

## FIVE PARADOXES OF THE NEW MARTYRS

Our century will be no doubt in the history of Christianity as the century of martyrs, inevitable denouement of the first two millennia. (S. Giovanni Paolo II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*)

Never like this century many believers have given their lives for Christ. And not just because you do there are many more men on earth today than 2000 years ago! From the Ottoman Empire to Africa of the Great Lakes, from Mexico to Albania, from Spain to Russia, from Salvador to China, the list is long, very long: "persecutions in the concerning the believers - priests, religious and laity - have done a great job sowing of martyrs in various parts of the world" (ibid.). But our century does not it will only be remembered as the "century of martyrs" but as the one of the "Paradoxes of martyrdom".

### **Five paradoxes**

The century with the greatest number of martyrs will also go to history as well the one in which, as never before, it will be sought not to do the visible martyrs. The Nazi carnivals sent the believers to torture after having condemned them not because of their resistance inspired by faith, but with political pretenses. The same circumstances often occurred in the Marxist era; Father Nonov, a Bulgarian cappuccino, still tells with indignation - a forty years after the incident - the process at the end of which his bishop was shot with many priests accused of being "Spies and agents of imperialism," while Nonov himself was sent to one concentration camp. Not so much the martyrdom of his brothers to scandalize it (after all, Christ had told us what his disciples would be meeting) rather than certain false labels defamatory. "We never did anything but our pastoral assignment. No politics, no spying, ever! "

Another paradox: this century of martyrs will also be the one where the difference and hierarchy - which the Christian tradition had always established between the martyr who pours his blood into the gift of his own life and he openly professes his faith, who suffers for faith without getting to shed their own blood - is perhaps even more evident. The to perfect the techniques of physical, psychic and moral torture will also be one of those sad areas for which our century will be considered, without shadow of doubt, a century of progress. The duration of jailings e I financed torture against those who professed them openly faith - ten, twenty, thirty years and more - give rise to dizziness. A priest survivor of the Communist lager draws attention to this paradox: "If I knew what was waiting for me in the concentration camp, I would preferred to be shot. And to say that despite everything I rejoiced. Self I was shot like so many other priests, I would have become a martyr. Today, yes he speaks of beatification of this or that martyr and I, who I suffered a lot more to along with them, I can continue to commit nonsense on this earth. " To the beyond the humor, the paradox ...

Third paradox, that of those martyrs whose martyrdom itself was "stolen": men broken by violence, ill-treatment, drugs or blackmail, and who died in the night. And equally paradoxical: this century of martyrs seems to be the one in which the same martyrs have been marginalized in the conscience of many of their brothers in faith. Century of martyrs, of course, but also, too often, century of indifference to the martyrs - or even of their rejection, in the name of the "Dialogue," "coexistence," or "tolerance," or because it was believed more to the word of their carnivals who masqueraded martyrdom (see more above the second paradox). The cross of indifference or abandonment by their own brothers in faith it was perhaps the heaviest to bear.

But here's the last paradox. At the time of the early Christians, martyrdom seemed be such a vector, even the first vector, of evangelization which Tertullian had composed of an adage: "Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum," the blood of martyrs is sement for Christians. And here's that in

this century the Christian churches who experienced a persecution total they come out instrumentalized and enslaved by an atheist state: here it is that heroic survivors wander about liturgical vocabulary issues while other believers belonging to those same liberated populations, from oppression seem to have lost all kinds of solidarity from that time persecution and not just thinking of doing business. That does not look like it is true, entirely new. After the Edict of Milan some survivors of the great Diocletian's persecution would have been beaten to have the best seats at Senate, who assumes an eye under torture, who is his broken leg ... What about our century? And what about the persistent lack of interest of so many Christians in the West towards them of the martyrs and believers of this century, always ready to justify themselves: yesterday, you did not want to know, because you could not know; today, you do not want to know why the matter is closed!

### **"We must ensure that their testimony is not lost"**

And yet, John Paul II wanted the martyrs of this century to be contrary to the center of the celebrations and the deepening of the faith that the Church proposes for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000: "In our century the martyrs, often unknown, almost "unknown militias" of the great, returned the cause of God. As far as possible, they must not be lost in the Church their testimonies "(Tertio Millennio adveniente, 37). The reasons for the which one must try to keep alive their testimony are numerous. Starting with the response to the "scandal" constituted by the above paradoxes described, and for the duty of righteousness and truth to all those who have given their life for Christ in this century. But the appeal of John Paul II can take us on other slopes. The work of the Commission for the New Martyrs and those of all men of good will make us discover new ones by here in 2000 and on the occasion of the Great Jubilee. And this is not one reality that somehow constitutes a kind of paradox?

### **Their "fraternal tenderness"**

To become aware of this paradox, we start from a finding; if anyone there he asks: "What images does the word martyr come to you?", most likely of us will associate this term with the images of martyrs in the Roman arenas, lions and the figures of the great Primitive Church commemorated in the Roman liturgical calendar. Two millennia of history have "skinned" and "golden" these figures and, in some ways, theirs Hail them away from us. We pray to them, we are proud of these great figures of faith, we try to follow the example of their virtues. But what was actually the real life and everyday of each, as he (or her) reacted in front of the daily challenges that the contemporary world places our faith in disciples of Jesus Christ, it is difficult imagine it, and so it is difficult to inspire us to exist in order to create a bond concrete with ours (these lives are generally not known except in the context of the "Acts of the Martyrs" that provide us with information only on their final testimony and on their deaths). Or what is worse, we consider these first-century martyrs as one kind of heroes or Christian semidays to be proud of, because we are proud to belong to their own Church. And we are somewhat tempted to pounce on the sufferings and the testimony of these martyrs (and of those of our century), as noted Urs von Balthasar.

But with the martyrs of this century is not so simple. They do not appear still featured with a halo on the windows of our cathedrals or on the wood of the icons. We can not behave, if not in bad faith as if we did not know anything about their lives and reduced them to Epinal des images. Is when John Paul II urges us not to lose his testimony, he is at all their life that is certain, and not just to their martyrdom: "The greatest tribute, that all the Churches will render to Christ at the third threshold Millennium, will be the demonstration of the almighty presence of the Redeemer through the fruits of faith, hope, and charity in many men and women languages and races that followed Christ in the various forms of vocation Christian ". (Ibid.). You have to take this program seriously. These fruits have not been manifested to moment of martyrdom in the face of Roman prosecutors, and not before in life everyday of a metropolis or a village of antiquity, but in front of judges or a perhaps still living political commissars; and even earlier in an educative, familiar environment

cultural, media, propaganda or advertising, prejudices or ways of living that are - despite all the undeniable differences - ours.

So, a new and more surprising paradox begins to emerge: if only knowledge of their martyrdom (sometimes atrocious) will distance us from these great figures of faith in our century (most of us are not at risk nothing at all, at least in the West), knowledge of all the phases of their existence brings them closer to us, and it is increasingly referring to our lives baptized. Let's start then - if we make an effort - to realize that many of them have met our own temptations, our difficulties, our weaknesses, our smiles and our falls, sometimes our doubts, in a world that is our under different aspects. We will find that there are no two ways of being a Christian, their "who" was consistently of heroism almost sovereign and our "more trivial and without great dangers. We will understand that if their death for faith made them martyrs, the essence of what they can teach is elsewhere, is in that testimony love and other theological virtues that they have manifested, and we should admit that that testimony is not reserved to the martyrs, which was request to us as to them.

In short, we will have made this discovery discouraging: we are much more involved with what we believed in the lives and death of these brothers and sisters in faith, our contemporaries, so close to us with their lives every day, facing those same challenges - albeit in a different way - than this century will place on everyone who professes the Christian faith. A disturbing discovery, as it would be easier to believe that if vocation to martyrdom is a grace (and it is true) it would only concern those who are called, and that the evangelical radicalism that it implies is not required of the other Christians. No, there is only one Gospel, there is only one Christianity, everywhere demanding, everywhere under the horizon of the cross. But let's add to it now, everywhere, formidable to live. Because we find out even in these vines the action of Christ manifested in the weakness of the men. More than the models to imitate (the context of their lives is often - on concrete plan - different from ours) then they will become signs for us, of the almost sacramental presence of God's love stronger than all of them powers of evil and death. Today every Christian (but was it different?) he knows opposition, discrimination, and even forms a lot more often subtle but no less real than persecution, whenever he shows he wants to live his faith and to testify to the needs of the Gospel. The testimony of faithful fidelity in the trials of the martyrs and of those who professed openly their faith, and everything they owe to the role decisive of believers in the release of systems against God and against man which have oppressed entire populations, reminds us of this fundamental truth of Christianity that Mother Teresa has reminded us of his Church of Albania, the one who knew the most radical persecution in this century: "Our faith teaches us that Christ's life does not end there Holy Friday, but with the Resurrection.

But this paradox can lead us far beyond that moral support and spiritual that we can draw from the example of the martyrs of this century. must lead to the communion of saints where relations are no longer simply notional, image and inspirational, but personal and real. Without wanting apart from the judgment of the Church (but aware of the concern of John Paul II to actualize the martyrology of the Church and to bring it on altars numerous witnesses of our century), we can already invoke the intercession of these brothers and sisters in the faith they gave in this century their life for Christ. And let us do what St. Teresa of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, teaches us and whose last paradox on the martyrs of Our century shows us the importance: "I believe that the Blessed are in a great state compassion for our miseries, they remember that being like us fragile and deadly, made the same mistakes, sustained by them battles and their fraternal tenderness become even bigger than they are it was on earth.