APOSTOLIC COMMITMENT OF THE LAITY TODAY

(OUTLINE…)

SOME INEVITABLE PREMISES...

1. ***Christianity has become a stranger...*** above all the Gospel remains a closed book... mostly, the one in circulation risks being a caricature and even a deformation, a mix of resonances, intimisms, privatisms, [translator’s note: think of intimism and privatism as keeping things just at a personal, domestic level] emotional particularities... *And here we leave aside the reduction of Christianity to ‘private morality’, individual morality, the morality of prohibition...* having placed *the vital link between faith and life* too much in *the background* – implying ‘all’ of life, *the link between faith and history* that means politics, society, economy, education, profession, work..., *the link between the Christian faith and the future of the cosmos,* of the earth, of all other living forms (very much found, instead, in the first Christian communities and in the Fathers).
2. ***In the now definitive collapse of a society in which Christianity had become the “dominant ideology”, “we can no longer speak of the things of faith as we did in the times of Christianity”*** *(O. Clément).* "What we are experiencing is not simply an era of change, but a change of era," Pope Bergoglio observes. He emphasises: *"*Brothers and sisters, *Christendom no longer exists! Today we are no longer the only ones who create culture, nor are we in the forefront or those most listened to. We need a change in our pastoral mindset which does not mean moving towards a relativistic pastoral care. We are no longer living in a Christian world because faith – especially in Europe, but also in a large part of the West – is no longer an evident presupposition of social life; indeed faith is often rejected, derided, marginalised and ridiculed” (*To the Roman Curia, 20 December 2019)*.* **It is not only a question of “techniques” but first of all of “content”, that is,** if you stop at the method you end up ‘adapting’ and that’s it, to ‘conform’ to the ‘dominant’ figures; what must be done is the profound rethinking of the contents of the faith as proposed by Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: the *kerygma has a clear social content and the ‘hierarchy of truths’ on which to make a new formation*... But the strenna of the Rector Major is very pertinent and frank regarding this too.
3. “You must not believe by ancient habit” wrote Andrej Sinjawski from the Siberian gulag, not because of the anguish you feel in the face of death, not in any case, so not because someone forces us... Today, in ***fact, Christianity is increasingly the result of a free choice...*** P. Berger writes: “*Although unexpectedly we became contemporaries of the first Christians, who lived in the Greco-Roman world characterised by a lively pluralism and for whom the Christian faith was possible only as a deliberate choice”.* It is this fact for the layperson today that makes the difference! *This means rethinking and re-articulating all our education and our Christian pedagogy...*
4. ***The Christian layperson must learn to be in a world in which God no longer informs culture: the layperson lives among people in a world in which God is no longer an obvious or foregone hypothesis...*** It is a new style for us, which requires “careful listening, on the part of those who proclaim and of the Magisterium, to the many forms of expression of the sense of faith”, renouncing “forcing [things] into a rigid doctrinal structure.” Faith does not impose itself but proposes itself (W. Kasper). *It is not a question of re-Christianising the world for a new Christianity, but of inaugurating a new form of life at the service of the Kingdom announced and begun by Jesus*.
5. ***The beginning of a fundamental process: the de-privatisation of the Christian faith***, which aims to overcome the individualistic *rigorism* of Christian salvation by taking steps today from the evangelical meaning of conversion to act in a messianic practice of love. *From rigorism to the radical nature of Christian life.*
6. A new social responsibility

A ***new style for all Christians who*** *are entrusted with responsibility for a central issue such as* ***the social bond and the way of treating others:*** *the refugee, the asylum seeker, the Muslim, the land that welcomes us...* And a new style becomes necessary also for theology, called to “activate its critical-contemplative potential”. “Not only does ‘going out from oneself to others’ properly characterise a Christian dynamic induced by Sacred Scripture, but it is the core of authentic humanity. Therefore we also speak – with reference to a mystique of fraternity – of a ‘critical-contemplative’ shift.[[1]](#footnote-1)” ***The new social responsibility is called*** ***Fraternity.*** *And this responsibility includes mercy and concern for the poor, going out into the peripheries of life, caring for the sick and accompanying families, condemning corruption and injustice, exposing deadly political and economic choices, seeking peace and the unity of Christians...* All areas in which the leaven of the laity can make the meaning and value of life flourish again...

THE STYLE OF THE COMMITTED LAYPERSON

*Therefore it is more than evident that Jesus preached the kingdom of God and not himself*, writes the Rector Major. This implies cleansing the proposal and going to the heart of Jesus’ style: **the cause of the Kingdom** that Jesus lives as a cause worthy of the gift of a lifetime! Pass on and become passionate about the cause of the Kingdom!

1. Like it was for Jesus, hospitality is the lay person’s first duty

Hospitality is presented as an offer: symmetry allows us to offer others the opportunity to express themselves and share something, so that I in turn become their guest.

1. ***Transformation with discretion but through radical human relationships****.* A layperson who, above all, takes on the responsibility of creating *relationships* which are now degraded, torn apart and a source of suffering, where it is useless to seek solutions in "*outdated ways and forms* that even culturally do not have the capacity to be significant" (Pope Francis). Social and civil love (cf. Laudato Si’).
2. ***The mystical-political following of Christ in Christian commitment today*.** The proposal of theologian J.-B. Metz: a "mysticism of open eyes"[[2]](#footnote-2) that aims to bring together, through an eloquent analogy, **mysticism** (often depicted with eyes closed to the world)***and open eyes****, that is,* attention to the world, to history, to man and to the incarnation that continues in history, opening it to redemption. **A concrete and responsible spirituality:** it is authentically *Catholic* because it theologically interrupts ‘the ever-increasing dualism between the history of faith and the history of life, between the world of faith and the world of reason, between the profession of faith and experience.” ”Jesus’ first gaze is a messianic gaze. It is not primarily gazing on the sin of others, but on their suffering. Jesus offers and perfects in his person the paradigm of *"a biblical mysticism of justice; it is the passion of God in the sense of compassion, of mystical practice of compassion"*.
3. ***The ‘markers’ of the apostolic commitment of the laity.*** The supreme principle of the Church’s social teaching is the commandment of love, which alone would be sufficient to make a difference with respect to the many ideologies of our day. Linked to it are: ***1. The recognition of human dignity; 2. The preferential option for the poor; 3. The universal destination of goods; 4. The common good; 5. Solidarity; 6. Subsidiarity; 7. Care for our common home.***
4. ***Aspects on which to engage: our way of life***, especially the laity linked to the Salesian charism must ‘make community’ – be weavers of relationships (today re-signify the meaning of the ’Salesian *Family*’); ***professional life*** (for a “free, creative, participatory and supportive work”)***; the field of civil participation*** (...upright citizens..., face the crisis of the bond of participatory citizenship...); ***new educational poverty*** (of children but also of adults!); ***the economy of the gift*** (not welfare but generation of bonding value); ***the professions of care for the person*** (emergency destined to increase...);  ***the ecological transition*** (which is first of all the ecological *conversion* of people and our structures...).

1. C. THEOBALD, *Fraternità* Qiqajon, Magnano, 2016, pp. 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J.-B. METZ, *Mistica degli occhi aperti,* Queriniana, Brescia 2013, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)