



FIAT – Newsletter nr. 77 – May 2022

What is a Christian, inspired by the Holy Spirit?

After L.J. Cardinal Suenens



“Even today, Jesus is being born from Mary and the Holy Spirit.”

+ L.J. Cardinal Suenens

According to French Dominican Fr. Lacordaire, a Christian is a person to whom Jesus Christ has entrusted other people. Just like the apostles were entrusted with the responsibility of evangelisation and received help from the Holy Spirit, we as Christians also desire inspiration from the Holy Spirit from that same sense of responsibility. In particular around Pentecost, the feast of the commission of the Holy Spirit, we may wonder how we can prepare our inner temple for the coming of this exceptional guest. Or perhaps we are specifically looking for an answer to that fundamental question: “What is a Christian, inspired by the Holy Spirit?” As always, Cardinal Suenens’ answer is multi-layered.

Someone who has met Jesus Christ

In the Gospel we read how the apostles obey Christ’s command by waiting for Him on the mountain. According to Cardinal Suenens, this is how every mission begins: with an encounter with the Lord. This personal encounter is what makes a person a Christian. French author and poet Paul Claudel experienced such an encounter with the Lord at the age of 18 at the statue of the Virgin of Piller in the Notre Dame in Paris. He instantly converted and said “Now, Lord, at once Thou art Someone.” In the end, Christianity is not a theology, an ideology, a philosophy or a collection of wise sayings. Above all, Christianity is Someone. The message and the messenger are one.

Our encounter with Christ constitutes the core of our Christian lives. Along with other Christians, we share our faith in the incarnated Word of God, in our Lord Jesus Christ, only born Son of the Father and Brother to all mankind. Gathered together in a community, we offer our lives to Christ, even if we all do this in our own unique way. When the apostles met Jesus on the mountain, there were some who immediately threw themselves at his feet in adoration, others hesitated or doubted. It should not surprise us that the same division is still very much present in our current society, where our faith is tested every day. Still, in the midst of all this chaos, which seems so far removed from the message of the Lord, we can ground ourselves in Him by beginning to proclaim our faith once more.

“If I open up my soul to that encounter with the Lord,” Cardinal Suenens says, “I will go to Him, not with my own small, human faith, but with the faith of the entire Church: that is the power and beauty of our faith.”

Just as the priest utters during the Mass: “Lord, look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church”, we are not alone in our prayers. We throw ourselves before the Lord not only with our own faith but with that of all the Disciples, Mary and all the saints, martyrs, confessors, Church doctors and mystics.

Someone in whom others recognise the Lord

A Christian is not just someone who has encountered Christ as the deepest reality of his life, but also one who has received Him and given over his entire life to Him with all of his heart and mind.

Life presents us with the challenge of living from the Lord and allowing Him to live within us. As Christ Himself said: “My words are truth and life, my words are words of life.” Just like in the gospels, in every generation there are people who emerge from the crowd and say: “We want to see Jesus!” As Christians, we can allow the light of the Lord to shine through us. Our words and deeds should give expression to all of the gospel. Alas, we are often too opaque. We should receive the Eucharist every time from this realisation. Only then can we go to the world and respond to the Lord’s commission.

Someone who proclaims the Lord to others

A Christian is also someone who proclaims the Lord to people. In our current society, many Christians refrain from explicit statements of faith or direct evangelisation. By focusing on the fact that non-Christian religions also contains elements of truth, hidden like specks of gold, we often forget our responsibility to offer the Word of God to our contemporaries. After all, those specks don’t offer the deepest secret of our happiness as Christ does.

The joy of our faith is a treasure we must share with the world. Respecting the convictions of others too often turns into a flight into silence these days. We are invited to open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit and continue the mission He has entrusted to each of us. The Holy Spirit was not just for the Apostles in the past. He is here today and He will be here tomorrow.

A witness to Love

“Love finds its origin in God, who is defined as Love, according to the gospel of John,” Cardinal Suenens explains. “In the eyes of God, living and loving are the same.” The deepest meaning of human love must be discovered within Him. The quest for love takes up a primordial position within the life of every human being. All earthly desires, whether based in pleasure, politics, culture or career, all point to the same desire to love and be loved. Rich or poor, we all thirst for real, authentic love that will not wear out or diminish over time – a love that is not influenced by human weakness.

Many in this life suffer from a lack of (parental) love, warmth and consideration, which often leads to future failures and dramas. For this reason, people are always looking for an immortal and timeless love, which will never disappoint or abandon us, which brings life and strength to all it touches.

From the realisation that love in its deepest core points to God, we can also understand sin, which is primarily a ‘no’ to love. This connection between God and sin explains why people in a society that has turned its back to God, despite His unconditional love, no longer believe in sin either. After all, to whom would we be accountable for our shortcomings?

Recognition and humility

According to British author and philosopher G.K. Chesterton, a saint is someone who knows he’s a sinner. Besides this recognition, a measure of humility is required, a virtue offered by grace. Only this humility will lead us along this essential dimension of freedom to be accepted and forgiven in the full freedom of God’s love, which is one and triune.

It is in this certainty of faith that Christian morality must find its source of nourishment. From the Love of God we must love our neighbour, with the heart of God itself.

The FIAT Newsletter appears 3 times per year in French, Dutch, Spanish and English

Source: L.J. Cardinal Suenens,
The Christian at the Dawn of a New Era
pp. 101-113

Responsible editor: Roger Matthys,
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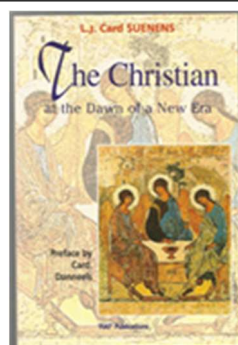
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because grace goes back to the donor through the same channel that brought it. "***

(St Bernard, 12th century)

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