

CONVERSION

In today's world, the most formidable challenge we are up against is not a nuclear threat or fundamentalism or world hunger or global warming. It is mankind's rejection of God. A society that sheds its Christian identity relapses into its pagan past.

"Structures of sin" are deplorably on the rise. Just go to any newsstand, surf in the internet, enter a cinema, or drop by a video shop to breathe the air densely contaminated by moral pollutants. Do you think there is nothing wrong with a society where flesh trade is becoming a form of "social service?" Open the yellow pages, for example, and you will find fleshpots in the business section. Anyone with a bit of common sense, if not moral sense, realizes that something is amiss in a world where undergarments used by actresses are auctioned in the market; where condoms are sold in the pharmacies, where two men can be legal "spouses," where TV programs are spiced up with porno stuff.

When people are enslaved by sin, they tend to justify it and even demand respect for it as an exercise of their "right to a personal lifestyle." Those who gainsay are up against arguments of ethical pluralism and cultural diversity. Christian morality is viewed as fixation and intolerance in a pragmatic world where everything is open to consensus and subject to debate.

A revolution is in order, aimed at transforming social structures through the renewal of hearts and minds. The most effective way to do this is through the testimony of our own lives, our good example, moral integrity and fortitude to live the demands of our faith.

We often deplore the iniquities around us and forget that evil dwells within us, lurking deep in the dark corners of our heart. Indeed, there rages a battle in the interior of every human person, the battle between good and evil. Our greatest enemy lies within us – our tendency to sin. Our life is like a tug of war, pulled as we are by two opposing forces.

We need to crack certain habits and muster the courage to make ourselves over. Sticking to our old self is a form of self-imprisonment. When a person abandons God, he or she abandons oneself. It is the worst case of self-alienation, a spiritual suicide. The only way for that person to recover life is to turn back to God.

God always gives us a chance to change. Even though we have lived a sinful life in the past, we can always reform. We can clean our bad record, so to speak. It is never too late to do it. Deep within the heart of every Christian – indeed, of every man and woman – is a hidden longing for God.).

Conversion is authentic to the extent that it brings about a real change. And since we do not change overnight, we need to persevere in our good resolutions, to keep up the fight, to sustain the effort, aware that our *fomes peccati* (concupiscence) constantly pulls us down. Our struggle is a lifetime task. Remember that "a righteous man falls seven times and rises again" (Prov 24:16). We need to return to God as often as we displease Him, and as quick as the blood flows out of an open wound.

If we are vigilant, we realize that there are a thousand and one opportunities to rectify our intention and correct our behavior from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn: when we think ill of someone, or cast a lustful glance, or tell a lie, or lose our temper, or overeat, or judge others, or entertain bad thoughts, or neglect our duty, we ought to say an act of contrition and start all over again.

In a 20-kilometer marathon, a Russian athlete dashed off at the opening salvo, leaving far behind the rest of the runners. But his sprint tired him out halfway through. Soon an Ethiopian

caught up from behind and overtook him. The latter initially lagged, but his pace was firm and constant. In the end the African clinched the laurel, even hitting the finish line in record time.

Similarly in the spiritual life, a slow but steady pace is better than an enthusiastic start that never gets through. Our final victory is attained by dint of little struggles and daily conquests.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight” (Ps 51[50]:1-4).