therese who writes in her autobiographical manuscripts, in a style which was typical to her era: “Jesus gave me a simple way to accomplish my mission. He made me understand these words of the Song of Songs: ‘Attract me, and we will run to the smell of your perfume’ [Ct 1,3]. O Jesus, so it is not even necessary to say ‘In attracting me, attract the souls that I love.’ The simple word: ‘Attract me’ suffices. Lord, I understand, when a soul is left captivated by the intoxicating scent of your perfume, it cannot run alone, all the souls it loves are linked to its mansions; this is done without constraint, without effort; it is a natural consequence of its attraction towards you.”<sup>43</sup> And God knows that in many catechetical or pastoral meetings, human beings are filled with the fragrance of the Lord, the young, children, humble people, distant from the Church!

## 11. An apostolic mysticism

Following the example of Teresa of Avila “eminently contemplative and tirelessly active,”<sup>44</sup> every baptized, every pastoral agent finds happiness in the balance

---

<sup>41</sup> *Autobiographie*, 19/3/122.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, pp. 81–82.

<sup>43</sup> Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, Manuscrit C, 33 v<sup>o</sup>-34r<sup>o</sup>, in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Cerf / DDB, 1992, pp. 280–281.

<sup>44</sup> As Père Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus states, “[...] on ne saurait, dans l'enseignement chrétien, séparer ni distinguer la doctrine spirituelle d'apostolat de la doctrine contemplative.

between contemplation and action in a true “apostolic mysticism”.<sup>45</sup> By his/her openness to the Spirit, the “mystic apostle” lets him/herself both empty of him/herself and be filled with the divine presence. S/he was born with the dignity of a son or daughter, totally ‘converted’ in the etymological sense of “facing” the Lord, where s/he sees the action.

We then enter into a new modality of cooperation with God, not by imposing in some way the conditions of our action and requiring him to put it in the service of our plans, sophisticated as they are. We ask him to take it over from our own endeavours, leaving him really take the helm of our lives and restoring him to power in his Church. We so often “devise” the divine channel through our own “jabber”! We should move from activism, even a well-intentioned one, to a receptiveness of the work of God at the heart of our action.

Prayer is the place par excellence where we can get in tune with the divine architect: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain, if the Lord does not keep the city, it is in vain that the guards keep watch” (Ps 127 (126), 1). Do we really believe in this divine work within us? As F. R. Wilhélem stated, “Others said, the Lord expects of us not so much the development of major projects for the construction of the Church, but the fundamental decision to surrender ourselves completely to him, for he himself associates us with his own project.”<sup>46</sup> It is precisely in this that the apostolic “second conversion” consists!

Translated by Carl-Mario Sultana, University of Malta

---

*En cette spiritualité, contemplation et apostolat sont solidaires l'un de l'autre, s'y fondent et s'y complètent heureusement. Ce sont deux aspects d'un tout harmonieux, deux manifestations d'une même vie profonde” (Je veux voir Dieu, p. 125).*

<sup>45</sup> “Mystique contemplative” et “mystique de l'action” forment deux aspects indissociables de l'unique vie baptismale. Cf. F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, p. 23, returning to the essay by H.U. von Balthasar, *Au-delà de l'action et de la contemplation?*, “Vie consacrée”, mars – avril 1973, pp. 65–74.

<sup>46</sup> F. R. Wilhélem, *Agir dans l'Esprit*, p. 50.