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Session 2009 - "It is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20)

Documents - Eymard Writings
Written by Fr. Manuel Barbiero, sss
Thanks to the new computerized and printed edition of his writings, Fr. Eymard is revealing himself more and more.

Concerning the use of the Word of God, the new edition of his writings helped us discover the verse that Fr. Eymard quoted most often. It is Gal 2:20: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. [...] He loved me and gave himself up for me".

We might have expected a verse from the gospel of John that Fr. Eymard loved so much, or an explicit Eucharistic quotation; but we must say that this quotation is one of the high points of the strong tradition of the French school of spirituality. It is "everywhere in Bérulle, as in all his disciples" (Yves Krumenacker, L'école française de spiritualité, du Cerf, Paris 1998, p. 254).

Fr. Eymard is not an exegete in the strict sense of the word - nor did he ever compose any commentary on the Bible. The purpose of this talk is to present the spiritual experience that produced or that was the fruit of this verse in his life, the existential exegesis that Fr. Eymard offers us from the phrase of St. Paul, and how he used this passage, in what context, and for what challenge of growth.

Our interest in this verse also comes from the fact that it is quoted in our Rule of Life, in number 4: "The Spirit of the Congregation". "We cannot live the Eucharist unless we are animated by the spirit which led Christ to give his life for the world. When he proclaimed the New Covenant by the gift of his Body and Blood to his disciples, it was out of love that the Lord gave himself up. Sharing in this gift of himself to us, we place ourselves at the service of the Kingdom, fulfilling the words of the Apostle: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

A few precisions are needed before going into details.

The verse in Gal 2:20 is composed of two parts, two sub-verses. The result of our research, that is 178 times, makes no distinction between them: it refers either to "It is Christ who lives in me", or to "He loved me and gave himself up for me".

Deeper research, however, reveals that the verse is never quoted in its entirety. On only two occasions is it found in the same text, but the two parts are always separated.

We want to focus on the first part of the verse that recurs 110 times. It is quoted the first time in 1837, when Fr. Eymard was still a young vicar at Chatte, and the last time on July 23, 1868, only a month before his death. The quotation reappears 30 times before 1856 (the year of the foundation of the Congregation) and 80 times after (with 30 times after 1865).

We can say that, after the foundation of the Congregation, the use of this verse greatly increased. Another observation is that this verse is found in all his writings: correspondence, personal notes, Constitutions and Statutes, and his preaching. (It appears in all the circumstances of his life and in all the literary styles of writing; Eymard uses it with all kinds of audiences).

I used the computerized technology to research other questions: the relationship of this verse with other words:

The verse of Gal 2: 20 appears 12 times with the word "Baptism"; 30 times with the word "Incarnation"; 26 times with "Holy Spirit" and 65 times with "spirit" (see February 8, 1865); 66 times with "Eucharist"; 40 times with "union"; 20 times with "personality"; 21 times with "Reign"; 65 times with the verb "remain" (10 times with "to remain" and 52 times with "he remains"); 171 times with "love and to love" (137 with "love"; and 34 with "to love"); 123 times with "gift and to give" (42 with "to give"; 21 times with 'gift'; 60 times 'he gives'). The gift of personality, beginning with 1865, is always associated with the text of Gal 2: 20.

In relation with other verses from Scripture:

It appears 29 times with Chapter 6 of the gospel of St. John, particularly Jn 6: 56-57 ("Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the Father, who is living, sent me and I live because of the Father, so also whoever eats me, will also live by me"; 17 times with Jn 6:56; 2 times with Jn 6: 56-57; 10 times with Jn 6: 57); 8 times with Jn 15: 9-10 (the vine and the branches; "As the Father has love me, I also have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love") and 7 times with Jn 17: 22-23 ("May they be one as we are one: I in them and you in me").

It appears 10 times with Ph 1: 21 ("For me Life is Christ"; we should notice that this verse of Ph 1: 21 is quoted 20 times in all the writings and the two verses are closely united, one always following the other); 8 times with Rm 8: 29 ("God has also predestined them to reproduce the image of his Son") and 2 times with Rm 13: 14 ("Put on the Lord Jesus Christ"); 6 times with Gal 4: 19 ("My little children, you to whom I give birth anew in pain until Christ is formed in you") and 1 time with Gal 3: 27 ("In fact, all of you who are baptized in Christ, hyou have put on Christ"); 1 time with Eph 4: 22-24 ("take off the old man... put on the New Man"); 2 times with Col 3: 9-10 (" You have taken off the old man... and put on the new... by renewing himself in the image of his Creator").

After this time dedicated to statistics, although they can already give us a certain orientation, we present the main ideas of this research, under the form of a spiritual overview.

1 - "For me to live is Christ" (Ph 1: 21)

Fr. Eymard affirms with extraordinary force that the life of every Christian "is Christ", whether lay, priest, or religious; like St. Paul, he is a man passionate (crazy) for Christ, his entire life is centered on Christ, and the goal of every human existence is: "Christ lives in me".

The verse of Ph 1: 21: "For me to live is Christ", is always closely united with that of Gal 2: 20. For example, while meditating on the life of Jesus Christ, Fr. Eymard makes this proposition to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament: "St. Paul says: I live but he corrects himself, it is not I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me [cf Gal 2: 20], and in another passage he says: My life, it is Jesus Christ [cf Ph 1:21]. In the same way we should be able to say: it is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me, he is my life" (Paris, May 2, 1860, Pr. Serv. 211,1).

Another text that Fr. Eymard uses rather frequently with Gal 2: 20 is that of Rom 8: 29: God has destined us to be the image of his Son. To do this we must put off the old man, in order to put on the new (cf. Ep 4: 22-24), we should imitate Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11: 1), reproduce the image of the Son of God (cf. Rm 8: 29, allow Christ to be formed in us (cf. Gal 4: 19). To some young people, Fr. Eymard said: "He [Jesus Christ] came to heal h[uman] nature, to give it life: whoever serves me, let him follow me [Jn 12: 26]. That's the mission of the apostles sent into the world. Listen also to St. Paul to the Galatians: My little children, to whom I give birth again [in pain] until Christ is formed in you [Gal 4: 19]. It is a second birth, very painful, calling for double cooperation: the apostle and you. How happy we are, my friends, to be invited to call you also: My little children, you to whom I give birth anew, to to consecrate our life to give you birth in Jesus Christ, to give you the milk of the word of God, to distribute to you the heavenly nourishment. Yes, My little children, you to whom I give birth anew until Christ is formed in you... That is our mission. It is great, it is [beautiful]. But this is yours: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Romans [Rm 13: 14]. He [St. Paul] says again: You have put off the old man [...] and you have put on the new [Col 3: 9-10]. ... that is, his virtues... his life, to be able to say with St. Paul: It is no longer I who live, [but Christ lives in me]... [Gal 2:20]. Whoever sees me, sees the Father [Jn 14:9]" (Pr. Gen. 44.4,1).

The basis for this conviction is the sacrament of baptism, where the Christian has become a member of Jesus Christ and the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6: 15; 1 Cor 12: 27; Eph 4: 15 and 5:30; Col 1: 18), and therefore is called to live the life of Christ, manifest the life of Jesus in him (cf 2 Cor 4: 10), to be the "the good fragrance of Christ". "To be Christian, is to imitate his example, for the Christian is another Christ, in order to be the good fragrance of Christ [2 Cor 2: 15]" (Pr. Gen. 102,1).

On several occasions Fr. Eymard quotes the expression of Gregory of Nyssa: "the Christian is another Christ". The life of Jesus Christ in us produces holiness, "the spiritual man is born through baptism, he grows, he is formed by the sacraments until he becomes a perfect man." (Pr. RSS. 7,1).

We must put on Jesus Christ, the New Man: that's the tactic for putting off the old man. "How does this revolution work? (...) to live the life of Jesus Christ in me - to form him in me, to give him birth and growth (...) Jesus Christ in us, it is his truth, his virtues, his love (...) Therefore, it is through Jesus in that I will battle the old man. It takes two to fight. To the extent that Jesus grows in me, I will be stronger. The essential is to give him good regular nourishment" (February 6, 1865). "To form Jesus in me, to live in Jesus in me and everything for Jesus - then he will be my counsel, my strength, my consolation, my center of love" (February 7, 1865).

The triumph of the new man, the interior man, "who is Jesus Christ in me" (March 23, 1865), is achieved at the price of the death of the old man, at the price of a change, of a journey.

Fr. Eymard states: "Oh! If only we could understand these words of St. Paul: 'It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me' [Gal 2: 20]; and these others: 'Jesus Christ must increase in us to the state of the perfect man' [cf. Eph 4: 13]. Yes, Jesus Christ has to born and grow spiritually in each man. He wants to glorify his Father in each of us" (1865, Pr.Div.12.6,1).

2 - By the Eucharist, sacrament of love

The life of Christ, received in baptism, grows and reaches perfection through the Eucharist. It is by means of the Eucharist that the life of Christ comes to us, that Christ gives himself to live in us, that he forms himself in us, and transforms us into himself. To the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament he says: "This transformation has placed you in him, your heart into his heart, your mind into his mind, your will into his will, your body into his body..." (Pr.Serv.239,7).

Fr. Eymard insists very much on Communion. If baptism is the starting point, after that we must eat, we must nourish ourselves, we must take Communion. Bread feeds the life of the body, the Eucharist feeds the life of the soul, it is "our daily bread" (Lk 11:3), food and strength (cf. Pr.Publ.23,1).

"Christ lives in me" thanks to Communion. This nourishment changes us into Jesus. In fact "Jesus said: Whoever eats me will live for me [cf. Jn 6:57], ... Jesus nourishes me, and nourishes me with his body, with his blood, with his soul, and with his divinity; ... this divine nourishment changes me into itself; Jesus into himself; ... Again, Jesus said: Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood abides in, and I in him [Jn 6:56]. Therefore there is union of life, ... Jesus abides in me, he sets up his home there, his tabernacle, his throne..." (Pr. Serv. 161,1).

The Eucharist produces in us a second incarnation of Jesus Christ - Holy Communion is an actual extension of the Incarnation. To the young workers who were making their first Communion, Fr. Eymard said: "Jesus Christ will come to imprint, to infuse his holiness into your body and soul, to incarnate himself eucharistically. The Eucharist is the extension of the Incarnation. I live [...] but it is Christ who lives in me [Gal 2: 20]" (Pr.Com.5,1,3). "This morning you went to Communion, that is, Jesus Christ changed you into himself. Here you are united to his body, to his blood, to his soul, to his d. [divinity]: What a favor [?]? But [Whoever] eats me, will also live by me [Jn 6: 58]. [It is no longer I who live] but Christ who lives in me [Gal 2:20], we his obedient members" (Pr.Com.10,5,3).

The body of the communicant becomes the place where Christ is present and active. The new life of conformity with Christ through baptism is made dynamic and intensified to the point that we can speak of a continued incarnation. In his preaching, Fr. Eymard says: "I live, but it is no longer I who live..." [Gal 2:20] (and there is a contradiction in these words of St. Paul? I live ... this is the man, this is Paul... and Paul the Christian, but then but rather, it is no longer I [who live] ... Then, can there be two lives in one person? Two centers, [two] persons in a single one? Yes, m.f., (sic) that is the wonder of the Eucharist, the marvel of the Incarnation continued in man. As in the Incarnation, the human nature of Jesus Christ is united hypostatically to his divine nature, so also through Holy Communion, the life of the communicant is united sacramentally to that of Jesus Christ and takes merits and virtues from it, and finally is transformed in this way into Jesus Christ. Then we can say in truth with the apostle: I live [Gal 2:20]. Communion is therefore the life of Jesus Christ in us" (Pr.Gen.262,1).

3 - Thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit

The major actor of the life of Christ in us, of his incarnation in us, of the divine and risen life in us is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who worked the incarnation of Jesus in Mary, is working, as educator and sanctifier, to inspire and form Christ in us.

"The action of the Holy Spirit on the loving soul completes that of the Father and of the Son; his mission is to perpetuate and bring Jesus Christ to perfection in his members... His divine mission therefore is to form Jesus in his disciples; to teach them the truth interiorly by giving them the taste and love for it; to give them the strength to manifest this divine truth, and to be faithful and generous witness to it before kings and nations; to infuse in their soul the spirit of Jesus, so that they may live from his life and from his ways, and be able to say like the Apostle: "I live, but no, it is no longer I who live (who am the principle and end of my life) but it is Jesus who lives in me" [Gal 2: 20]" (Reg.Agr.15,11).

The action of the Holy Spirit in the communicant transforms him into a new heaven, into a living tabernacle of the Trinity (cf. Jn 14: 23). Something is happening in the heart of man that is similar to the union between Chris and his Father. To live from Jesus Christ "is therefore to become just one with Jesus Christ, as Jesus Christ is just one with his heavenly Father" (Pr.TOM.140,3); "I must be to Jesus what Jesus is to his Father" (cf. Jn 17: 22-23) are the words Fr. Eymard uses in his retreat notes (February 21, 1865, Not.Ret.42,57).

4 - Up to the gift of self

The Eucharist, sacrament of love, produces in us the very life of Christ. The Eucharist is a fire of love and feeds love, and love tends to union of the entire person: being, faculties, senses, union of love, because it is love that transforms.

Love demands the gift of oneself. It is a question of total giving, as Christ gave himself totally, to do out of love what Jesus Christ did out of love.

Fr. Eymard, in his thanksgiving after Mass on March 21, 1865, in response to the love of Christ, made the vow of personality; he wrote in his notes, under the form of a dialogue between Christ and his soul: "through Communion, you will live for me, for I shall be living in you. I will fill your soul with my desires and with my life, which will consume and reduce to nothing everything that is personal to you; so much so that it will be I instead of you that shall live and shall desire everything in you. Thus will you be entirely invested with me; my heart will beat within your body, my soul will act through you so that your heart will be the receptacle and the pulsation of my heart. I shall be the person of your personality, and your personality will be the life of my person in you. Vivo ego jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus (It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me) (Not.Ret.42,119).

After 1865, the gift of personality is always associated with the text from Gal 2: 20. Through the gift of personality, the entire person is changed into Jesus Christ: heart, mind, will, body; it is a question of living for Christ, to belong entirely to Christ, "Through him, with him, in him" (Pr.Gen.262,8,1).

The fruit of this life is constant and habitual union with Christ. In his personal notes Fr. Eymard writes: "I meditated on the union of our Lord with us, a union that ought to be the life of the vow of my personality... Our Lord desires that union in order the better to glorify his Father on earth by incarnating himself in a way in every Christian and, by so doing, to become, as it were, the divine personality of each one and do for the Christian united with him what his divine person did for the actions of his own human nature, that is, elevate these actions, by the divine dignity of his person and the strength and power of that union, to the point of making them divinely meritorious; of transforming them into divine actions... That is why St. Paul calls us so often membra Christi (members of Christ - 1 Cor 6: 15), corpus Christi (the body of Christ - 1 Cor 12: 27) That is why our Lord said to his disciples at the Last Supper: Manete in me (Abide in me - Jn 15:3); Manete in dilectione mea (Abide in my love - Jn 15:9). That is the gift of self since we no longer abide in self, since we work for the one with whom we dwell and are at his disposal. Our Lord desires that union out of love for us in order to ennoble us in himself... By that union our actions become the actions of our Lord... Thence the beautiful saying of St. Gregory, Christianus alter Christus (The Christian is another Christ); and of St. Paul: Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus (It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me - [Gal 2:20 - 1 Cor 15: 10]... This union is the fruit of the love of Jesus Christ." (March 22, 1865 - Union of our Lord with us, The Big Retreat of Rome.)

The gift of self does not destroy the human person, but divinizes it, by giving it a new dimension. We can say that the paschal mystery of death and resurrection is being realized. It is the triumph of the new man, the interior man, "who is Jesus Christ in me" (March 23 1865). Fr. Eymard looks at himself as a man conquered by God. Christ becomes his interior master. Jesus Christ becomes his guide: "Our Lord is therefore the one in charge of my soul and of my body since he is in me (...) He must therefore rule over the one and the other since, by my vow, he is that me, he is in what a pilot is on his ship, a master in his house, a father in his family, a soul in the body she animates - God being the life of the one and the other." (March 24, 1865).

According to chronological order, the last text that Fr. Eymard left us is a meditation given to the Servants - it is his last message, his testament: "Ah! My sisters, give your personality to our Lord, then you will really be perfect, you will be able to say with St. Paul: It is no longer I who live, it is our Lord Jesus Christ who lives in me [cf. Gal 2:20]. Then you will be very happy, and very rich. Your heart will be round, because nothing will be able to hold it back; you will be all powerful, you will have the power of our Lord" (July 2 1868, Pr.Serv.642,3)

5 - Conclusion

Pope Benedict XVI, on the occasion of the congress of the Italian Church in Verona, on October 19, 2006, made reference to the verse of St. Paul that we have just commented on while following the writing of Fr. Eymard. What Pope Benedict said can perhaps be helpful as a comparison and serve as a conclusion to this talk: "It is what St Paul reveals in this Letter to the Galatians: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (2: 20). Hence, the essential identity of my life is changed through Baptism, and I continue to exist only in this changed state. 'My own self is taken away and I am filled with a new and greater subject, in which my 'I' is still there but transformed, purified, 'open' through the insertion into the Other, who acquires new space in my existence. Thus, we become 'one in Christ' (Gal 3: 28), a unique new subject, and our 'I' is freed from its isolation. "... I, but no longer I': this is the formula of Christian existence established in Baptism, the formula of the resurrection in time, the formula of the Christian 'novelty' called to transform the world. "Here lies our Paschal joy. Our vocation and our Christian duty consist in cooperating so that they reach effective fulfillment in the daily reality of our life, what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us with Baptism. In fact, we are called to become new women and men, to be able to be true witnesses of the Risen One and thus bearers of Christian joy and hope in the world, concretely in that community of men and women in which we live." (translator's note: this was copied from the Vatican translation found on the internet)

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