

“Prayer, Teaching, and Sacrifice: The Triple Apostolate of the Society”—A New Call in a “Liquid” World?

“Pray, teach, and sacrifice yourself, so that all may know and love Jesus.

Pray, teach, and sacrifice yourself, to restore all things in Christ Jesus,

Pray, teach, and sacrifice yourself, to educate... according to the teachings of Teresa of Jesus” (EEO II, 536)

We live out our vocation to form Christ in the mind and heart by dedicating our strength and our whole lives to spreading the knowledge and love of Jesus throughout the world through prayer and education. The mission, which we share with those who participate in the Teresian charism, encompasses our entire lives: a friendship with the Lord in prayer, sacrifice as unconditional self- giving to all, and the commitment to educate according to the spirit of Teresa of Jesus

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INTRODUCTION

Returning to our origins means not only looking back to “the sources” of the founding charism of the Society of Saint Teresa. It means returning to and re-reading what the Founder intended for those first members, and attempting to translate and interpret it for today’s Teresians, within the contexts of the fast-paced present in which we live.

That is why, in this sheet No. 7, we want to reflect on the Society's "triple apostolate"—**prayer, teaching, and sacrifice**—asking ourselves how to interpret it, live it out, and even offer it as an "alternative" to a postmodern, "liquid" society that poses enormous challenges to a life of faith and discipleship in Jesus. What do we understand—and what do people today understand—by "prayer," "teaching," and "sacrifice"?

We invite you to enter this reflection barefoot, asking the Lord for a great measure of humility so that we do not take for granted what we already know about the Society's triple apostolate, but rather so that we may rediscover it from the perspective of this postmodern society of which we are a part.

PREPARING OUR

HEARTS

In this section, we present some texts that will help us "warm our hearts" and prepare them for two things: first, for a **PERSONAL REFLECTION** on the "meanings" we have ascribed so far to the Society's "triple apostolate." Second, to prepare for our sharing during the community gathering with some texts that, from a different perspective, will speak to us about what other authors today might understand by each of these words: "prayer," "teaching," "sacrifice."

1. The Triple Apostolate: From the History of the Society:

In his personal notes, Henry de Ossó explained the purpose of the Society as follows: "Our most ardent petition and desire: to be the first to know and love Jesus, Teresa, Mary, Joseph, and St. Francis de Sales. To seek the glory of God through the salvation of souls. To be holy and wise like Saint Teresa of Jesus, so that through her virtue and wisdom we may draw all hearts to the love of Jesus".... The Provisional Directory, an important document for the Society prior to the adoption of the Constitutions, defined the purpose as follows: "Not only to work diligently at our own salvation and perfection with God's grace, but also to seek the greatest honor for Christ Jesus with the utmost zeal, spreading knowledge and love throughout the world through the apostolate of prayer, teaching, and sacrifice." [1]

Apostolic zeal is the expression of spousal love in the documents. Love for Jesus Christ is the starting point for defending His honor. Love implies knowledge gained through prayer.

Teaching was the inspired instrument through which Henry de Ossó sought to extend the Kingdom, together with sacrifice—understood more as a renunciation implicit in teaching—especially since teaching is not confined to a single place but has the entire world as its horizon. Sacrifice takes the form of detachment, uprooting, availability, ongoing formation, and daily renunciation. [2]

First reflective pause

How have I understood, up to TODAY, this threefold apostolate of the Society?

How have I lived my life of prayer, my mission as an educator, and the dimension of “sacrifice” up to today?

2. “Prayer,” “teaching,” “sacrifice”: other voices...

Below are the following texts (“other voices”) for personal reflection. The key here is to highlight what surprises us, point out what affirms us, and note what challenges us, in preparation for a subsequent communal conversation.

Prayer, according to Hans Küng [3]:

No, as an enlightened man of the 21st century, I need not be ashamed to pray. Of course, I reject selfish prayer, which puts myself and my desires, my needs, and my requests first, and equates my cause with God’s cause. Nor do I harbor any naive notions about a

supernatural “intervention” by God in the world. However, God is above or alongside the world and myself. He does not miraculously break the laws of nature from the outside just because I ask Him to; He does not play dice outside His own rules... Love needs expressions of love if it is to remain alive; likewise, faith needs testimonies of faith if it is not to perish. And when I simply say to God, “I believe in You,” then I am praying.

Whoever, walking uprightly and without hypocrisy, has offered their own prayer of petition to God... has experienced that one emerges from prayer differently than one entered it; that their desires and concerns may be transformed...

Yes, you can talk to God—self-critically, frankly, and modestly—in every tone and mood: when you’re happy or unhappy, laughing or crying, elated or bored, with serenity or impatience. There is no need for elevated language, a sublime style, sacred expressions, formalities, or courtesies. No word is too simple and no statement is too clumsy to be uttered, if I address God personally with it. [4]

On “Teaching” (Some Authors)

"Everything can be taken from a man except the last of human freedoms: the choice of one's personal attitude toward any set of circumstances. When an educator or mentor faces pain, exhaustion, or injustice with dignity and composure, they are imparting the most transformative lesson possible. Young people are not looking for flawless speeches; they are looking for real role models who demonstrate to them, through their own daily actions, that life is worth living and that it always retains meaning, even in the midst of the darkest storms" (Viktor Frankl)

"If we want others to grow, the fundamental condition is that we ourselves love life and have faith in it. There is no greater educational force than the example of a person who loves themselves and loves others freely... Many educators and parents believe they are fulfilling their role by transmitting a set of moral norms or intellectual directives, while their own lives exude bitterness, emptiness, or automatic submission. Children and students absorb, through a kind of psychic osmosis, the living atmosphere of the adult. They do not learn from your commands; they learn from your joy, your respect for their individuality, and your courage in facing life. To be a beacon, your first task is not to shape the minds of others, but to structure your own being with integrity." Erich Fromm

"Human beings learn by watching the hands of those who work, the gaze of those who comfort, and the steady stride of those who walk in search of justice. Our daily actions compose the true poem that others read in us."

To educate is to sow the seeds of one's own heart in the furrows of each day. If you seek peace, let your hands not sow discord even in the smallest corner; if you seek beauty, let your treatment of living beings be pure and generous. Do not seek applause or thrones of wisdom. Be like bread, be like everyday water: a simple, honest, and ever-present element, whose greatest lesson is the absolute truth of its existence." Pablo Neruda

And what about “sacrifice”?

*“And by exercising these two apostolates, **they will sacrifice themselves for the salvation of their brothers and sisters**; that is, they will exercise the apostolate of sacrifice, which is the ultimate, most perfect, and most sublime apostolate”* (RT February 1878, in EEO III, 849).

*“The members of the Society must be strong-willed, determined souls, detached from themselves and from all things, **willing to make any sacrifice.**”* (EEO II, 98 and 215)

Today, the word “sacrifice” has rather negative connotations: self-denial, inhuman effort to achieve the impossible... standards of “holiness” that no longer have any reason to exist. Clearly, this is a term typical of nineteenth-century spiritual literature, characteristic of Henry de Ossó and all nineteenth-century authors. But in the VC, “sacrifice” has been understood as “asceticism”—a term that, incidentally, has no relevance to Christian life today, as it is now unintelligible to many. However, we refer to the views of some authors who maintain that asceticism, rather than an act of one’s own will “against” one’s own nature, is something intrinsic to the human being who strives to grow, improve, progress, and relate to others and the world. We quote Saturnino Gamarra [5]:

The verb “askeín” and the noun “askesis” mean exercise. Originally, “asceticism” was understood to mean any form of exercise, whether in a physical-athletic or psychological-moral sense (the exercise of virtue, the correction of a flaw, inner and outer discipline, etc.) (Gamarra, 282). We begin with a significant fact: asceticism—not so much in its terminology as in its practical content—is a constant feature in the history of humanity. It is as old as the history of humankind and as relevant as the people of today. The explanation lies in the fact that asceticism is essential to human fulfillment. Human beings are not born complete; it is also up to them to shape themselves. And this involves directing their vital potential toward specific objectives or goals. To do so, firm, unambiguous decisions are absolutely necessary—decisions that include saying “yes” and “no” in life on a permanent basis. (Gamarra, 286).

Asceticism cannot be absent at any stage of a person’s development. Its presence is indispensable. One never ceases to become a person—and a Christian. “Being and living” in Christ implies the constant dynamism of an ever-renewing life, which cannot exist without asceticism. (Gamarra, 292)

Those who seek personal gain at the expense of exploiting other people and other peoples are described as “short-sighted,” “selfish,” and “foolish.” Christianity, which also proclaims universal brotherhood in Christ, cannot tolerate any form of exclusion and must support the channels of fraternal solidarity. The discipline of openness to our brothers and sisters—which is characteristic of true brotherhood—is essential... The existence of the poor today is an injustice, since humanity has sufficient means to ensure a decent standard of living for all. The failure to find a solution is everyone’s responsibility, since the goods of creation must be available to all people. The discipline of solidarity and kindness involves each and every individual, and each and every community (Gamarra, 295)

LET'S GATHER

For the community gathering, we suggest placing three signs with the three words “prayer,” “teaching,” and “sacrifice.” A candle, the Constitutions, and some images depicting situations in today’s world.

1. Opening song: “*Todo por ti*” (Ruah)

2. We listen to the Word of God: Isaiah 58:6–10

Is not the fast I choose rather to break the chains of injustice, to loose the bonds of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and to bring the poor and homeless into your house? When you see the naked, clothe them, and do not hide yourself from your own flesh and blood. Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will spring up quickly; your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call out, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say, “Here I am.” If you remove from your midst the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and slander, and offer your own food to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light will break forth in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noonday.

3. Let us take a moment of silence to reflect on this Word. Let us contemplate the words placed in the center of the room where we are gathered. We let our reflections on the texts offered—which preceded this gathering—resonate within us...

4. We begin our sharing:

- **Regarding prayer**

“Prayer is the soul of the Society, giving it life of faith; it is its foundation, its support.... You must therefore strive with all your might to be souls of prayer, teachers of prayer” (EEO II, 43)

From what we have read and reflected on regarding prayer, what surprises us, what is confirmed for us, and what challenges us?

- **Regarding “teaching”**

“Teach by example, by word. Like Jesus, who first began to act and then to teach. So too should you: act before you speak; do before you teach; practice before you preach: deeds and words—and thus the word is effective.” (EEO II, 650)

Of the three texts we read about teaching, what insights can we share? How have we experienced this kind of “teaching” in our own lives?

From whom have we learned... how have we taught...?

Regarding “sacrifice”

“And in carrying out these two apostolates, they will sacrifice themselves for the salvation of their brothers and sisters; that is, they will exercise the apostolate of sacrifice, which is the ultimate, most perfect, and most sublime apostolate” (RT February 1878, in EEO III, 849).

Does this way of understanding “asceticism” mean anything to me? How can we interpret (and live out) this “apostolate of sacrifice” today?

5. After listening to one another, let each person’s words resonate within us... and let us GIVE THANKS.

In a spirit of prayer, let us say aloud what we are grateful for regarding this “triple apostolate” that Henry de Ossó asked of the first sisters and asks of us in each of our contexts.

6. We close our gathering with the song:

“Sin miedo” by Cristóbal Fones, S.J.



A fire burns brightly in my eyes
and awakens a flame in my heart The
peace is new and the joy is greater
The same colors, yet a different flavor It
is the eternal that comes from you
It is the eternal that comes from you
Today I leave that same old life behind
I set out on my journey, heading toward the end Love calls to
me; I know the longing though honor weighs heavily on
my life I become freer in search
of you I become freer in search of you

**Without fear, I embrace and follow
in your footsteps; I seek the path, I journey as a
pilgrim. Without fear,
I entrust myself to your grace
I set out—your love is enough for me. Without
fear, I embrace and follow in your footsteps
I seek the path; I journey as a
pilgrim. Without fear, I entrust
myself to your grace. I set out;
your love will accompany me**

This path, like so many others, Demands struggle;
it does not exclude pain There
is room for my detours and my weary feet
And those voices that make me doubt But in my
nights, I cling to you
But in my nights, I cling to you. I see
more clearly; I must remain vigilant
to the winds that clash in battle within me

Lights, signals, opposing banners
Offers of glory and fleeting prestige
I do not cower; I choose my king
I do not falter; I choose my king.
Without fear, I embrace you and
follow in your footsteps; I seek the
path, I journey as a pilgrim.
Without fear, I entrust myself to
your grace
I set out—your love is enough for me. Without
fear, I embrace and follow in your footsteps
I seek the path; I journey as a
pilgrim. Without fear, I entrust
myself to your grace
I set out; your love will accompany me.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

To explore this further, here are some resources that can help you delve deeper into this topic of the Society's essential apostolate.

1st reference: Chapter 17 of **Back to the Sources**: "Prayer, Teaching, and Sacrifice." In this chapter, Carmen Melchor traces how Henry de Ossó coined this "triple apostolate" of the Society and unpacks its charismatic significance. Pages 445–471

2nd reference: By José Ma. Castillo, excerpt from the book **The Future of Religious Life: From Its Origins to the Current Crisis**.

In a world, a society, and a system such as ours—in which we are all inevitably forced to live in constant tension due to the myriad demands and temptations inherent in the way of life that has been imposed upon us—the great contribution of the early witnesses to religious life is now more relevant than many could ever imagine.

The monk, the religious, is the person who challenges us to seek and recover lost unity, serenity, self-mastery, silence, freedom, and availability.... The decisive factor is “asceticism” in its deepest sense, which is nothing other than knowing how to renounce everything that puts us under strain and divides us, everything that breaks us from within, what robs us of freedom and peace, what makes it impossible for us to be truly available—whether to God (as the ancient monks lived it) or to be more useful when we set out to do something worthwhile so that this world of ours may be different. This is the radical meaning of asceticism and its powerful relevance at this moment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1.EEO II, 407–414
- 2.History of the Society of Saint Teresa of Jesus, Volume I, 118–119
- 3.A theologian, he was born on March 19, 1928, in Lucerne, Switzerland, and died on April 6, 2021, in Tübingen, Germany. He was one of the most important theologians of the Second Vatican Council. A controversial theologian, he was censured by John Paul II. He died as a Catholic priest.
- 4.Hans Küng, *Prayer and the Problem of God*, Madrid 2018,
- 5.*Saturnino Gamarra*. Theology Handbook Series. Spiritual Theology, Library of Christian Authors, Madrid 1994. The page numbers for the various citations should be placed in parentheses immediately after each quoted paragraph.