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S U P P L E M E N T



“Here I am”

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FOR INTERNAL USE

Here I am

Joined to other verbs, this expression, “here I Am”, determinates the action in space (territory), in time, (period) or in a modality, (comprehension, adhesion, implication). By answering “here I am”, the person called upon wants to assure his interlocutor that he did hear his voice, and shows himself available to accept and accomplish a given mission, without delay, without hesitating, and without going back. On the contrary, the called person lets himself invested by this mission, committing himself completely, body and soul (understanding and loving), with his qualities and capacities (charism and creativity).

In the Bible, we meet situations where God calls a person whose answer is “here I am!”. Likewise, we find some “here I am” uttered either by God to man’s notice to confirm his active presence (Is 52,6 ; 58,9 ; Ez 13,8.20 ; 21,8 ; 25,7 ; 26,3 ; 28,22 ; 29,10 ; 30,22 ; 34,10 ; 35,3), or by a man to another man’s notice to tell him his proximity, support, or his implication in a question.

In order not to exceed the place devoted in this supplement, I shall only evoke the examples where we see God himself making the first “step”. He rejoins the man or woman in his personal and communautary history ; he proposes a concrete project and helps him understand its full significance. While respecting the freedom of the called person, God encourages him by assuring him of his proximity when the project is realized, and of his support when some difficulties are met. When the called person let himself be implied, he is ready to come back on God’s paths, whereas he would be tempted to deviate from right to left. It is not easy to walk on God’s paths, especially when our thoughts, our plans, don’t coincidate with his. Some choices are indispensable to make possible what seems impossible to human sight. The called person is conscious of being an instrument in God’s hands, always useful but never indispensable.

1) Abraham’s “Here I am”: always trust God.

Abraham chooses to obey the Lord always. It is why he abandons everything : land, house, family, and starts off towards a new land, hoping to become the chief of a multitude.

Though he is ninety nine years old, Abraham goes on trusting the Lord : “I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless. Between you and me I will establish my covenant, and I will multiply you exceedingly [...] you are to become the father of a host of nations” (Gen 17, 1-5) To have a son when you are a hundred years old ? (cf Gen 17,17) God helps him to go beyond human logic based on the laws of nature. Abraham and Sarah will give birth to a son.

Abraham’s faith is soon tested : to be the father of a multitude or to sacrifice his son Isaac ? To consider God’s faithfulness to his promises or to think he is the same as all the other gods ? Three times, Abraham shows his will to believe in spite of everything and in spite of his interior confusion. “*Abraham!*” He answered: “*here I am!*” [...] Then God said: “*Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you.*” (Gen 22, 1-2) “*Father!*” said Isaac to his Father [...] “*Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?*” (Gen 22,7). This is the most terrible moment for a father : to sacrifice his son. “*But the Lord’s messenger called to him from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. “Do not lay your hand on the boy,” [...] “Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God.*” (Gen 22, 11-12). Though it was early in the morning (cf Gen 22,3), Abraham saw the drama of the dark night. His trust seems to waver. God seems to him as a God who does not keep his promise, who does not take into account a father’s despair. The third “here I am” of Abraham is illuminated by the rising sun, but moreover rekindles Abraham’s hope, and his trust in God gets stronger.

2) Moses’ “Here I am”: the instrument of God’s compassion

Times were difficult for the descendants of Jacob’s sons, persecuted, enslaved, condemned to hard labour and deprived of a minimum of humanity (cf. Ex 1,12-14). In spite of his integration in the Egyptian world and the education received near the Pharaoh, Moses can’t remain calm in face of the humiliation and sufferings of his co-religionists : he kills an Egyptian and shelters in the desert (cf Ex 2,15). There, Yahveh catches him up again. Taking advantage of the runaway’s curiosity, Yahveh joins him

precisely in the desert : “Moses said, ‘I must go across and see this strange sight, and why the bush is not being burnt up.’ [...], God called to him from the middle of the bush. ‘Moses, Moses!’ he said. ‘Here I am,’ he answered. [...] I am the God of your ancestors [...]. At this Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (Ex 3, 3-6). Having observed the misery of Jacob’s son people, having heard their imploring cries, having seen their pains, God decides to free his people from the Egyptian yoke. God gives an order and commits a precise mission to Moses : “So now I am sending you to Pharaoh, for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” (Ex 3,10). Moses becomes the instrument of God’s mercy. His physical limits (stuttering), his fears, are not a problem, but offer an opportunity. The people can verify little by little that Moses’ mission, received from Yahveh, has authority and is true. Indeed, the mission is enormous and the difficulties won’t miss. The Pharaoh obstinately refuses. The people does not accept easily the difficulties inherent to any liberation. Moreover, once freed, it lets itself carried away by disputes, grumbling, laments and regrets (cf Ex 6, 9-12 ; 7, 1-13 ; Nb 11,1-3 , 12,1 et seq...). Moses is not downhearted : he goes on with his mission to lead the tribes of Israël towards an ever-surer freedom.

3) Samuel’s “Here I am”: letting oneself guided by listening to God.

Hannah is anguished because she is sterile. Yahweh hears the silent murmur of her prayer and promises the birth of a son ; Having had this son, Annah does not go back on her promise, she does not dodge, does not put back to better times the fulfilment of her vow to the lord : to offer the fruit of her womb. The mother makes her son enter God’s house to consecrate him to his service : her heart exults in the Lord. From that time, the spiritual birth of Samuel is starting under the direction of the priest Eli who takes care of him like a father and teaches him how to listen to God.

“Samuel, Samuel”. Someone calls him thrice in his sleep. Samuel mistakes God’s voice with that of Eli. In fact, the child goes to his spiritual director and tells him this : “Here I am, as you called me” (1 Sam 3,5-6-8). It is only when he is awakened for the third time that the priest understands that it is God who calls the boy. Eli teaches Samuel how to answer the Lord : “Speak, Yahweh; for your servant is listening” (3,9).

Both overcome the misunderstanding : the difference between the paternal voice and God's voice is established. At the same time, the boy does not renounce to listen also to his "father's" voice. He still needs his director. In fact, the next day, when Eli calls him again, Samuel hurries to answer : "Here I am" (3,16). The boy goes in front of Eli truly, without hiding anything of what he has seen and heard (cf.3,18). Actually, it is still Eli and his way of calling Samuel which allow the latter to live the ultimate passage from fear to freedom. From then on, "*Samuel grew up. Yahweh was with him and did not let a single word fall to the ground of all that he had told him.*" (3,19). From the boy who was listening, Samuel became a man who is speaking. This is why "*all Israel knew, from Dan to Beersheba, that Samuel was attested as a prophet of Yahweh*". (3,20). Eli plays a decisive rôle in this initiation to the experience of listening to God. Samuel is not formally sent by God, but it is enough for him to listen to God's word to understand what his mission will be.

4) The "Here I am" of Isaiah: to welcome generously God's proposal.

Like Samuel, Isaiah's call also happens in the Temple. The prophet is implied in an experience of vocation at the time of offering incense. There, in the sanctuary, God's manifestation is fascinating and terrifying at the same time. The vision stages an unbearable contrast between God's sanctity and Isaiah's experience as his limits as a creature: "*Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth*" (Is 6,5). Then happens a purification of his mouth and ears, a sign that he is able to speak truly and listen correctly. Both "openings" always keep abreast ; "*I then heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me.'*" (Is 6, 6-8). While respecting God's freedom on God's side, Isaiah accepts freely to be sent towards those with whom he is solidary, there is no space anymore for hesitating. No illusion is allowed. In fact, the prophet's voice shall clash with Israël's refusal; it shall become an unrelenting judgment striking the closed, callous hearts, and the hard, deaf ears. The prophet's voice shall have no result. It shall be like a seed sown on a stony ground, covered with brambles. This "here I am, send me", Isaiah had to remember it constantly and bravely reiterate his candidature to be able to accomplish his mission, being freed from any human, political

or social link. The more arduous and difficult the work became, the more Isaiah believed in God's faithfulness, able to rejoin man in his misery. The men of his time needed to convince themselves that faith and life, cult and justice, kept pace with each other. Isaiah, for his beloved town, Jerusalem, was dreaming of a mission demanding but not impossible to realize: to shout to the world that peace between the peoples is possible, that disarming is not an economical loss, that justice is always a wealth.

5) Mary's "Here I am".

The passage of the Gospel according to Luke (1,26-38) has been read, commented and meditated numerous times: it has supported the spirituality of many Christians, consecrated and lay people. Mary's "Here I am" is a total, fearless answer to God's proposal. Mary also, like any pious Israelite, was waiting for the promised Saviour. In harmony with her people, Mary is sure that the day will come when the people will rejoice, shout with joy, exult and cheer with all its heart for "Yahweh is king among you" (Zeph 3,14-15).

Let us insist on the conclusion of the passage of the Annunciation : "*And the angel left her*" (Lk 1,38). The angel Gabriel leaves Mary, perhaps a little frightened. He did not expect Mary to utter such a total YES : "*You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.*". I like to think that deep inside him, he hesitated a little: what shall this young girl say ? What absurd proposal must I bring her ? Instead of this, Mary is available to what God and life call her. She faces the challenge, she questions herself, she is concerned... But finally she says "Here I am": I am here, disposable. It is perhaps the way of taking every event in life. Not by resignating, but by starting from the present moment which, more or less, always offer the opportunity of growing up as men. In front of the expression of such freedom, even the angels are amazed and impressed.

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For personal and communautary reflection.

1) Michael Garicoïts leaves Cambo for Betharram. Later, during the ordeal, he finds himself as a priest without charge, except being the keeper of an empty monastery. What would I have done in his place? Today, how do I react when the Superiors propose to

me to change for a mission not as visible, or for a retirement home because of old age? Shall I know how to rebound ?

2) Michael Garicoïts did not find a smooth road to start the religious experience where God was calling him. For me too, starting a new mission was not always easy. Following the Founder's experiences, I have thought: to present objections to God's project, doesn't it amount to not-recognizing -God ? Let God be served first.

3) How many times Michael Garicoïts, during his ministry in Cambo and Betharram, answered "Here I am", when his old vicar called him for a humble service, or invited by nuns for a ministry, without caring about weariness, bad weather or various obstacles. For him, the question was to live daily the answer given to God: "Here I am, to do your will". For me today, the "here I am", do they reflect daily the enthusiasm of yesterday's "Here I am"?

4) Michael was asking himself: what must I do against the temptation of what is immediate and successful ? We only have to follow God's will in everything, everywhere, always, quickly, with joy. It is the only source of peace and good. Is it my interior frame of mind to overcome the temptation of showing off ?

5) Michaël Garicoïts , when contemplating the " white Madona ", understood the importance of the " I am the servant of the Lord ", here I am to do your will. When contemplating the mystery of Incarnation, do I manage to live concretely God's will, without negotiating a discount, without indulging in a comfortable interpretation ?



Societas Sacratissimi
C o r d i s J e s u

Betharram