

MISSIONARY EXERCISES

The Art of Fishing

I It is believed
that the King of fishermen
does not look for anything else
than souls.
I have seen more than one of them
carry on the slime of the canals
flashes of lapis lazuli.
His kingdom is millimeter-sized,
his arrow is uncatchable
by flashes.
Only the Fisher King
has a right size,
the others barely have a soul
and the fear
of losing it.

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MISSIONARY EXERCISES

How to Follow the Miracle of Conversion

A General Introduction

This contribution to formation for a missionary spirituality in general and Xaverian in particular consists of:

- + Materials
- + Instructions

Materials are texts,

- + written and already given,
- + oral and to be found during meetings, or in preparation for meetings, on which to initiate dialogue, personal reflection and prayer.

Instructions are indications on how to use the materials during group or personal meetings.

Instructions

These exercises are designed for **groups**.

These groups should already be somewhat close-knit and **interested in Mission**.

It would be desirable that they have not just one leader, but that **at least two people** carry out the management of the groups, and in particular the meetings. This way the leaders can help each other and above all communicate the spirit that animates them.

In the **time between meetings** there should be continued

- + some form of personal reflection,
- + some dialogue about what was experienced in the meetings.

1.

A First Set of Meetings

The meetings can begin with

- + a moment of mutual **welcome**
- + a **prayer**.

The topic of the first series of meetings is

- + sharing conversion **experiences** followed by
- + **questions** and **answers**.

Conversion experiences can be those of

- + people belonging to the group, or
- + people invited to share them in the group, or
- + experiences taken from texts or other media (youtube...).

Questions can be asked

- + by listeners present at the meeting (preferably)
- + by those conducting the meeting (if they consider it prudent, useful, necessary).

The **answers** can be given

- + by those who have shared their experience
- + by everyone, when they read, watch or listen to the testimony through the media.

There may be **some meetings** of this type.

One meeting alone would not be enough.

This type of meetings can also be done at other times later in the exercises.

Purpose of these first meetings is

- + to discover, admire and praise God for his masterpieces worked in people
- + to begin to realize how many factors cooperate in the process of conversion
- + which their complex interaction is
- + what are the multiple ways in which we can cooperate in conversion.

Possible questions to delve deeper into conversion stories:

- + What struck me most in this story? Why?
- + What are the circumstances that started the conversion journey? Why?
- + Were there obstacles? Where? When? How?
- + Who helped the person who converted? How did they do it?
- + Let's try to get into the soul of the persons who helped:
 - + What might they have thought?
 - + Could they have had hesitations, fears? Did they overcome them? How?
 - + How did they accompany the person they were following?
- + When and how were there decisive moments?
- + Was there any resistance? From whom?
- + How was the entry into the new community?

+ What is the current situation? Are there any afterthoughts?

The meetings can end with a **prayer**.

(For a conversion story, see the file Materials 01)

2.

A Second Set of Meetings

The meetings can begin with

+ a moment of mutual **welcome**

+ a **prayer**.

The topic of the second series of meetings is

+ a study of the different moments of conversion followed by

+ **questions** and **answers**, **dialogue** and also **discussion**.

I propose to use as material excerpts from a text written by Lewis R. Rambo,

Understanding Religious Conversion (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1983, 1993, 2020). (See the file: Materials 02)

Other materials can be used.

The work on these materials has a series of objectives:

+ to realize

the complexity of the phenomenon and

the possibility of studying it

+ to arouse interest in the analysis of the individual moments of the conversion process

+ to realize that knowing the dynamics of the process is not enough: it is necessary to deepen the motivations to actively intervene in these processes.

+ the choice to favor dialogue between the members of the group is important, because each one must learn to become a protagonist in these processes. They must therefore elaborate their own thoughts, find their own solutions, study their own resources... All this not to work alone, but to work better together.

The meetings can end with a **prayer**.

3.

A Third Set of Meetings

The meetings can begin with

+a moment of mutual **welcome**

+a **prayer**.

The topic of the third series of meetings is

+ a study of stories accompanying the conversion as told in the **Book of Acts**, through the **sharing of answers** to a series of **questions**.

(For some questions about the texts, see the file Materials 03)

The meetings can end with a **prayer**.

4.

A Fourth Set of Meetings

The meetings can begin with

+a moment of mutual **welcome**

+a **prayer**.

Purpose of these meetings is to somehow enter into the intentions of Paul and Guido Maria Conforti and make them our own, so as to be guided by their same spirit.

It is about growing in spirituality.

The meetings consist of

+ **presentation** of biblical texts

+ **silence, meditation and prayer**

+ **sharing** on what of these texts strikes us and helps us

(See the file Materials 04)

The meetings can end with a **prayer**.

5.

A Fifth Set of Meetings

The meetings can begin with

+a moment of mutual **welcome**

+a **prayer**.

The topic of this series of meetings is

- + reflecting together on how each person can work for conversions where they are
- + imagining what can be done together to accompany conversions

(See the file Materials 05)

This series of meetings aims to help participants realize, in a very practical and feasible way, what possibilities are open to individuals and groups in view of conversions.

The meetings take place in the form of dialogue, even in small groups.

Someone can perhaps take note of the most feasible proposals.

There can be a summary of the dialogue and the proposals.

The meetings can end with a **prayer**.

And then...

Individuals and groups who have participated in these exercises generally return to their daily lives and the church services they already perform.

However, we can keep in touch (some meetings?), to

- + share lived experiences,
- + support each other,
- + find possible ways and forms of collaboration to spread missionary spirituality

It is possible to create some simple connection structure for this purpose.

Materials 01 A Story of Conversion

In You is the Source of Life

My baptism caused no conflict with my family. Because the Catholic Church can honor our ancestors, this gave us all peace of mind. My mother said to me “It’s good that you can find a support for your life.” I replied to my mother “I think we have to find the source of life.”

Warmth Spreads - Jesus’ Invitation

1998 was a pivotal year in my life. In June of that year, I left my profession work as social worker. I realized again: Humans have no solution for human problems. But I did not know where to find it. I accidentally saw in a bookstore “By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept” by Paulo Coelho. I bought the book and read it. It mentioned some things about the Catholic Church. When reading, I did not understand, but it had an inexplicable attraction for me. I was particularly impressed by the author’s preface “Love is the Guide”. Later, I bought another book by him, “The Alchemist”; it deeply attracted me.

I read again and again. The two themes of “pursuit” and “transcendence” vaguely emerge in these two books, which more or less reflected my inner desires. When I was idle, a senior fellow student asked me to work as a counselor for a maternal and child shelter under a Catholic Foundation for two months (July and August). During that time, “Catholicism” reappeared, but this time it had moved from books up into my real life. One day in July, when I was on duty, I received a notice: A priest would come to the shelter for an hour that evening, residents could freely participate. I also took a chair and gathered around with several participating sisters. The priest was Father Lai, an Italian. He gave us photocopies from the Bible, a page titled “The Parable of the Banquet”: “When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ But he said to him, ‘A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for all is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of

the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’” (Luke 14:15-24)

After the reading, Father Lai asked us to share freely; the speeches of two or three sisters and the response from the priest made me notice how tolerant Father Lai was in accepting different reactions.

My response to this parable surprised myself at the time! I said: “The reasons mentioned in the parable, looks like that I have some of all of them.” In my heart I felt: I have used all kind of excuses to decline the invitation from this Jesus.

The days of working as a substitute in the shelter home continued to be full of challenges; since the colleague on duty with me was a Catholic, there was a statue of Our Lady on our desk and in the night room there was a statue of Jesus.

Several times, I encountered very difficult situations that I could do nothing about.

In these situations, I was desperate and helpless and prayed to the statue of the Virgin: “Please help me, help this child.”

I also said to the statue of Jesus: “Although I am not a Christian; this is your place, you have to take care of them!” Every time the danger turned into safety.

These experiences also made me vaguely realize “Jesus and the Virgin Mary heard my words and helped me.”

The time when Father Lai came to our home in August was not during my duty period. I asked the director to stay and attend the meeting. That day the priest gave us two photocopied texts. One was from the Bible and was titled “How You Should Pray” (Luke 11:1-13). I noticed this passage: “Therefore, I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10). The other text was the Sequence of the Holy Spirit read at Pentecost.

The priest said this was a prayer he had often recited since he was a child. Afterwards, the priest invited the participating friends to a sharing. I boldly asked the question: “If really there is a God so good as you say, why does such a God allow things like this to happen? These sisters were hurt by the people they were supposed to spend their lives with and now not only are they no longer able to spend a lifetime together, but their bodies are scarred everywhere and they became people with no home to return to. If there really is such a good God, why do things like this happen?”

When I finished speaking, I felt that everyone present was holding their breath, waiting for the priest’s answer.

After a while, the priest said slowly: “I don’t know either.” There was another silence. After a moment of silence, the priest continued: “However, my faith since I was young made me know that this God is with me no matter what.” Oh my God! Somehow, at that moment, while listening, I felt a warm current filling my chest. My tears also flowed out. My tears kept flowing, and the warm current seemed to flow throughout my body. I burst into tears, not from sadness, but from the experience of being enveloped in gentle light, touching my heart deeply. Perhaps, it was someone like this that I longed for. Dopo un po’, il Padre ha detto, lentamente: “Non lo so neanche io”. C’è stato un altro silenzio.

The Attraction of Jesus and Mary

After a day or two of settling, I decided to call my friend Mei Ting. We were classmates in junior high school and had been in contact with each other for a long time. I knew that she was listening to a nun teacher at Fu Da. I told her about my recent experience and thought seriously Maybe, I need to re-understand Jesus in the Catholic Church; because the Jesus conveyed by Father Lai seems different from the image I originally thought of Jesus (the impression I got from Christianity). So I made an appointment with her to go to the Holy Family Church in Taipei at 5pm the following Sunday. When the time came, outside the Holy Family church, she introduced her teacher, an old nun from Spain. I ‘watched Mass’ with them. After it was over, a priest was handing out posters at the door of the church. It was a picture of the Virgin Mary. I thought that the Virgin Mary was so beautiful, so I took one. After returning home, I posted it and looked at her almost every day. However, I said to Mei Ting “It seems that it is very difficult to be a Catholic! During the whole Mass, except kneeling, standing, and sitting down, I don’t know, what are you doing?”

After that, I started enjoying listening to songs. During that time, I lived with my younger sister, who was a Presbyterian Christian. My sister had many CDs of songs. I especially liked the songs of two groups, “Rhymes of Heaven” and “Fountain of Praise.” In addition to listening to hymns and interacting with Our Lady, I also went to St. Paul Bookstore to buy books and read them; I also went to the Campus Bookstore and selected a few Scripture cards. I tried to maintain some level of connection with Jesus and Mary. Before my term as a substitute at the Shelter Home agent expired, by chance I got a job as a high school counseling teacher adjunct. I put two Scripture cards in my notebook – “The Lord’s Prayer” and “Psalm 23.” I took them out and read them several times while waiting for the bus in the morning. They always made me feel at ease.

One day, I received a call from Mei Ting. She told me Sister Gu said that Mass was for baptized believers; people who wanted to know Jesus could attend a “catechumenate.” She also said that there would be a catechesis class at the Holy Family Church starting on a certain day in September. I looked at my calendar and replied that I had something to do that day. Unexpectedly, I received another call from Mei Ting at the beginning of October, saying that Sister Gu had informed her that a catechesis class was about to start on October 18. If I could go, she would accompany me. I looked at my agenda - that day was blank, and I thought: This nun whom I only met once really cares about me so seriously, I would be really sorry if I refused again. So, I just agreed.

On October 18th, I arrived early and walked to the classroom door on the second floor. I hesitated and walked down the stairs, thinking: I can explain, I have been here, but I could not get out of the gate. I went upstairs again, lingered outside the classroom door, hesitating, and then went downstairs again... I kept fighting like this for about ten minutes, as if I were deeply afraid that something might happen if I entered this door. Or will I ever come out again? Finally, I mustered up the courage, pushed the door open, and finally walked in! In the first catechumenate class, the only thing I remember is that Sister Hao gave each one of us stationery and envelopes, asking us to write to ourselves today, saying that we would send this letter after we were baptized.

At the end of October, I went to Yilan to meet up with some old friends. When arranging the itinerary, they mentioned the Guanyin Temple in Yuanshan Township as a must-visit place because I used to go to worship Guanyin Bodhisattva. I told them: “I am sorry, I can’t go there with you to worship now. I started attending catechesis classes in the Catholic Church to get to know Jesus again. Although I am not sure whether I will be baptized or when I will be baptized, since I want to know Jesus, I just need to concentrate on this, it is better this way.” After I finished speaking, several old friends pretended to faint and exclaimed that it was incredible! Yes, my change in religious orientation not only surprised my relatives and friends, but also seemed incredible to me! I have followed my grandma to worship at Mazu Temple since I was a child. Our clan immigrated to Taiwan from southern Fujian. In addition to worshipping Mazu, we also have princes enshrined in the ancestral hall. I am the eldest daughter in the family; because my father does not like to participate in such things as sacrifices, since I was in the fifth grade since elementary school I began being responsible for participating in various activities to worship the princes in the ancestral hall. When I was in college, I read the works of Master Shengyan of Dharma Drum Mountain, and came up with the idea of pursuing orthodox Buddhism. I also got interested in Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, and was particularly impressed by Guanyin Bodhisattva, who heard the voice and saved suffering... However, at that time, Jesus and the Virgin seemed to be

more attractive to me than anything else.

I Find the Source of Life

In addition to continuing to attend catechesis classes steadily, starting from mid-December, Sister Gu and I had individual catechesis courses, starting my “double study” catechumenate period, and receiving the benefits of group and individual courses at the same time. In January of the following year, Sister Hao informed the class:

Oltre a continuare a frequentare regolarmente le lezioni di catechesi, a partire da metà dicembre, suor Gu e io abbiamo seguito corsi di catechesi individuali, iniziando il mio periodo di catecumenato di “doppio studio” e ricevendo i benefici dei corsi di gruppo e individuali allo stesso tempo. A gennaio dell'anno seguente, suor Hao informò la classe: those who wish to be baptized on Easter Vigil this year should make an appointment with her and the Parish priest, Father Wang, for a private conversation. When I talked to Sister Hao individually, I told her that one day in December last year Mei Ting told me that she decided not to be baptized at Christmas Eve Mass and would postpone her baptism with me until Easter. I replied to her at that time “You have been listening to the teachings for two or three years. I have only been a catechumen for a few months. If you want to be baptized, please do it on Christmas. Do not wait for me. I do not even know when to be baptized.” I expressed my confused feelings to the nun. I clearly remember myself, how I was when giving that reply; however, when I heard the nun’s announcement, I somehow could not say to myself that I did not want to be baptized that year. I was genuine and sincere at both times. The nun responded to me: “If there is a miracle, this is a miracle! The change of people’s hearts is the biggest miracle!” It turned out that I was experiencing a miracle!

As we continued the process of catechesis and as Lent approached, the nun encouraged us to attend Sunday Mass in order to prepare for the liturgy on Easter Eve. I started attending mass every Sunday and several weekday masses. After the catechesis course, I learned about the structure and content of the Mass, and I knew on which pages of the book there was the order of the Mass. After several times, I gradually became familiar with it.

After learning this, I realized even more what I lacked... I still could not receive Holy Communion! I was looking forward to the coming of that day.

I let my family know my decision to be baptized in the Catholic Church, because my younger sister, a Christian from the Presbyterian Church, had already been a pioneer in the family. My decision to be baptized did not cause any conflict, and because the Catholic Church could commemorate our ancestors, we all felt at ease. My mother said to

me “It is good that you can find something to support you in life.” I replied Mom “I think I have found the source of life.”

My younger sister expressed her intention to attend the half-day retreat for us, baptismal candidates, with me. During the sharing time, she actually stood up and testified, saying that since she was baptized in the Presbyterian Church at the age of 15, she had been praying every day for her family to believe in the Lord and be saved. Among them, the one she found most difficult to convert was her eldest sister (me, maybe because every time there was an argument she could never convince me). Unexpectedly, she said, the eldest sister was the second person in the family to become a Christian after her! She was moved in her heart and had to come and bear witness to everyone “What is impossible for human beings is not difficult for God.”

Amen! A few years later, our mother began to attend church with her younger sister, then attended catechumenate classes, and was baptized in the Catholic Church in 2008. My other sister was baptized in the Lutheran Church in 2011.

Father Wang and Sister Hao invited Mei Ting and me to share our feelings about our preparation for baptism during Lent. When I said “I feel that this Jesus values me more than I value myself.” ...” Then I burst into tears. This is really a wonderful experience. I could not see Jesus physically, but in the days of knowing him and interacting with him, I have gradually felt how much he values people and me.

I realized that the one who values human value and gives human dignity the most is the God who created the universe. Human beings are “images of God.” Only God can give people the so-called “unconditional love” completely. The Gospel of John says in chapter 3 verse 16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” It really touched my heart. On April 3, 1999, during the solemn ceremony before Easter, I received the three sacraments and finally received the Eucharist of Jesus. When He melted in my mouth, my whole being seemed to be melted by Him, melted into warm drops of tears as pearls...

It was exactly nine months since I heard Father Lai preach the gospel in July 1998. God reborn me in Jesus Christ. In order to commemorate that the first Mass I attended to was celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that Our Lady was indeed my Christian blessing, I accepted Sister Gu’s suggestion and chose Asunta as my holy name. In the following years I have even more experience that Our Lady is my mediator of all favors and the Mother of life. She reminds us of the attitude of following Jesus: “Whatever He commands you, do it.” (Jn 2:5)
Our catechumenate class came to an end on the Feast of Holy Trinity that year.

However, baptism is indeed the “sacrament of initiation” before we begin to live our faith life. Later I discovered that conversion to God is a continuous process of paddling into the depths. After receiving the Sacrament of Initiation, in addition to observing my duties as a normal Christian, I also wanted to deepen my relationship with Jesus. I accepted Sister Hao’s invitation to be with her in the new catechumenate class. I continued to have individual conversations with Sister Gu, and also participated in the catechism class of Fr. Muscat OCD. One Sunday, I was unable to attend Sunday Mass because I overslept. The first thought that came to my mind was that I did not observe the Sunday precept. I felt fear and other reactions, but I had the opportunity to face the inner part of me that wanted to be a good Christian. Later, I slowly experienced kind of liberation: I realized that Jesus would not blame me for this, and I gradually became less likely to be nervous and afraid of many things.

In the year 2000, I started participating in the “Discipleship Course.” I had the opportunity to read the Bible from the beginning and read Psalm 139. I was surprised at how close the relationship between God and us is: He will always take care of me, no matter where, in which kind of situation I am. After reading Romans Chapter 8, verses 35-39, I realized that the dynamic of the relationship between Jesus Christ and me is completely opposite to what I originally thought.

“Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Is it hardship?

Is it embarrassment? Is it persecution? Is it hunger? Is it abject poverty? Is it dangerous? Is it a sword? As the Scripture says: “For your sake we are put to death all day long, and we are treated as sheep to be slaughtered.” ‘ But through Him who loves us, we have great victory in all these things, for I am convinced that whether death or life, whether angels or principalities, whether things that are now or things to come, no power, no high or far-reaching power, nor anything else in creation can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

It turns out that it is not I trying to win the love of Jesus Christ by myself; on the contrary, it is He who will not be affected by any force or thing to diminish his love for me.

God’s Remembrance and Zacchaeus’ Pursuit

I continued to experience and receive the love of Jesus Christ for me. Between 2004 and 2005, I experienced another major turning point in my life (this would be enough to write another article).

After a long period of discernment, I decided to leave my original life track, enter the seminary for training, and continue my journey of becoming one with His will and Him.

I also experienced the process of fighting with God. Fortunately, God is infinitely kind and patient to me. There was a very important sign to me in this process, which indicates that God is truly and livingly present! I started studying at the seminary in September 2005. In February 2006, I had my first conversation with Father Hu, who taught the class. He asked me “How did your faith begin?”

I started describing my experience of meeting Father Lai in July 1998. After Father Hu listened to me, he slowly said: “This priest is our family’s priest.” ““But he is not here now.” “In June, he will come back here.” Oh my God, how is this possible!

Father Lai, whom I thought I could only remember in my memory for the rest of my life, was sitting right in front of me eight years later! He certainly had no idea that his two Bible sharings would so profoundly and crucially inspire my faith journey. Being able to thank him in person and once again thank Jesus Christ among us, from whom everything started, was indescribably touching.

Starting from the second half of 2007, I had the opportunity to work with parish pastors and priests in outreach work to share God’s love for us in Jesus Christ with all the people we meet. I am very grateful for this. In 2011, while preparing for the canonization of Bishop Conforti, I had the opportunity to read the Bishop’s works, which described his desire to be a missionary when he was very young and to preach the gospel to people who did not know Jesus Christ. This desire later translated into the founding of a missionary institute named St. Francis Xavier. Xavier was the driving force behind the foundation of the order, and the first batch of religious he sent went to China. God made him the father of missionaries. I was very moved when I read this: my faith came from the desire of Bishop St. Conforti. Through his missionaries, I heard the gospel! I could not help but express my gratitude to Bishop Conforti, and I seemed to hear him smiling back at me and saying, “Everything is Jesus Christ.”

Yes, all is Jesus Christ.

Starting in September 2016, I had the opportunity to participate in the Thursday morning Bible reading class in the parish. Father Lin led everyone to read the Sunday scriptures. It was on the day when we read the scriptures for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time that the priest invited me to write about my journey of conversion to God.

The Gospel reading that day is the story of the encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus. The priest explained: “The name Zacchaeus means: “God remembers.” Zacchaeus longed to seek God. Because of this desire, he was not limited by his short stature but found a tree and climbed it up. At the same time, God also passed through the life of

Zacchaeus, He remembered Zacchaeus' desire, and He too was looking for Zacchaeus. What a wonderful and beautiful encounter!" The priest asked us to think about, what is my "dwarfing"? Where is the "tree" in my life? As I was thinking about it, I began to review my journey of encountering God, and a picture emerged in my meditation: a tree grew out of the cross of Jesus, a tree of life with lush branches: "For in you is the source of life, by your light can we see the light" (Psalm 36:9).

Asunta (19.07.1970 – 20 03 2021)

Materials 02 Stages of a Conversion

While conversion can be triggered by particular events and, in some cases, result in very sudden experiences of change, for the most part it takes place over a period of time. People change for a multitude of reasons, and that change is sometimes permanent and sometimes temporary. Conversion transpires over an entire lifetime.

The stage model is a heuristic construction designed to integrate the perspectives of anthropology, psychology, sociology, and religious studies.

Even though a temporal sequence transpires in conversion processes, the order of the stages is not universal and invariant.

The stage model serves to organize the cluster of themes, patterns, and processes operative in religious change. Let us try to summarize its parts.

The Stages

1. Context:

The Ecology of the Conversion Process

Context, the most comprehensive of all the stages, is the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place. Context encompasses the modes of access and transmission, provides the models and methods of conversion, and also contains sources of resistance. Human beings are intimately connected with the world in which they live.

Organized religions, among other institutions, are the vehicles through which the methods and models for conversion are conveyed.

While people may feel alienated from society and the church, all are influenced by the dynamic force field of the context.

Forces of resistance and attraction fill the intellectual, spiritual, and cultural climate of society.

Religious organizations, as well as other cultural media (whether books, magazines, television, or movies) convey messages to people every day that changing one's life is either desirable or undesirable.

People shape the political, religious, economic, social, and cultural worlds.

Conversely, the socialization processes of the wider world shape people.

The networks of relationships and the cumulative effects of education, training, and institutional structures all influence the potential convert.

It is against this background of influences that people begin their trajectory to conversion through such things as conversations with others or mystical visions that serve as catalysts for further searching, leading eventually to commitment to a religious orientation.

2. Crisis:

Catalyst for Change

Crisis provides an opportunity for a new option.

Crises force individuals and groups to confront their limitations and can stimulate a quest to resolve conflict, fill a void, adjust to new circumstances, or find avenues of transformation.

Experiences in life often cause crises.

Disorientation in life sometimes triggers the search for new options.

Crises can have many sources, and they vary in intensity, duration, and scope.

3. Quest:

Active Search

Human beings actively seek solutions to their problems and strive to find meaning, purpose, and transcendence.

4. Encounter:

Advocate and Potential Convert in Contact

The encounter stage brings people who are in crisis and searching for new options together with those who are seeking to provide the questors with a new orientation.

Advocates and potential converts relate dialectically to one another.

Depending on the differences between each partner's relative power and particular circumstances, the encounter can proceed to interaction.

Advocates are often persistent and creative. Seeking new ways to elicit the interest of potential converts, they seek to understand them better and communicate better with them.

Potential converts as active agents are also skillful in seeking out what it is that they want and rejecting what they do not desire.

5. Interaction:

The Matrix of Change

Once sufficient mutual interest is established or created, interaction involves more intense levels of learning.

Relationships are often the most potent avenues of connection to the new option.

Rituals enable the potential convert to experience religion beyond the merely intellectual level.

Rhetoric provides the convert with a system of interpretation relevant not only to the

religious sphere of life but also, in some cases, to the totality of a person's life.

6. Commitment:

Consummation and Consolidation of Transformation

Commitment is the consummation of the conversion process. The decision to commit is often expected. A psycho-spiritual experience of surrender empowers the convert with a sense of connection with God and the community.

Central to the converting process is the convert's reconstruction of his or her biographical memory and deployment of a new system of attribution in various spheres of life. The convert becomes a full member of the new community through rituals of incorporation.

7. Consequences:

Effects of Converting Processes

After a period, certain consequences are more obvious than others. For some people the consequence is a radically transformed life. Their patterns of beliefs and actions are significantly different from what they were before. Others gain a sense of mission and purpose, and yet others acquire a very quiet sense of security and peace. The conversion process can also have a destructive effect. One may find that the new orientation is not what one expected. In some cases, the convert realizes that he or she has been manipulated for the sake of the group's own goals. In any case, conversion is precarious; it must be defended, nurtured, supported, affirmed. It needs community, confirmation, and concurrence.

From: Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1983, 1993, 2020).

Materials 03 How to Accompany Conversions?

In the Bible

The Bible can be considered as The Great Story of Conversion, and the fundamental parameter of this process.

Some aspects.

1.

Old Testament

It is easy to see how from age to age God calls.

We begin with Abraham, the first convert:

“Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac...’” (Joshua 24:2-3).

All the most important characters follow. Their call is also a conversion experience. The beginning of a journey of continuous growth, which continually asks us to leave God for God: the known God to enter more and more into the mystery of him.

They are like avant-gardes. Through their experience they attract the people and encourage them to seek ever greater knowledge, fidelity and obedience to God.

As we advance along this path, the people become increasingly aware of their identity as mediators between God and themselves, between God and humanity.

At the same time, there is a big problem: what knowledge of God, within the people of Israel, is the knowledge that God wants? Who, among the many teachers, truly knows the God of Israel?

Conversions to the religion of Israel?

In the OT a famous example is Naaman (2Kings 5), who however, it seems, never ceases to be the head of the army of Aram, a people who are enemies of Israel.

There is also the case of those who, not belonging to the people, want to celebrate Passover with them. They must be circumcised (Ex 12:43-49) and then will be allowed to eat it.

The encounter with Greek culture leads to unprecedented exchanges, including the possibility of converting to the religion of Israel.

In the Book of Judith (Jdt 5:6,14) the conversion of Achior is remembered.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks of the missionary commitment of the Pharisees:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.” (Matth 23:15)

2.

Jesus

Jesus claims to be the one who knows God because he is his Son, sanctified and sent by the Father.

Among the people, some believe: first Mary, then Joseph, then the Apostles and the first community.

Others accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They consider their knowledge of God superior to his. Then they kill him. God demonstrates the truth of Jesus through the resurrection. Starting from the coming of Jesus, conversion is towards his person, welcomed as superior to the entire chosen people. Believing in Jesus means overcoming one's belonging to a culture, even that of the chosen people, and losing oneself in him, in his mystery.

3.

In the New Testament

The experience of the first community is an experience of personal conversion, of 'personifying' conversion, which makes people enter into the person of Christ.

We convert one at a time, through a path that is unique and mysterious. In this journey, not only ideas come into play, but also, together, experiences and interpersonal relationships.

4.

How to accompany conversions?

We can read some texts about this topic, in particular in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

4.1

Paul's conversion and the role of Ananias and Barnabas (Acts 9, 22, 26)

The story appears three times. This fact shows the importance of that event and the art of narrating it.

Regarding Ananias we can ask:

- + how does Luke portray him?
- + what is his reaction to Jesus' request?
- + what could he have felt in his heart?
- + how did he behave in front of Paul?
- + with what words did he address him?
- + what were his words aimed at?
- + how did Paul feel his presence?

Regarding Barnabas we can ask:

- + why does he enter the scene?
- + what exactly does he do?
- + what is the purpose of him?
- + does his position in the community play a role?

4.2

The conversion of the Ethiopian minister and the role of Philip (Acts 8,26-40)

This story highlights the series of inspirations that Philip receives and responds to immediately.

We can also notice how Philip begins the dialogue with the minister: with a question, the topic of which has no direct relationship with Christ. It is a very wise question, which creates a friendly relationship.

Then the dialogue becomes more and more centered on Jesus, but in a very natural way, until the baptism.

And then... Philip disappears, while the Ethiopian continues his journey, happy. But who will accompany the first steps of his new life?

4.3

The conversion of Cornelius and the role of Peter (Acts 10 and 11)

Even in this case, the story is double. Again, this is a sign of the importance of how it is told.

We can analyze the figure of Cornelius, the precedents of the vision he receives. What was the preparation for that event?

As for Peter:

- + what is the meaning of his vision?
- + how does Peter behave in front of Cornelius' envoys?
- + what could have been his internal reactions, and his choices?
- + Peter preaches to Cornelius: what words does he use? To what end?
- + what are the parameters of Peter's final discernment?
- + do they also matter to us today?
- + what can we say about the reaction of Peter's companions?
- + Peter in Jerusalem. Is this part of the story important? Why?
- + what are the reactions of the community? Could they have been different?

4.4

The conversion of the Philippian jailer and the role of Paul (Acts 16)

In this story, context plays a particularly important role. In this story we can even read the story of the Passion, of the Resurrection, of the disciples of Emmaus.

We must also note the times of day when the story takes place.

We can imagine the states of mind of the jailer, of Paul, of Silas, of the other prisoners.

We can ask:

- + what was going through Paul's soul at the moment of the earthquake, and when he then heard the cries of the jailer and his family?
- + what moved him to speak?
- + what if he had waited even just a few seconds?
- + what could the jailer have felt in his heart at the words of Paul?
- + why such a reaction in front of Paul?
- + what connection could he have discovered between Paul's first words and the subsequent announcement?
- + what might the family members have felt when the head of the family asked them to be baptized?
- + we can also imagine a sequel: what relationship between the jailer and the first family converted in Philippi, Lydia's?

In these stories, we have highlighted the role of those who in some way accompanied, even catalyzed the conversion.

Biblical stories suggest the internal states of mind of the characters starting from their actions. They suggest imagining what they may have felt, how they were led to make their choices.

Materials 04 Spiritual Thoughts

We can meditate on two sentences, studying them first in Saint Paul, then in the synthesis that San Guido experienced, and finally in our lives.

4.1.

The Love of Christ Impels Us

Saint Paul offered a very rich reflection on how he lived his missionary charism. Some important texts:

1Thess 2:1-12

1Cor 9:1-27

2Cor 2:14-6:13

Phil 1:12-26

(Plus some practical instructions in the Letters)

4.1.1

1Thess 2:1-12.

2 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain; 2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition.

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile;

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.

5 For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness;

6 nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle[a] among you, like a nurse taking care of her children.

8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

9 For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our

behavior to you believers;

11 for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you

12 to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Paul recalls the external circumstances of his coming. Even though persecuted and removed from Philippi, he found new strength to announce the Gospel in Thessalonica. He then talks, first negatively, then positively, about the reasons that supported him. In verse 4 the final reason appears: God chose Paul, gave him the honor and responsibility of announcing the Gospel.

For this reason Paul announces to those he meets, but always before God. God continually sees Paul's thoughts, his plans. Paul seeks to please God alone.

For this reason, he does not make use of his authority but considers himself as a servant. Even more: between him and the people to whom he announces the Gospel, a very strong communion is created, a mutual belonging, the family of God.

Paul almost competes with God in loving the Thessalonians (see 1:4 and 2:8: Paul uses the same verb).

From the relationship with God, Paul then moves on to the relationship with the Thessalonians. First negatively, then positively, he talks about his internal choices, his motivations. He refers to the family's experience. He presents himself first as a mother, to underline the aspect of affection.

In **Gal 4:19** he says:

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Then he presents himself as a father, recalling some characteristics of the paternal role: the work to support the family and the responsibility of educating sons and daughters.

In **1Cor 4:15-16** he says:

15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

We should note how Paul highlights his internal attitudes, the attitude with which he came into contact with the Thessalonians.

This also shows his program: to create the family of God through faith in Christ.

Paul then continues by thanking God because the Thessalonians accepted the truth of his message, God brought about in them the birth of a new life in his family. This family lives not on a human logic, but on the life of God.

In **1Cor 3:4-11**, he says:

4 For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely men?

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

8 He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor.

9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

10 According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it.

11 For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

4.1.2

The second text is **1Cor 9:1-27**:

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me.

4 Do we not have the right to our food and drink?

5 Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a woman believer, as the other apostles and the brethren of the Lord and Cephas?

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

8 Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned?

10 Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the

plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop.

11 If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?

12 If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting.

16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.

18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law.

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

26 Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air;

27 but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The context of this chapter is the problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Some of

the believers felt free to eat them, but others were scandalized. Paul first invites his readers to give up their freedom so as not to scandalize their weaker brothers, and he does so with a strong statement, in **1 Cor 8:13**:

13 Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.

The Apostle imagines that this statement arouses wonder, even disapproval, and in Chapter 9 he continues in this line. He shows that he has already renounced his rights as an apostle, rights established by Jesus, so as not to be misunderstood in his preaching and in order to help the faith of the Corinthians.

At the beginning (9:1-3), he offers proof of his status as an apostle: he saw the Risen One, and gave birth to the Christian community of Corinth.

Then he goes on to offer the proofs of the right he has to be supported by the faithful: the other apostles do this; reaping the fruits of one's work is logical, it is sanctioned by the Law of Moses, Jesus established this.

Finally he explains the reasons for his choice to renounce these rights.

The foundation of this choice is the choice that God made of him. God chose him to announce Jesus, his Son.

Paul elsewhere says:

Rom 1:1

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God

and

Gal 1:15-17

15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace,

16 was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood,

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

We can also reread 1Th 2, which we saw above.

The choice that God made of Paul does not bring him a right, as if God took day laborers, who he then he had to pay. On the contrary, Paul feels this choice as a very great, undeserved honor. He asks himself how he can thank God for this gift. The answer he finds is: I will announce the Gospel without enjoying the rights that the

Gospel gives me.

This is why he becomes everything to everyone: servant of all, to win at least someone to Christ, at any cost, as many people as possible.

However, Paul does not stop here and adds another reason, which is linked to the problem of the meat sacrificed to idols: the problem is not simply not to scandalize anyone, the problem is to have a share in the gospel. Indeed, there is the risk of being excluded from the Gospel after bringing it to others.

Here a particular, very clear understanding of the relationship with the Gospel comes to the fore.

The Gospel is not an object that is received and transmitted, news to be spread, a job in the media. On the contrary, the Gospel is the truth of the person, the experience of being loved by God and made a participant in divine life through his Son and the Holy Spirit. It can only be transmitted through life, sharing the same relationship with God, becoming participants together.

This is why Paul says: Woe to me if I do not evangelize! I lose my truth, I lose the salvation I had received. I am a wire and the electric current must pass through me. If I don't let it pass, I don't participate in it.

In **1Cor 8:9-12** he says:

9 Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

10 For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

11 And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

12 Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

The same thought returns in **Rom 14:14-18**:

14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean.

15 If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.

16 So do not let what is good to you be spoken of as evil.

17 For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit;

18 he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Paul relives in himself what Jesus experienced, emptying himself, becoming incarnate, humbling himself and becoming obedient until death, to give the love of God.

He writes in **Phil 2:5-11**:

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

4.1.3

The third text, rather long, is **2Cor 2:14-6:13**

First of all, the context.

In this letter Paul hopes that Christians will have a positive image of him:

2Cor1:13 -14

13 I hope that you will understand entirely –
14 as you have understood us in part - that we are your boast, just as you will be ours, on the day of our Lord Jesus.

In the first part he explains why he changed his plan to go directly to Corinth, and instead sent a letter (perhaps it is the First Letter to the Corinthians). He also shows that he tried to maintain a positive relationship with them, and did not rest until Tito returned with good news.

Precisely to hasten the meeting with Tito, Paolo went to Greece to wait for him.

At this point, the window of time opened (in the story, Titus has not yet returned, Paul is waiting for him) gives Paul the opportunity to talk about an important topic: his identity as an apostle (thus defending again his choices, in a more profound way).

We can divide the section into some parts.

2Cor 2:14-17.

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us

spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,

16 to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

It is an introduction, at the end of which Paul states the theme of the entire section: *We speak in Christ*.

Paul states that through the true apostles God spreads the knowledge of Christ. They participate in the triumph of the Risen One.

At the same time, their announcement provokes two different reactions: salvation or death. They are therefore in a very critical situation, on the border between two worlds.

We speak in Christ: Paul makes a negative comparison: others trade in the Gospel. Instead he is continually before God, moved by him, under his gaze and his judgement.

2Cor 3:1-6.

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?

2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your/our hearts, to be known and read by all men;

3 and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God,

6 who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

We have a kind of new introduction, where however Paul no longer stops at the subjective aspect, at how he announces the gospel, but goes further, claiming to be a deacon of the new alliance, invested by God with this dignity.

He starts from the custom of writing letters of recommendation to introduce evangelizers, a custom followed in the case of Apollos (Acts 18.24-28), in order to say that in his case there is a very different letter that recommends him: the community of Corinth itself, which he founded. The community is a living letter, written in his heart. Its

establishment shows the new relationship that is created between those who believe in Christ. It is written *with the Holy Spirit in the hearts*. These two characteristics are taken from the two prophets who announce the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.

2Cor 3:7-11.

7 Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was,

8 will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor?

9 For if there was splendor in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor.

10 Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it.

11 For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor.

Paul makes a comparison between the ministry, the service of the old covenant and the service of the new covenant. He wants to invite his listeners to recognize that the glory of the second service is much greater than the first. This glory is the presence, the action, the visibility of the power of God. It brings about the miracle of conversion.

2Cor 3:12-18

12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,

13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor.

14 But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 And we all, with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Based on what he has just said, Paul continues the comparison of his ministry with the service of Moses. Paul's service is not a time of work followed by a rest, but it is a new way of existing. He becomes a mirror of the glorious light of the Lord, who poured out the Spirit. By reflecting and transmitting this light, Paul is transformed, together with the

believers, and enters more and more into the glory of God, according to the transforming action of the Spirit of the Lord. For this reason he announces the Gospel with frankness, courage and confidence.

2Cor 4:1-6

- 1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.
- 2 We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.
- 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.
- 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.
- 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
- 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

By hinting again to 2.17 and 3.12, Paul shows the attitude with which he presents himself before everyone's conscience, and at the same time before God.

Through his announcement, a new creation appears. God shines in his heart so that the knowledge of Christ may shine in many, as in the beginning God had said: "*Let there be light*".

If someone does not believe, it is not a problem of human means, but of the action of the devil who blinds him.

2Cor 4:7-12

- 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.
- 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;
- 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;
- 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.
- 11 For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
- 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Paul goes a step further in describing his identity as an apostle. He shows that, in

addition to a mystery of glory, also a mystery of death operates in him. His service encounters very great difficulties and even the danger of being condemned to death. However, all this shows that the power of God is at work in the apostles. God reveals itself through weakness, failure, persecution.

Elsewhere, in **1Cor 4:9-13**, Paul expresses the same thought:

9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless,

12 and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;

13 when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

2Cor 4:13-15

13 Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak,

14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Again, Paul explains why he continues to speak, even in the midst of difficulty. He hopes in the resurrection and in the fruit that his preaching brings to believers.

2Cor 4:16-18

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.

17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

18 because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Here Paul seems to leave aside for a few moments the theme of service to the Gospel to delve into another, more general topic: how to live the prospect of dying before the Lord's return.

A first response, which is also the final solution, is the renewal of the spirit through physical trials. This leads Paul to fix his gaze on what is eternal, even if it cannot be seen. In the following part Paul delves into the aspects of his hope.

2Cor 5:1-10

- 1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
- 2 Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling,
- 3 so that by putting it on we may not be found naked.
- 4 For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.
- 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.
- 6 So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,
- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.
- 8 We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
- 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.
- 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

Paul talks about a topic he did not explore in 1Cor 15: what will our existence be like between our death and Christ's final return, before our bodies will be resurrected? Paul highlights that, in order to receive a heavenly home, the bodies of the deceased must already be clothed in some way. The clothing that they must wear are the works performed during life in the body.

A similar statement is also found in **Rev 14:13**:

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying: "Write: from now on, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes - says the Spirit - they will rest from their labors, because their works follow them".

2Cor 5:11-13

- 11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.
- 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart.

13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

Paul returns to the main theme:

the apostles speak in Christ, before God;

their communication leads to a progressive glorification of those who speak and those who welcome the gospel;

the apostles speak even in the midst of difficulties and persecutions, because they want to please Christ.

Finally, they speak to convince. They want to get conversion. What drives them not only to speak, but to try to convince?

2Cor 5:14-17

14 For the love of Christ impels us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.

17 Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

The fundamental reason, the foundation of all of Paul's thought, is Christ's act of love, his intention. What Jesus wanted, what he did, pushes Paul with an irresistible force.

The same thought is found in other texts:

Gal 1:3-4:

3 ...grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

4 who gave himself for our sins to snatch us from this wicked world, according to the will of God and our Father.

Gal 2:19-20:

19 For through the Law I died to the Law, that I may live to God. I have been crucified with Christ,

20 and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And this life, which I live in the body, I live in faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.

Rm 5,8:

8 But God demonstrates his love towards us in the fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The verb Paul uses has a wide range of meanings. Let us list some texts.

Mt 4:24 His fame spread throughout Syria and they brought to him all the sick, *tormented* by various diseases and pains, possessed by demons, epileptics and paralytics.

Lk 4:38 After leaving the synagogue, he entered Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law *was in the grip* of a great fever and they prayed to him for her.

Lk 8:37 Then all the people of the territory of the Gerasenes asked him to leave them, because they *were very afraid*. He got into a boat and went back.

Lk 8:45 Jesus said, "Who touched me?" Everyone denied it. Peter then said: "Master, the crowd *is pressing* you on every side and crushing you."

Lk 12:50 I have a baptism in which I will be baptized, and how I *am distressed* until it is completed!

Lk 19:43 The days will come for you when your enemies will surround you with trenches and besiege you and *press* you in on every side.

Lk 22:63 And the men who were *guarding* Jesus mocked him and beat him,

Acts 7:57 Then, shouting with a loud voice, they *stopped* their ears and all rushed together against him.

Acts 18:5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul began *to dedicate* himself entirely to the Word, testifying before the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 20:8 There were a good number of lamps in the upper room where we were *gathered*.

2Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ *possesses* us; and we know well that one died for all, therefore all are dead.

Phil 1:23 For I am *caught* between these two things: I desire to leave this life and be with Christ, which would be far better.

While he thinks and reflects on the death of Christ, Paul is invaded by the intention of Christ and by what his death created: Christ placed everyone in his death, a place of liberation from sin

Rom 6:6-7:

6 We know: the old man that is in us was crucified with him, so that this body of sin would be rendered ineffective, and we would no longer be slaves to sin.

7 For he who is dead is freed from sin).

But this is only an intermediate step: the plan that Jesus has is for everyone to live the new life, to live for the one who died for them, in full reciprocity of self-giving. He wants everyone to be resurrected in him, to become a new creature in the new world that he has inaugurated.

This pushes Paul to announce and try to convince. He no longer knows anyone according to the flesh, not even Christ. Now what he knows is the desire of Christ. This desire has already achieved its goal. Everyone is a new creature.

But not everyone knows this.

This is why Paul feels on himself the pressure of Christ's love, he announces and tries to convince.

2Cor 5:18-21

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul traces what Christ has done to God. God himself made Jesus the atonement for sin. Through Christ, God reconciled the world to himself. The apostles are ambassadors of him and ask everyone to accept the gift of God.

2Cor 6:1-2

1 Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.

2 For he says,

“At the acceptable time I have listened to you,
and helped you on the day of salvation.”

Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Paul applies what he has explained to his present situation, and asks the Corinthians to welcome him and his message. He speaks in general terms, but also in relation to the problem of his relationship with the believers of that community.

2Cor 6:3-10

3 We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

5 beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger;

6 by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love,
7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the
right hand and for the left;
8 in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and
yet are true;
9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not
killed;
10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing,
and yet possessing everything.

At the conclusion of what he said, Paolo reiterates the attitudes that guide him. He tries
in every way not to be an obstacle to God's work. With their fidelity to the call and
mission they received from God, the apostles are the hope of salvation for the world.

2Cor 6:11-13

11 Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide.
12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections.
13 In return—I speak as to children—widen your hearts also.

In parallel to 6:1-2, and taking up the theme of hearts to which he referred in 2 Cor 3:2,
Paul asks his listeners to reciprocate him in the same way with which he opened himself
to them.

4.1.4

Philippians 1:12-26

Phil 1:12-14

12 I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to
advance the gospel,
13 so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest
that my imprisonment is for Christ;
14 and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my
imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.

After thanking God and presenting his prayer for the Philippians (1.3-11), Paul gives
them some news about his situation. He shares his joy with them because his chains are
contributing to the growth of the Gospel. Paul sees the Gospel as something alive, which

has strength by itself and which conquers hearts. He follows the gospel by offering his contribution to its growth.

Phil 1:15-18

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.
16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel;
17 the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.
18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice.

Paul sees clearly that some proclaim the Gospel with bad intentions. But he is confident that Christ himself, preached and believed in the Gospel, will lead those who believe in him to the fullness of truth.

Phil 1:19-26

19 Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,
20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.
21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
22 If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.
23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.
24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.
25 Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,
26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Paul's joy comes from the certainty that by cooperating with the Gospel, as he is doing even though in chains, he will obtain salvation.

Indeed, in the situation he finds himself in, he doesn't know what to want. On the one hand he would like to die and be with Christ (here is the solution to what was said in 2 Cor 5:1-10), on the other hand, he is ready to continue working for the Gospel, for the joy and growth in faith of his listeners.

4.1.5

Some Practical Instructions on How to Do Mission

Although this theme does not appear frequently in the New Testament, it is nevertheless possible to gather some indications.

Col 4:5-6

5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.

1Pt 3:13-17

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right?

14 But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

15 but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;

16 and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

17 For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong.

1Pt 4:11

11 whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul and Peter suggest a non-aggressive attitude, but one that is careful to seize every opportunity, and a way of speaking through which the truth of God makes its way into hearts.

4.2

***In Omnibus Christus* Christ in All**

Colossians 3:1-17

In this exhortation, Paul summarizes the new life of Christians, which is death to the old man and new life where Christ is everything.

Col 3:1-4

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The life of Christians participates in the life of Christ. At this moment he lives in heaven, hidden from the sight of men. Together with him, Christians also died to the world and are hidden from the sight of many.

Col 3:5-11

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them.

8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices
10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

Death to the world means death to sin which continually undermines the new life of the Christian. Therefore, Paul urges us to reject sinful behaviors. He uses the image of undressing the old man, and putting on the new man. The new man is the person who is continually renewed in his relationship with Christ. He leaves and abandons every identity prior to his faith in him. Now the new person is lived by Jesus. He is everything, the truth of every being.

Col 3:12-17

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness,
lowliness, meekness, and patience,
13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each
other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the
one body. And be thankful.
16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in
all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in
your hearts to God.
17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul describes the new dress that Christians can wear: the life of Christ in mutual
relationships and in the relationship with God. Jesus becomes the principle of the new
life of Christians.

4.3

The Spirituality of Saint Guido Maria Conforti

4.3.1

***Caritas Christi Urget Nos* – The Love of Christ Impels Us**

The motto given by the Founder to the Xaverian Missionaries.

We all know the dialogues between Guido, still a child, and the great Crucifix of the
Oratory of Peace: "I looked at him and he looked at me, and it seemed he was telling me
many things".

We do not know the content of those dialogues. We know that one day, when he was
Archbishop, Guido said to a friend: "Do you see that Crucifix? He gave me my
vocation."

We can think that in those dialogues Jesus made little Guido feel the strength of his love
for all men, to the point of pushing him to respond to him with the gift of his life, first
as a priest and then as a founder.

In Saint Guido, the drive for mission arises from the perception of the love of Christ, as

in Saint Paul.

We see that it is an internal drive, a desire, a necessity.

This is a very important fact. Not so much about actions, works, but what lies at their basis: the desire, the passion for the salvation of souls.

This desire is strong but it is also weak and powerless. Indeed, such desire encounters a thousand obstacles placed by the devil. Apparently they are obstacles posed by circumstances, or by people, by particular situations... but in reality it is also good to think that there is also the action of Satan (as Paul says, 1Th 2:18).

At this point a strange reversal occurs: the desire that fails to convert others returns to itself and changes the life of the one who has this desire. Conforti writes in the Rule: “The missionary should consider himself a voluntary victim for the conversion of infidels”. Desire devours not others but the one who desires. He finds no better means to realize his desire than the total gift, the total sacrifice of himself. In this, the missionary copies Christ, who gave himself up for the salvation of all.

This second dimension of desire also brings the passion for the mission, for the conversion of souls to Christ, on a spiritual level.

The missionary says, with Christ: “For them I consecrate myself, so that they also may be consecrated in the truth” (Jn 17:19).

According to this dimension, the missionary enters a vortex, the vortex created by the charity of Christ, and he enters it because he sees that this is the most effective method to foster conversions.

Conforti says that the best way to get everything is to offer everything. That is why he wants the vows for his missionaries. For him, cooperation in conversions is not a job but entering into the love of Christ, conquerors and conquered at the same time.

Everything that Saint Paul says about his internal and external way of doing mission comes from this foundation, and we see how Saint Guido’s missionary passion follows the same logic, with great fidelity.

4.3.2

***In Omnibus Christus* – Christ in All**

The motto chosen by the Founder for his episcopal coat of arms.

In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul tries to solve a problem: some believers give great

importance to celestial visions and try to prepare for them with a special asceticism. Paul says that these visions, while beautiful and important, are not necessary. Indeed, they can lead to divisions and even doctrinal errors. He proposes another life, a different spiritual elevation, the result of choice and continuous quest and commitment. He urges us to live oriented towards heaven, dead to the things of the earth. He urges us to live in mutual charity. All this because Jesus is already present in everything and everyone. Indeed, his presence is the truth of everything and every person. He is everything in all things. He is everything in all things in his act of continuous and total offering to the Father, so that through him God is everything in all things (1Cor 15:28).

This is a vision, the divine vision on the world. It gives strength and security to announce Christ.

We do not go to bring, we rather go to reveal, to help each person to discover the One who is everything in them and of them, because he loves them (Caritas Christi) and because he is the Lord of the world, the Son of God, to whom the Father he subdued everything.

We operate with weakness, but through us, through the divine power of the Gospel, God works with power and opens the hearts of people, as in Lydia while she was listening to Paul. Then we reap the fruits, we help people to enter the Church, so that it becomes increasingly visible that Jesus is everything in everyone.

4.4

A Spirituality for our Life

We can start from two Chinese proverbs

4.4.1

姜太公釣魚 願者上鉤 [jiāng tài gōng diào yú yuàn zhě shàng gōu]

The Duke Jiang used to fish. He wanted the fish to bite by their own will

(The story goes that the Duke kept the fishhook above the water, or that he used a fishhook that was straight. It took him ten years to catch one...)

We know that persuading somebody to change his mind is very difficult. But we do not want to force anyone and therefore we wait for God to open their hearts.

At the same time we offer bait to the fish, because if there is no news of Jesus, even if

they wanted to, they would not be able to believe. We do this with patience and perseverance.

4.4.2

揠苗助長 [Yà miáo zhù zhǎng]

To help plants grow by pulling them

(A farmer saw his plants not much lush, so he pulled them up to help them. Result: all the plants dead)

Likewise, we do not pull shoots to make them grow. God gives growth. But somehow we help!

4.4.3

We Admire the Blooming of Flowers

Every charism is a passion in order to make a particular beauty of Jesus (“the most handsome of the sons of man”) to become visible in souls. Some Saints particularly love to educate Jesus, some other love Jesus while he praising the Father, some other love the wounded and dying Jesus...

The missionary charism, and at its center accompanying conversions, is falling in love with the particular beauty of a soul that opens itself to discovering the love of Christ. It is like watching flowers bloom.

Generally, the blooming of flowers is hidden, we first see the closed flower, then, the next day, the open flower, without knowing how this happened.

We try in some way to participate in these mysterious moments, we help the preparation, we celebrate the joy of this spring.

4.4.4

We Bring Souls to God, We Bring God to Souls

Our desire is twofold: if we look at God’s desire, we do everything possible to make his desire come true, we bring to him the souls we encounter.

Sometimes it is a long story, we accompany people for a good part of their journey (months, years...).

Many times we accompany them for very short journeys, sometimes just for minutes...

But we try to make the most of every opportunity. A greeting, a wish, a question... can put the people we meet in contact with the grace of God.
All this to give joy and glory to God.

But, somehow, the opposite also is true: because we love some people very much, we want to give them God, the best present we can offer them. With our family members this is often the case...

When Paul says that he feels a kind of divine jealousy for the Corinthians, perhaps he means that he has plans for them, because he loves them. He has the most ambitious plan, he wants to give them God, he wants to give them to God and he fears that someone will hinder this hope.

There is a strange jealousy regarding Christ: we are jealous of Christ, because we would like that particular soul for ourselves, but we recognize that it belongs to him.

We are the friends of the Groom. And as if we wanted to realize this dream, that souls become ours by becoming Christ's, we try to put on the mouth of Jesus, speaking in his favor, the most beautiful words that attract the soul to kiss him.

Thus, on his mouth, souls kiss our words.

It is an ambitious dream: to foster with our presence the love of souls towards Christ, even if this means, for us, humanly, in some way, losing them: they will love Christ, no longer us. In reality we then find them again in our relationship with Christ.

Cooperating to a conversion is similar to giving life. We can note the parallels between the two processes.

0.

He who generates transmits a life that surpasses him/her. The choice of giving life is entirely his/her own, while related to something greater, which he or she administers without being its master. Sometimes children are born without being desired. Sometimes the desire to have children is not enough for children to be born.

In any case, it is not possible, first to ask children, then to give them life.

1

The choice to generate someone is the fruit of communion between two people, at the same time it does not depend on the one who is born.

Likewise, cooperating in a conversion depends entirely on the relationship between us and God. Desiring that someone convert is a choice, a passion that is totally ours. It

arises from feeling the desire for God (*Caritas Christi urget nos*). It arises in prayer, and through prayer it begins to materialize.

2.

When is a new spiritual life generated? When someone is loved in God. We can create relationships of mutual love, of all possible dimensions (small and great, instant-like and prolonged in time). These acts, these experiences unite souls to life, to God who is Love. They are 'born' in Him through us.

3.

The passage from point zero to point one of the life of an embryo, on the side of the embryo, is passive. Then embryos increasingly begin to have a life of their own, even if dependent on the life of their mother. They are alive, but could not survive without their mother.

Similarly, there is a period in which those who cooperate in a conversion continue to love, with concrete gestures, without the other person – apparently – giving the answers we might expect. It is the time of gratuitous love, which slowly, almost imperceptibly, arouses life in the one who is generated.

In the experience of falling in love, this period is similar to courting, when the lover tries to make himself alive and known in the life of the loved one, and tries to arouse the perception of the possibility that a special relationship between the two may begin.

4.

What does the moment of coming to light correspond to? Just as at that moment the one who is born begins to live more independently, a body separate from the mother's body, so in spiritual life birth occurs when the one who has been loved begins to love, begins to respond to the love received with his or her own actively given love.

In this stage, just as the mother continues to be necessary for the newborn, so the one who is born into the life of the spirit continues to need the presence and support of the one who loved him or her first.

5.

Another period follows in which the mother takes care of her son (daughter) and offers him/her every kind of support, in particular his/her own language and culture.

Similarly, in spiritual life, the one who loves shares with the loved one everything he/she can, in particular the divine origin of the relationship that has been created between them.

6.

At a certain point the newborn boy/girl begins to speak and also verbally recognize the father and mother. When the parents hear these words: "Dad," "Mom," they begin to have the perception that their work is being accomplished.

Likewise, when the loved ones begin to recognize the origin of the love they receive and

give, when they begin to invoke Jesus, then one can start thinking that a new spiritual life has truly been born.

7.

Just as pronouncing a word does not yet mean knowing how to speak well and at length, so the beginning of a person's relationship with Jesus must grow as from dawn to full day, through our wise cooperation with divine grace.

In spiritual life, there can be and indeed there are many ways and actors who cooperate in its birth and growth.

We need to have the wisdom to grasp how, in a given moment, we can offer our contribution, without overestimating our importance, but also without underestimating it. Sometimes, a life can depend on our choices, on our words.

What has been said for a conversion is also valid for a vocation.

Materials 05 What We Can Do

This part of the Materials contains mainly questions that can help the group and its members to reflect on the situation they are in and the possibilities that are offered.

5.1

At an individual level

5.1.1

My resources

I can ask myself:

What is my age?

What skills have I acquired?

What are my hobbies, the services that I am already offering?

...

How much time can I dedicate to conversions?
Do I find, would I find obstacles or help in my family?
Do I have means at my disposal?
Do I speak other languages?
...

5.1.2

My context. My encounters

How can I describe the contexts where I live?
In a given time (for example, in a week, or more), how many and what kind of people do I meet?
What type of relationships do I live with them? (as an example, if I am a teacher, I meet many students, in an institutional relationship, as their teacher)
Are there also occasional encounters?

5.1.3

Experiences

Have I collaborated with missionary groups? In Catechism?
Have I attended training meetings in these areas?
At this moment, who am I in contact with, with hopes of conversion?
...

5.1.4

What can I do. Directly

Prayer for conversion
Which people can I reach out to?
What strategy can I develop?
Whom can I talk with about it?
Can I collaborate on this with someone?
Do I have in mind which community to include the people I want to dedicate myself to?
Am I starting to interest others?

5.1.5

What can I do. Indirectly

Can I keep a diary of meetings with some people?
Can I ask to write, or record, or film, conversion testimonies?
Can I record how someone collaborated to conversions?
Can I do something to spread these experiences in the media?

With whom can I share this service?
Where, how can I promote this service?
With whom can I collaborate in this promotional work?

5.2

At group level

What possibilities does our group have?
Or: which groups do I belong to? Do these groups have possibilities?

What can we organize?
Can we participate in catechumenates?
Can we open catechumenates?
What can we do to sensitize parishes and communities to open up to conversions?
...