

Permanent formation program

2015 Agustinian interiority

1. Interiority
modern man and
weak thought





THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERIOR LIFE FOR MODERN MAN. PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NOTION OF WEAK THINKING

1. CONTINUOUS CHANGE AND THE INCARNATION AT THE PRESENT TIME

We are witnesses to continuous change in many parts of our lives: in politics, social life, economics, culture, religion, the Church and, of course, at a personal level. In order to be aware of this it is a good idea to take note from History and to show how, from its very origins, human development has gone through a series of cycles which repeat themselves, not in the sense of an absurd or eternal repetition, but in the sense of maintaining some common elements. We can think of advances, regressions, conflicts, peace, development, destruction, technology, barbarity, correct decisions, and errors, etc. This could be seen as the solution for our time,

in which we are also called to become incarnate today looking for our particular Sitz in Leben¹.

Today, along with the notion of globalization, is that of the monstrous caricature of the "herd mentality" which Nietzsche drew up; and the reproductive metastasis of maddening singularity. This, as a general landscape, can seem to be somewhat disheartening.

For at present thinking has gone wild, with productive thinking becoming a wild terrain². It seems to be an impossible route. So it is, that liquid thinking and the liquid person within a liquid society, has made instability in many areas a common denominator³.

At present, what Saint Theresa of Jesus says about the soul as an inner garden is a forgotten concept⁴. We may attempt in many ways serious educational reform, yet from the earliest years this spectacular "inner garden" is not cultivated, and the few fruits which could be brought to bear and grow seem to be somewhat wild.

At present serious thinking about this is a lost cause. We are wrapped up in a bewildering chaos of information without end, tones of books, terra bytes of archives of differing quality, the rebirth of the Scholastic regime in interminable discussions, the continual defense of lazy arguments going nowhere, a proliferation of schools, sects, trends of thought which offer no clear way forward.

Faced with this particular landscape, an interesting alternative consists in interpreting history from the present as we see it; making use of the Classics which, in a way, lived similar circumstances to those which we are going through at the moment. Reflecting in this way could offer us solutions⁵.

¹ Sitz im Leben is a German phrase which can be translated roughly as a "viewpoint upon life". Or in other words, that there is no text without a context.

² This evokes a Byzantine manuscript from the 13th Century edited by M. H. Thomson, *El jardín simbólico (the Symbolic Garden)* Olañeta, Barcelona 1998 (<http://interclassica.um.es/var/plain/storage/original/application/c727b4e101b3737cefbce023e10526609.pdf>).

³ Cf. Z. Bauman, *Los retos de la educación en la modernidad líquida*, (Challenges for education in Modern liquidity), Gedisa, Barcelona 2007.

⁴ I allude to the works of Theresa of Jesus particularly the *Complete works* (Obras completas, I, Ed. Monte Carmelo, Burgos 1990). Amongst other passages which make reference to this metaphor there is cf. *Vida*, 6, pp. 98ss.; 14, pp. 136ss., where we read "It was a great pleasure for me to consider my soul as a garden and the Lord who walked in it...There are times in my soul where there is no memory of this garden: all seems to be dry and there seems to be no water to sustain it, nor does it seem that there was ever anything virtuous. Much work had to be done, for the Lord wishes that it would seem that the poor gardener who had worked hard to sustain and water it for nothing. It is then that the real hard work with the hoe must be done to take out the root of the small weeds - for whilst they are small they cause much harm. With knowledge there is always a need for greater diligence, unless the water of God's grace takes it away. We must also be aware of our little importance, which is less than nothing, and hereby gain much humility".

⁵ Cf. A. Carrón de la Torre, *Diafanidad de la persona y transparencia del corazón*. María Zambrano y San Agustín, (Clarity about the person and transparency of heart. Maria Zambrano

Who is not aware today of a trend in Sophism? Cannot the Classics offer us a new light, being tireless searchers for the truth in itself - and not only a truth for myself, my image and my likeness? Thus becoming a true Ethics for human happiness and not merely ambition or utilitarianism?

At present rivers of ink are wasted in demonstrating that "Philosophy is in crisis" (and also in casting it out from educational programs). In this context there is also to be found the so-called "crisis of modern Philosophy" or the "crisis of Modernity". There is also the pretension to sweep away Modernity, understood as an anachronism along with the apparent post modernity which hasn't offered any convincing solutions either.

This type of philosophical sickness consists in the fact that theories look for small triumphs rehabilitating themselves (be that as an incarnation of novelty, or as the clear defense of absolute differences). It is cured with a good dose of millennial Philosophy which could well be evoked in condensed form in the proverb: "To go over again ancient things and from them to learn new things"⁶.

This is not the time to defame humanist theories, like some ancient trend, but rather the opposite: the time has come to reawaken the senses, to bring out the new from the old. Is this not precisely what the revitalization of the Church and the Order is about?

"Beauty so ancient and yet so new" (Confessions X, 27, 38) Saint Augustine reminds us. In Jesus Christ, in his Gospel, and in the Mission which has given to us as a Church we find these ancient things from which we should learn new things.

In the midst of this search for questions and answers it is still relevant, and with ever greater insistence, man's interior life. In this current landscape of questions and answers how then are we trying to find this inner man?



and Saint Augustine) *DiE Académica Española*, Granada 2012, 392 pp. The work also demonstrates the relation between Saint Augustine in the 5th Century and Maria Zambrano at the beginning of the 20th in terms of their lived experience. It also places in context both the problems and solutions of each author.

⁶ R. Darrobers, *Proverbes chinois*, (Chinese proverbs) Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1996, 148, quoted by M. N. Lapoujade, "Después... 28

2. PERSPECTIVES FROM WEAK THINKING

We live in a time where the great narratives have passed to a second, lower level. The great traditions are forgotten; eclecticism and religions where anything goes take the lead faced with the question for meaning and the need for spirituality. This is about the need for a full inner life given the emptiness which comes about in man when he finds himself face to face with his irrelevance and his finiteness, with its resulting instability.

Then we have the notion of weak thinking as a concept coined by Gianni Vattimo, and related to the most generic form of post modernity which was very influential in the 1980's and 1990's. His perspective is, in a way, very relativist and values above all the multicultural.

Weak thinking shares some characteristics with Deonstrutivism (Jacques Derrida) in as much as the freedom of interpretation is not subject to an enclosed logic. There is also to be found the crisis of ideology at the end of the 20th Century, considered by some on occasions as an intellectual element of political eclecticism called the Third Way (Anthony Giddens).

For Vattimo, we have in post-modernity entered into a kind of “information Babel” where communication and means of communication have acquired a central importance. Post modernity marks the overcoming of a modernity controlled by singular conceptions of closed models and of great truths with fundamental consistencies, and a view of history as a unified outline for knowledge.

Post modernity opens the way, according to Vattimo, towards tolerance and diversity. It is a move from the “strong thinking” of metaphysic and a well-defined philosophical view of the world and true beliefs. In its place we have “weak thinking”, a kind of “weak nihilism” and an unworried “pass” as a result; far removed from existential criticism.

For Vattimo, the ideas of post modernity and weak thinking are closely related to the development of multimedia, with a midway position in the new scheme of values and relations.

According to Vattimo himself, weak thinking will be defined in the following terms:

- faced with an iron and errorless logic there is the need for a freer sense of interpretation;
- faced with an unchangeable political sphere and vertical party relations there is the need to support transversal social movements;
- faced with the arrogance of an artistic vanguard there is the need for the recuperation of popular and pluralist art;
- and, faced with a European ethnocentrism there is the need for a cultural World vision.

Vattimo’s theory would be seen to be well reinforced by what we could call the fulfillment of the “Orwellian prophecy”. Initially treated in *Animal Farm* and later

in 1984, George Orwell talks of a mass manipulation of minds. A manipulation, it must be said, over which we will have to question ourselves. This is in order to see if this said manipulation has affected the religious life, as well as seeing up to what point the same weak thinking has also affected the religious life.

It is also true that neither Vattimo nor Orwell offer solutions to the problem; rather they are content to constitute themselves again as narrators of an event.

All of this, nonetheless, reopens the question of the often treated and re-vindicating concept of the person. Since the definition by Boecio, along with the notion of being for others, we arrive to the concept of a person as a “digital profile”. In many places in our contemporary society you are not a person if you are not present on the Net; that is if there is no evident activity in the social networks. But we shouldn’t stay there: the way a person relates to others changes. How many times have we come across groups of friends who, sat at the same table, interact with their smart phones but without exchanging any actual words? We need to revise how many of our daily habits have been changed by the mere use of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Is this bad? Certainly we cannot condemn the use of these means of communication, but rather educate users in good practice. So that they remain what they should be, means of communication and not become an end in and of themselves.

Whilst this is true, there is another fundamental and serious question: what impact do these means of communication and the new occurrence of “digital profiles” have upon the Religious life? Also how have community relationships been changed by this new concept of the person and their place in the world? Are there opportunities and threats in all of this?

3. THE PRESENCE OF POST-MODERNITY IN THE NEW GENERATIONS

Digging a little deeper into Sociological investigations, the majority insist in what we have already proved: that “change” and the necessity of “adapting” to novelty has become a new paradigm for our times. Every day the challenge becomes clearer: that of adapting ourselves in order to continue to be in contact with the world. If not we would be out of touch, closed in on a structure with little meaning for other people in these times.

According to Sociological studies, we can see this trend in the emerging generations of the last seven decades⁷:

⁷ For this part we base our reflection on A. Carrón de la Torre, “La persona que el agustino recoleto está llamado a ser” (“The type of person an Augustinian Recollect is called to be”), *Recollectio* 36 (2013) 207ss.

Title	Birth Date	Age in 2012
<i>Traditional Generation</i>	Up until 1950	Older than 62 years
<i>Baby Boom Generation</i>	1951-1964	Between 61 and 48
<i>Generation X</i>	1965-1983	Between 47 and 29
<i>Generation Y</i>	1984-1995	Between 28 and 17
<i>Generation Z</i>	1996-2004	Between 16 and 18

In summary, the following reflects the fundamental characteristics of each of these generations:

CHARACTERISTICS	Traditional	Baby Boom	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
<i>Life philosophy</i>	Practical	Optimist	Skeptical	Hopeful	Individual
<i>Professional ethics</i>	Dedicated	Centered	Balance	Decisive	Dependent
<i>View of authority</i>	Respect	Love/hate	Uninterested	Considerate	Indifferent
<i>Leadership model</i>	Hierarchical	Consensus	Competitive	Collective	Novelty
<i>Motivated by</i>	Sacrifice	Self-motivated	Irresponsibility	Inclusion	Consumerism

Taking all of this into account, if we want to today make contact with those around us we cannot lose sight of the Augustinian educational perspective. This is that of the simple attitude of the teacher and the search of the student; a teacher who even has contact with his spiritual side becoming a child amongst children. This goes with the common touch, and a playfulness which enables a personal contact with the students in a common appreciation of things; as if these things were also new for him. This brings with it an always renewed enthusiasm by the teacher and the overcoming of any sense of tedium⁸.

⁸ Cf. G. Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine*, London 1969, pp. 183-207, 150-158, quoted in A. Carrón de la Torre, *Diaphanidad...* 337.

Does it not seem to happen that when we show pleasing and beautiful places, that of cities and panoramic views which they have never seen, and we who have seen them many times see them with almost no pleasure are we not renewed in our appreciation by their appreciation for something new? This is even more so when greater is the sense of friendship, for through the ties of love when we live still more for them, then greater is the sense of novelty for us for those things which were old (*cat. rud.* 12,17).

These acute observations from Saint Augustine flow into reciprocal education, given that the student helps the teacher to rediscover the truth, already known to him, and surely with a newer emphasis. It is a reciprocity which, in another sense, comes to resolve the dialectical relationship between the student and the teacher. Thus both are learning together in symphony, and together each one by himself.

How then can we establish a dialogue with a generation of people that defines itself as individualist, indifferent and consumerist? In this Augustine also offers us some good advice. *De vera religione* establishes with precision and depth the necessary steps to reach towards the *beatitudo*. In this practice Augustine teaches his audience from the very first of his *Dialogues*. He leads us from the outer world to the inner world, and from the inner world towards the transcendent. This model will be what guides his latter mature works like the *Confessions* and the *City of God*⁹. In essence, it is in the depths of man where Truth is to be found, and it is our task to make this discovery known to our contemporaries; this richness which defines us as people: the interior life.

Younger generations are often disorientated, guided by relativism, searching for answers and desiring to know themselves. People will be truly human when they possess within themselves a certain knowledge about themselves; a certain sense of order which allows them to be who they are. This will enable them to face up to what happens around them in relation to that which brings them to recall the intimacy of a said reality outside of itself; to the end of searching for and finding the certain truth inherent in all reality. In this way, the joining which they establish from their relationship with life through others and with things is a form of transcendence.

For this certain attitudes can help like that of silence (inner and outer); facilitating moments in order to share discoveries or problems; sharing, but not imposing, in a reasoned way various points of view in relation to problems; that of accompanying and acting as a guide, in the discovery of their own truth; encouraging communities where learning and teaching are a common objective, etc.

⁹ Cf. A. Carrón de la Torre, *Diafanidad*...134.

4. THE RESILIENCE OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE MAKES THE INTERIOR LIFE NECESSARY

Aware of the difficulties which are present when we open up a dialogue with newer generations, and given that the perspective of weak thinking within postmodernity doesn't offer us any interesting alternatives, we must look for something different. An interesting leap is to plant the problem from the perspective of a very contemporary theme around the area of the interior life, and referred to in many contemporary sectors: that of resilience. That is, the capacity of a person or a group to continue in their human development despite the difficulties, and sometimes serious traumas, which life offers to us¹⁰. This concept, applied to the context of religious life, connects with a previously mentioned idea: the need for revitalization from the sense of the value of antiquity and a deepening awareness of the inner life of the person.

This adjective is found in the English word *resilient*, or in Spanish and French rendered *resiliencia*. It is employed in metal work and civil engineering to describe the capacity of some materials to recover their original form after being submitted to immense pressure or deformation. Nonetheless, resilience is also found in the trend of positive and dynamic psychology stimulating mental health. It defends, in accordance with the testimony of many people, that we can overcome a traumatic situation and carry on with life; even indeed to a higher level as if the lived through trauma now taken on has developed surprising potential resources. Many people also come out of such adverse circumstances feeling renewed and enriched.

At present, and especially in the Religious life, the importance of the need to strengthen people inside so that they can resist the difficulties of this world which is so difficult, so global, complex and problematic is well known. To strengthen people is to inform them, to train them, to favor the vitality of every stage of life, without rushing their times and getting to know their potential and spiritual strength.

In order to strengthen and overcome the adversities in the Religious life it requires the development of a good self-image. This requires knowing our strengths and weaknesses; taking mistakes as lessons learnt and not failures; to be creative, flexible and proactive; to have a healthy emotional life. This entails teaching to ask for help when it is needed; to think and reflect before acting; to exercise self-control; and to look at life with optimism and a sense of humor.

In the Religious life, as in any human group, it is of vital importance to develop this capacity to face up to difficulties, to grow and mature as people. For this to happen it is necessary to maintain affective relationships where love is present: sensibility; comprehension; respect and interest which is combined through a good example in deeds and not only in words. In this way these aspects

¹⁰ Cf. T. Chamaya, "Resiliencia en la vida religiosa" ("Resilience in the Religious life"), : http://cppsperu.pe/cpps_esp_tem9.html.

will come to reinforce a sense of trust in community life. It is of prime importance to identify more the strengths and advantages than to detect problems and failures.

To talk of resilience in the religious life leads us to ask about the development of autonomy in Religious (especially in the stages of formation and first ministries). There exist, equally, many personal problems: discussions; conflicts; lack of meaning in life and in our vocation; inadequate personal relations; lack of courage or sense of self-worth, etc.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to overcome these difficulties in order to be free of problems and to live a balanced life. For that reason resilience is presented as the capacity by the human person to face the adversities of life, overcome them, and even be transformed by them¹¹.

We must not forget that resilience is sustained by the interaction between the person and their surroundings. Therefore, a Religious being in a context of relationships with others must learn to fix limits between themselves and the cause of problems. They should maintain an emotional and physical distance without falling into complete isolation; as well as developing the capacity to establish emotional ties with other people in order to balance the necessity of affectivity with an attitude of also helping others.

Resilience is, then, a process which could help a lot of Religious in their life-long development. To promote resilience is to recognize a strength above and beyond weakness. This helps to improve the quality of life from the individual's sense of meaning according to how the world is perceived and faced up to.

From a practical point of view, how can we take advantage of the interior life in making use of resilience? The following points could help:

- Finding in every brother or sister positive aspects and trusting in their capacity to be better than they are right now.
- Being able to put ourselves in their place.
- Fighting against humiliation and under valuing ourselves, because they impact negatively on the image and confidence of people.
- Lead by example, adopting attitudes based on respect, solidarity and comprehension.
- Take into account the necessities, difficulties and expectations of every brother and sister.
- Promote and develop the capacity to listen, and communication in general.
- Make use of limits and pacifying behavior in order to live in a healthy community atmosphere.
- Develop clear and coherent ways of conduct that are value based.

We will advance towards a better world when we understand resilience as a way of overcoming adversity and becoming responsible, given that resilience can be encouraged by all the community and those who surround it. A focus on resilience allows quality of life to also be a communal and ecclesial activity. It

¹¹ Cf. E. H. Grotberg, *Resiliencia: descubriendo las propias fortalezas*, (*Resilience: discovering your own strengths*) Paidós, Buenos Aires 2004.

involves assuming the challenge towards a better quality of life based on respect, dialogue, and learning from mistakes; rather than focusing on the errors and “horrors” committed by people. As a common Spanish saying goes “don’t add more wood to the fire, nor make firewood out of a fallen tree”.



5. BEAUTY ALWAYS ANCIENT AND ALWAYS NEW: MAN REBORN

Maria Zambrano, a contemporary Spanish writer, would say along with Augustine of Hippo that man must be reborn; the inner man, with an open heart to reality and faced with reality:

“This new man is the inner man. ‘Return to yourself, inside ourselves the truth resides’”. European man has been born because of these words. The truth is within him, and realizing this for the first time he is able to dwell in this interior life; for that reason he is independent, and more still he is free¹².

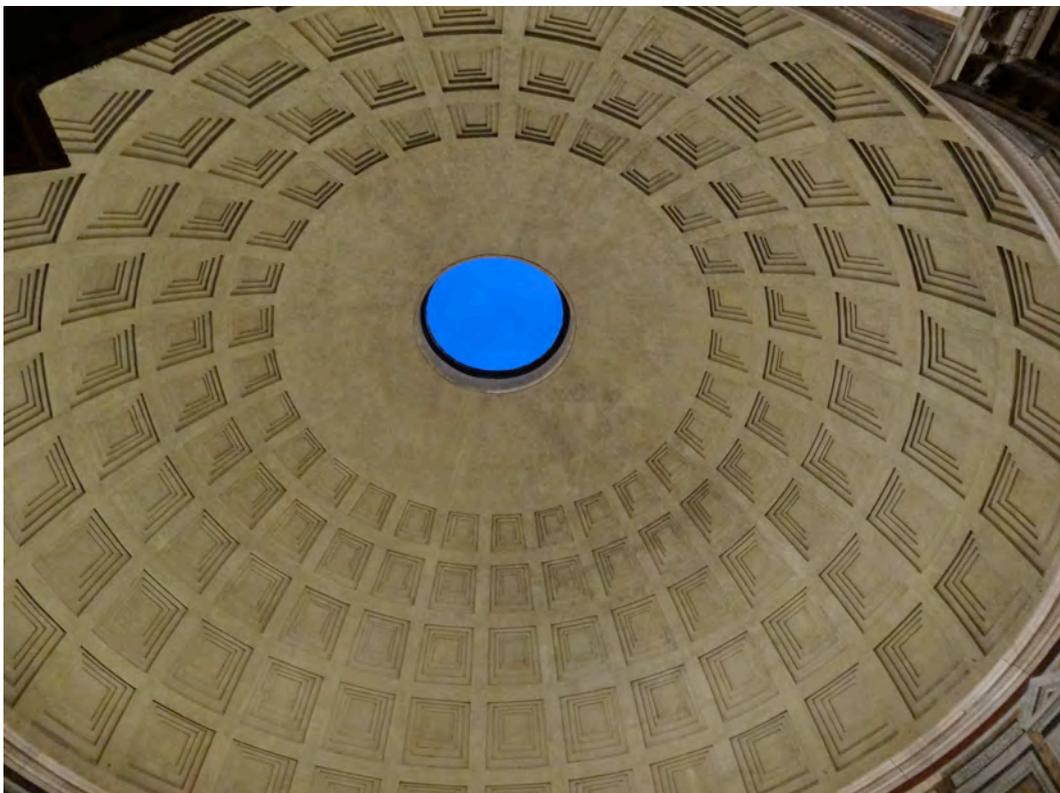
Everybody is need of the truth.

To need the truth is something which is characteristic of man. To the measure in which he wants it, and pursues it, he will be more ordered in his use of time and will be brought back from his waywardness. He will go on to discover a wider horizon for his use of time, and

¹² M. Zambrano, *Persona y democracia*, (*Person and Democracy*) Antrophos, Barcelona 1988, 132.

with that a sense of order. To allow things to take place we know that they need a place to take place in. So it is that time is the place for all things in human life; they need time in order to enter into a certain order¹³.

The sense of restlessness which is part of human reality is a reality open to be transcended; to make real this restlessness until it recovers its lost unity in encountering God. In Saint Augustine the problem of love is a problem of realization. This realization comes forth from the truth that resides in our hearts; it is truth as man's interior master. God is the truth for Saint Augustine: the waywardness of Saint Augustine is the concrete expression of this tension in the human depths of man; of the man who is torn apart historically and temporally, as a result of restlessness and its realization. The heart is the place for intimacy, which works in silence with this unceasing work in the depths of man; and for this reason it is measured by time¹⁴.



The end of this realization will be, in Saint Augustine, to achieve an open heart. There must be clarity and transparency. We have then man as he is realized historically, as a manner of process. It is a process which takes time. I am both unmade and am making an opening into my realization, and in this is revealed my reality.

¹³ M. Zambrano, *Persona...*132.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Zambrano, *Orígenes, (Origins)* Ediciones del Equilibrista, México 1987, 12.

This opening to reality is a moment of truth. It is truth as revelation or as a manifestation of my depths, of my heart. This is completed by transparency, in this hidden revelation of our being, in whose center divinity dwells. We have here time as a restless dispersion of our reality, in revealing the richness of an open heart. It is the ordering of love which creates the horizon in Augustine's sense of creation. It is in this horizon where people must realize themselves in living together with others in a context of universality, in order to reach unity in their lives when they suffer the effects of waywardness in moments of crisis. For this reason the sense of confession is necessary for in it:

more than in any other literary genre, it is shown that life has a way of transition between that which we have found ourselves to be and that which we are journeying towards being. Without a doubt, if this be true, it is a condition of all men. But Europeans, sons of Saint Augustine, have needed it more than any other, for more than any other they decided with great audacity to make real what they earnestly awaited. Also, because in addition to hope they had a firm will, decisiveness, a frenetic spirit in the realization of their project. Furthermore, a greater need of hope... a greater need of clarity¹⁵ (in order to make real our dream: the new man built upon the inner man).

It is a fight for

living a project, believing more in the reality of the project than in what is visible, pendant on the invisible reality and its realization. It is the feeling of living in another world. For in the Gospel we read "My kingdom is not of this world"¹⁶.

The beginnings of Augustine's anthropology is to be found in his deep analysis of the interior life, in his full immersion in the depths of the heart and the mind and its conscious and unconscious levels. His radical reflection is more than a superficial abstraction carried out by an isolated Cartesian "ego". For Augustine, the human spirit cannot be separated from its activities; the human spirit is its activities with respect towards its self, to others and to God. His analysis is not theoretical, but rather practical; the mind is made present to itself, remembering and pre-announcing its own life.

By means of reflection on this highly intimate spirit in relation with its self and with its world, Augustine arrives at a more profound consciousness. This leads to a greater hold on the basic principles of morality, and the sincere admission of our own ignorance. The search for self does not lead to a narcissistic self-contemplation which ends in a narrow and enclosed insularity, but rather it should lead to a vast ocean of being and goodness; to the Other which is within us and in which is found the intimacy of self-presence¹⁷.

In all this, if we wish that man should be reborn, we have to search for the truth thus creating our own time:

For every living thing is fed by something and in something. The human person also has his life: he breathes in time and is fed by truth.

In the words of Augustine:

¹⁵ M. Zambrano, *La agonía de Europa*, (*The agony of Europe*) Trotta, Madrid 2000, 73-74.

¹⁶ M. Zambrano, *La agonía*... 81.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Carrón de la Torre, *Diafanidad*... 164.

You, Lord, have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you
(*Confessions* 1, 1, 1).

Contemporary man finds himself in a continuous exile, motivated by constant change. People who experience exile have as their only refuge the inner life. The inner life becomes the place to search for their deepest being. Therefore, by way of a prophetic perspective, we could predict that the man of tomorrow will be a man of interior life or he will not be a man.

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