



CONFERENCE I

Religious Life in Europe: way of testimony

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A problematical question: we are heavily engaged in works and many activities, almost worn out with all the good we are doing, yet Europe, seeing all these good works, does not turn to God and does not glorify him as God the Father. "Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven", Mt 5:16. Something has evidently gone wrong... There is great concentration on the works, but without "light" the works will not lead back to God.

1. Theological foundation of testimony

- a. In John's Gospel it is explicitly demonstrated that testimony is a reality of relationship. The Son, in all that he is, says and does, reveals his union with the Father, the Father himself. The same can be said of the Father and also of the Holy Spirit.
- b. To make the Other within oneself emerge in all his truth - in John's gospel this is equivalent to *glorifying*.
 - i. To glorify: to make the other present in all his truth as love realised. The love of the Son is realised when in the obedience of love he reveals his Sonship, and the Father in all his truth of being Father.
- c. The culmination of the testimony, both in works and in words, is the Paschal mystery.
- d. Testimony is by nature relational and personal, to the point that Christ explicitly says: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If for no other reason, believe it on the evidence of these works", Jn 14:11.
- e. The work of testimony is inseparable from communion, so it makes the mystery present, and unites to the one of whom he is giving testimony.
- f. The Holy Spirit will glorify the Son because he will take what is his and announce it. "Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine and announced to you". The Holy Spirit bears testimony, glorifies, precisely because he draws from communion, and not from himself.
- g. Truth is communion and it is possible to make it known through communion, because what is being spoken of here is a truth that is testified, not demonstrated or taught.

2. Testimony is a symbolic reality

- a. Eastern Christianity gives us a grandiose vision of the symbol, which was the greatest cultural contribution of Christianity. The symbol as the real unity of two worlds, the inter-penetration of two worlds. The symbol, not as signifying someone or something (as proposed by contemporary western philosophical thought), but as revelation of the personal presence of God. The symbol makes present, reveals and creates communion with the one who is manifesting himself.

- b. Religious life, in all that it is and does, is, in fact, a symbolic reality *par excellence* precisely because it makes God present in a world living a new life, the divine life received in Baptism.
 - c. This life manifests itself in our mentality, in our activity and in our works. Everything that makes the divine communion emerge is a symbolic reality. As Christ is the place *par excellence* of the Father's revelation, religious life, living the life of Christ, is inserted into the revelation of the Father; as Christ said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father".
 - d. No revelation of Sonship or of Fatherhood is possible without the Holy Spirit.
 - e. In fact, Luke, at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of Acts, links testimony with Pentecost. Testimony begins only after having been invested with power from on high.
 - f. The Holy Spirit is the true communicator of divine life, the only one who makes it possible to discover, within a reality, another, deeper reality. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about an awareness of union and communion, because he creates a consciousness of *agapé*.
3. Religious life makes explicit what St Paul says to the Ephesians: "we are God's work of art"
- a. This is a mentality of symbol, of communion.
 - b. How is it possible that precisely this is no longer realised in the modern era (with the exception of the saints, both canonised and hidden)...
 - c. On one hand, we have developed a mentality that is conceptual, logical and abstract, and, on the other hand, a style of devotion that is disincarnated, intimate and individualistic.
 - d. The mentality of symbol has vanished, and with it, the whole organic, sacramental and ecclesial vision. Dualism has reappeared - between natural and supernatural, human and divine.
 - e. Even faith and the spiritual life have again become an obligation, a human work. And in this context, testimony has failed, and has remained, at most, a link between the ideal and its realisation.
 - f. The gulf between works and persons has been shown to be fatal; the breaking-point of religious life.
 - g. Need of a theological spiritual reflection on the significant experience of religious men and women of Eastern Europe under communism. Precisely when the State closed all their active works, there began a great creativity of the Spirit, of the testimony of these religious.
 - h. The very life of religious persons inserted into society has revealed true power and pastoral magnetism. Christianity has been commanding great sympathy among the people.

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