

APOSTOLATE OF INTERIOR LIFE

What interior life is

For many people the "interior life" is a certain internal serenity, free from the complications proper to the external world, a path that allows to arrive at a certain inner balance of the person. For others, it is a certain level of thought and feeling that gives greater intuition and inspiration in social and professional life. For others it can mean a relationship with the higher being, which is a source of peace, and higher energy; that is, a harmony with God, which allows us to live in a positive way. For others it is an internalization of everything you live (ideas, desires, experiences, habits, conditioning) up to the very identity of God.

With Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, we could define inner life as "the state of activity of a soul that reacts to regulate its natural inclinations, and strives to acquire the habit of judging and governing itself in everything according to the light of the Gospel and the examples of Our Lord".

For us, in concrete terms, inner life should mean living all reality, all dimensions of life, in unity – we are used to concentrating them in the "four wheels" – all of itself, in all circumstances...; fragmentation, typical of our age, caused by many external or internal realities. Only when everything we live or do becomes an expression of deep inner unity, could we say that we live as we have been called to live.

Only with a minimum of personality balance is it possible to reach a minimum level of spiritual life. At all stages of life we need to have something of maximum value, which makes everything else secondary. For us Christians, it is God and his Kingdom – the precious pearl and treasure that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel – that leads us to consider everything else secondary. What is said on a personal level also applies at collective, community level. It is necessary to get to live in unity everything that exists. On the other hand, if there is no unity in the interior, there can be no unity in the outside.

The interior life, source, engine and soul of every apostolate

It is inevitable to evoke here dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard's well-known book, *The Soul of Every Apostolate* – well known by our Founder – which really wants to show that without the inner life, all the activity and dedication of the apostle becomes unhappy and can empty the very person of the apostle.

The same author suggests the need to avoid the temptation to see inner life as "a kind of oasis in which one can take refuge to spend its existence there lazily". And in this sense he applies the words of the Gospel: "The kingdom of heaven is obtained by force and it is the violent who conquer it" (Mt. 11:12). In fact, it is not possible to close in on the spiritual level. Authentic inner life necessarily projects itself in action in favour of others, in the various works of apostolate.

However, says the author, it is necessary to avoid the temptation to oppose the pretext of the urgency of the salvation of souls in order to neglect the life of intimacy with God, forgetting that "action must be only the overflow of inner life" and that "the basis, purpose and means of a work must be imbued with inner life" because certainly what is sought by works is to realize the good, but sometimes, if "the organizers had a wavering faith in the power of action of supernatural life on souls, despite a thousand efforts, the results were nil or almost nil".

Dom Chautard gives a very eloquent example: "The heart beats day and night, and a single moment of arrest of this essential organ would immediately lead to death. The arm, on the other hand, is only an integral part of the human body and moves only from time to time. This teaches us that we must sometimes grant some respite to our outward occupations, but on the contrary we must never cease to apply ourselves to spiritual things... Without this life, everything is languid, sterile and full of imperfections".

Inner life is a condition of the fruitfulness of works. "Let us remember that, if the apostle realizes the Gospel saying: 'He who remains in me and I in him...', the fruitfulness of his action desired by God is assured: '... these bear much fruit' (Jn 15:5)." On the contrary— continues Dom Chautard – "the lack of inner life, and therefore the manifestation of human passions, give the explanation of so many defeats".

And when the apostle acts from a solid inner life, he not only cooperates with God in the salvation of others, but makes every activity a means of holiness for himself: inner life - says Dom Chautard - is "the basis of the holiness of the apostolic worker". The reason is that "Holiness is nothing more than the inner life carried up to the very close union of the will with that of God. Ordinarily and without a miracle of grace, therefore, the soul does not reach this end except after having passed, with multiple and painful efforts".

Interior life in itself is apostolate

For Dom Chautard, the substance of the apostolate lies in the fact that the apostle develops in his soul, in a superlative degree, the grace of God and transmits it to others. When someone possesses in himself, in an intense and abundant way, the life of grace, God's action, is felt – even unintentionally – through this person, on those whom he wants to conquer. In their souls, this action therefore produces spiritual fruits similar to those it produced in the apostle's soul. Thus the apostolate will be fruitful when its human instrument enjoys a high participation in divine grace; on the other hand, it will be sterile when this participation is insufficient.

God manifests Himself in some way through people of interior life. The supernatural shines through in the eyes of others, who perceive something of God's mystery. Perhaps it is the splendour of divine influence that theology calls sanctifying grace, or the result of the ineffable presence of divine Persons in the people they sanctify. St. Basil explained that when the Holy Spirit joins souls purified by his grace, he makes them more spiritual. Just as the sun makes the crystal that it touches or penetrates with its ray more sparkling, so the sanctifying Spirit makes the souls in which He dwells brighter, and because of His presence they become like so many hearths that spread grace and charity around them.

These are reflections of Dom Chautard, who still affirms that through inner life the apostle radiates faith, because God's presence in him manifests itself to the people who listen to it; it radiates hope, because his faith has definitively confirmed it in the conviction that happiness is found in God and only in God; charity, because it aims above all at the possession of charity and the purpose of the inner man is the interpenetration between Jesus and the soul (cf. Jn 15:1-8); it radiates goodness: even if it were naturally brought to selfishness and hardness of heart, gradually these defects will disappear.

These are reflections of Dom Chautard, who still affirms that through inner life the apostle radiates faith, because God's presence in him manifests itself to the people who listen to him; he

radiates hope, because his faith has definitively confirmed it in the conviction that happiness is found in God and only in God; charity, because it aims above all at the possession of charity and the purpose of the inner man is the interpenetration between Jesus and the soul (cf. Jn 15:1-8); it radiates goodness: even if it were naturally brought to selfishness and hardness of heart, gradually these defects will disappear.

Inner life generates other inner life; it is worth remembering that inner life through the Eucharist combines all the fruitfulness of the apostolate; whereas prayer is an indispensable element of inner life and therefore of the apostolate, while liturgical life is the source of inner life and apostolate; and - concludes Chautard - true devotion to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of men, is necessary for personal inner life.

The thought of Blessed James Alberione

Fr Alberione complains that the apostolate of inner life is often "not listed with others, one goes a little behind Americanism, that is, external action only, to the detriment of the spirit. This apostolate is our sanctification and the work we do to amend ourselves and to acquire the virtues... It is the effort to say no to nature and yes to God... And it is still the apostolate of inner life that prepares us for eternal life... The soul of inner life takes advice, accepts corrections, makes resolutions and watches; in this way it accomplishes the greatest of the apostolates..." (*To the Daughters of Saint Paul*, 1947, pp. 402-403).

And he observes acutely: "It will be said that this apostolate is too personal and selfish; yes, the soul piles up for itself, but it does like the hearth that swallows wood and charcoal and then spreads its beneficial warmth around it ... Those who work spiritually within do the most advantageous of the apostolates, because they join God and then communicate Him to souls" (Ibid.).

Fr Alberione said again in 1947: "The apostolate is the irradiation of Christ, imitation of him; it is the flower of charity, indeed the fruit of it: the more you love and the more you seek the will of the beloved" (Ibid., p. 401). And again: "The apostolate of inner life is that commitment, desire, work, continuous effort to arrive at holiness... And the truer and the more tiring the work, the nobler, the more necessary will the consequences be. The person who takes care to make the soul ever purer, ever more beautiful..., performs a true apostolate" (Ibid., pp. 448-449).

The Founder strongly affirmed this by describing the apostle's person: "The apostle is the one who carries God in his soul and radiates him around him. The apostle is a saint who accumulates treasures; and communicates the surplus to men. The apostle has a heart burning with love for God and for men; and can't compress and stifle what he hears and thinks. The apostle is a vase of election that pours out, and souls rush to quench their thirst. The apostle is a temple of the Holy Trinity that is fully operating in him. He, in the words of a writer, exudes God from all pores: with words, works, prayers, gestures, attitudes; in public and in private; from all his being. Live of God! and give God" (*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei* IV, p. 278).

And he affirmed that inner life is apostolate for two reasons: "because the soul that strives to achieve holiness obtains blessings throughout the environment in which it lives and on the whole world... it is like a magnet that quietly draws hearts to God... arouses apostles and promotes other apostolates..." (*To the Daughters of Saint Paul*, 1947, p. 401); and also "because

he accomplishes a true apostolate by virtue of the communion of saints" (Ibid.). And he makes a beautiful comparison: "The soul of inner life is in the Church like the heart that sends blood into all members, and therefore everyone draws good from her holiness. A soul that works for one's sanctification is not a selfish one that closes in on itself, but is active, active for the good of others; his life is not idle, but effective, fruitful" (Ibid.).

Fr Alberione opens up to all the possibility of making a very fruitful apostolate: "Sick people who have no aptitude and the possibility of being engaged in the apostolate of action, make themselves good, offer God their sufferings and exercise an equally effective apostolate" (Ibid., pp. 448-449).

And in the book *Mary Queen of the Apostles* (p. 35) Fr Alberione writes: "Inner holiness is the first and most essential apostolate, unmistakable and irreplaceable. If there is interior life, there is always the apostle, even if it were an Antony in the desert, a Carthusian in silence, a cloistered lay sister attending to the most humble jobs".

Conclusion

It is not easy today to live internal unity because there are many dispersive forces in us and around us. And if we are inwardly divided, we do not fully live even one of the dimensions that make up our being.

In order to achieve unity, essential to the realization of one's life, the first thing to do is to live all the elements, in themselves so different, as an expression of a single unity. It is necessary that there is no overlap of the fragments, but that we live all of ourselves, fully, at all times. Thus, personal unity – free from fears, worries, desires, etc. – will lead us to the discovery and experience of Unity: of God.

On the other hand, inner life is an art, and art is learned. The most valuable guide is within oneself. It doesn't matter what name is given; you can call him the "Inner Master" with St Augustine... But He has to be discovered. The other masters will have no other function than to foster this encounter of themselves with the Supreme Being. It is a question of discovering in oneself the divine image in the sense of the text of Genesis: God created man in His image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26).

This image is compared to a divine germ, infinitely small and fragile. Inner life has the function of awakening this seed. Thus, with his inner life, the dead and risen man prolongs Christ's work in the universe. It does not even speak of God, because it has become a living witness of divine life. Nothing will be lost as long as there are men who have become alive thanks to the fullness of their inner lives. They give that fullness to the universe and save it by transfiguring it (cf. Marie Madeleine Davy in *Les Chemins de la profondeur*).

I like to make a comparison, certainly trivial, but that can allow us to get a little closer to this infinite reality that is the apostolate of interior life. We could think of solar energy panels: they get energy from the sun, and they accumulate it and then apply it and distribute it in so many ways according to needs. Inner life receives from God the energy of grace, which the believer accumulates in the heart of God. He mysteriously distributes it to the extent of needs and His infinite mercy.

Inner life produces supernatural, mysterious radiation in the apostle. A kind of supernatural energy, which mysteriously affects and moves hearts, in a mysterious way, unknown to us because it surpasses us, which is administered by God in an equally mysterious way. It is up to us

to trust him and to continue to live this interiority in the security that will produce his apostolic fruits, even if we will never know them.

Don Alberione affirms that this apostolate of inner life is possible to all: "May the souls who, in silence, pray and suffer, be cheered. The world provokes God with outrage and chastisement! But they save it with reparation. They work in the building up of Christ's body, perhaps more and better than those who travel the world, those who get exhausted with hard work (*Mary Queen of the Apostles*, p. 37).

And he still states that it is the first of all because: "It is the root of every apostolate. It is mandatory for everyone. It can be done by everyone, and it is always possible. The apostolate of interior life consists in our special work of sanctification; purification from evil; join Jesus Christ. This work and zeal for our soul will arouse the desire to save other souls" (*Alle Figlie di San Paolo*, 1947, p. 448).

This is perhaps the challenge of our time. Either you try to live the apostolate of interior life, or you risk working a lot, with the pretense of "making apostolate", which will instead be a simple "clanging cymbal" (1Cor 13:1), with the risk of living an empty and emptying, sterile life.

Let us conclude with the invitation of Pope Saint Paul VI: "*This I wanted to tell you, dear children; we must give inner life the importance it deserves, both in the balance of the pedagogical development of human faculties and above all in the fulfilment of our christian salvation and that of others. Modern man, we will say with a similarity of a philosopher of this time, has left the house and lost the key to return to it; is 'out of himself'. May it not be so with the Christian!*" (General Audience, 16 August 1967).

Don José Antonio Pérez, ssp