

# Hagase mi Voluntad (According to my Will)

by

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## Hagase mi Voluntad

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Pedro Pablo Pérez Santiesteban

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## **Dedication**

Hector Melendez, Juan de Dios Hernández Arellano and Concepción,  
for helping me see God.

Whether it is called or not,  
God is present.  
CARL G. JUNG

## **Thanks**

Many people have been encouraging me during the time I've been writing these memoirs, but there are two people whom I owe a special thanks.

The first, Carlos Alaez, the most faithful to the friendship I have known person. With Carlos I shared those long and only conversations that precede the actual birth of what has so far been no more than a project. A Carlos I to have been devel-tascarme when in the early ideas were clear but not how to capture them. And I have to thank him Awareness-zuda and repeated revision of this writing, your patience with me and, above all, its unconditional support at all times.

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## **The Trigger**

For a long time this was simply "my story" or, more precisely, the story of why I'm a priest, told, more or less, when someone asked. At that time, there were two reactions in the auditorium that used repeated: "What you had given me answers" or "why do not you write this?" For years the idea of putting it in writing was reelin, but never tried.

In the summer of 2006 I was in Germany with the group of Cubans who went to the World Youth Meeting with Benedict XVI. Walking through the streets of Siegburg, where we stayed, we met a group of young Avelino, a city in southern Italy. Despite the human tide that attended the meeting, the two groups met again at the opening Mass of the day in Bonn, and one day agree on a train returning from Cologne.

In the third game I was asked to tell them the story of my vocation, all sitting on a sidewalk outside a McDonald's. After I accompanied them to the bus station because they had to go to another village. On the way, one of those young group separated me and told me that long ago that he came asking whether God was calling him to the priesthood, I spoke of his inner conflicts and asked me to pray for him. I think it was Enton-ces when I thought I had time to write.

He and those young people I address these pages, but also to everyone who sits on search. God makes them unique with each ways, but human experiences touch. My desire is to share the answers and the lights that helped me understand a project, acep-I tarlo and to stay in it.

## A few Words for this book

Since this book came to my hands, the feeling of learning was placed strongly in my instincts, and these-the-tintos- ins, I did not betray; On the contrary, they asserted more than that I was right, because reading "Let my will," goes far beyond. It leads us to explore the life of a young man who like so many, is marked by passion, and therefore by insecurities.

Father Alberto Reyes Pious, takes off his cassock, to show the real life of the man who was not in their plans the priesthood: he would be a doctor, was going to get married and have many children ... but the Lord, on those roads unexplained he draws from his wisdom, he had other plans for this camagüeyano, born in the east of the Caribbean island of Cuba.

To the question: Why ... ?, Father Alberto decided to tell his story of why healing was done. A story full of anecdotes, told with the simplest language we can ima-giñar, touching our human sensibility fibers, but deco-rando this story with touches of mood very well laid out, at appropriate times.

Alberto helps us unwittingly to meet at noso-centers themselves, then leave the way open for those who still have not managed, they can get to meet God, but a different God, different humanized to call it way as those images that the author tells us already on the last page of his book:

"God has not left me alone. Sometimes I wake up and I find in my room, with their hiking boots and backpack on his back, bent over my desk studying the map of the next route and commenting: "I like, I like" while I try to bury head under the pillow. "

"Let my will" is undoubtedly a literary jewel of its kind in real life. It is a book that gives answers to questions, casts no shadows, only a bright and strong light, ranging from the top of the altar, to the human heart that needs faith. Following the imprint left in this book the path taken by Alberto, each of its readers we will also find our own way, but in a more open, uncensored, space as does the author in his narrative, even when the miseries Church is concerned, and for that, I quote the following excerpt below that before the complaint does teach us what the right path:

"In the Church 'I would say John of God are getting very bright and dusty, and you have to fight not only because dust can not hit you, but remove it when you find it."

I thank Father Alberto, allowing me to enter their world and with it illustrate mine, from my humble thirst for learning, but especially the fact that strengthened my faith, when perhaps a gust of insoslayable wind, breaking hard fragile crystals my window.

Pedro Pablo Pérez Santiesteban  
Publications Between the lines  
EDITORIAL TODAY'S VOICES

## By way of Introduction

### YOUNG BOYS:

:

I was not surprised your question. And because...? It is the most common question when someone finds a cure, especially if it is not yet old, bald and paunchy.

Many people do not understand and may never not understand. But still they ask, and one would touch repeat the story of how one day something began to be different and life is turned upside down with what we call the "will of God". That will so often is incomprehensible, unbearable or heavy but no one knows how, becomes irresistible. It is a process in which you fall although not always mind and heart go hand in hand. What you want and what you reject, you crave and hate at the same time.

Yes, I want to thank you to be here turning my memories. After having known I returned home and I started writing, knowing that I can afford to include all the details that, for obvious reasons, have to be removed when counting oral-mind a story of years. No matter how nice they are the nights in summer, mind, heart and fondillo have their limits. ('fondillo' is a cubanismo trying to be polite. In Cuba 'ass' it does not sound good.)

I will tell them the whole story, as far as I can be faithful to the memories, but first I want to tell you some things that are me as foundations.

It was not easy to realize that God is like life, to understand, in addition to reason it out, you have to feel, intuit and pal-parla beyond its materiality, as we are about people we want, whether family, friends or anyone with access code to the heart. Only when you learn to look with the soul and thinking from the spirit you can understand life. Otherwise, I assure you, it is technical.

Approaching God demands the same mechanism. God overflows our reason much we weigh. When we enter this empathy and God begins to be more than what the mind says he knows, and we realize that he really is, close and intimate, Enton-ces ... then the problems begin and life is entangled, because what makes us love but entangle life?

Love clears the senses. When we love we learn to look, to listen, to understand. The hidden emotions intelligence espabila and begin to realize that it is easy to see the other, know what you think, "feel what you feel" when well, when something happens, when something makes you happy or unhappy.

Love only you need only look to understand, and love will always have the strength to act; therefore, opt for love is complicated life. When you start looking from the heart, you can no longer get-you indifferent, you can not keep locked in your immovable and perfect world, nor be fine if the other person is not. You can not sleep in peace if the other suffers, digestion not do well if the person you love hungry. When you decide to love, your happiness

is dependent on the happiness of others does. And the worst part is that when it comes to your life can no longer drive you back, much as you atiborres mind to deny the light and justify selfishness. When light has been and remains in the soul, or hugs or decided keep her at bay, but since the nostal-gia as possible and boredom of what fills but does not feed.

So it is with God. It is common experience that life changes when someone becomes "more": more than a friend, compa-ñero or known, more than a sympathetic or nice person. When God becomes "something more" than they have taught you, then your things start to get your things, your own interests and your proj-to the ideal of your existence. And here comes the question of when the entanglements, the terrible, the problem: What do you want me to do?

When one normal and falls common question is "what do you want?", Which is nothing but a way to ask "what makes you happy?". God is exactly the same, with the detail that what God makes him happy is that we are. Being cure is to accept a proposal and take a project that gives you that made you and knows you, with the promise that there is, to.

Despite the unavoidable prices, your way of complete happiness, your auth-tica personal fulfillment. But that does not mean that what God wants of each is very evident at the beginning, not to say almost never.

I will share with you my way, made search, struggles, insecurities and fears. If you synthesize, I would say that I am a priest because God one day got into my life and I was understanding, with the passage of time and from a brutal resistance, he knew what he was doing. I began to understand, painfully, the sense of a project.

However, what I have would be meaningless if it were simply "my story". It's his way in me, in my time passing. I am what I am because of what He has been doing. I may have single-mind merit, the walk despite my fears.

# Between Faith and Marxist Socialism

## Happy Times

I was born in May 1967, in that ambiguous mixture of sun-fering hope and that is Cuba. Were euphoric times for revolu-tionary process initiated by Fidel Castro in 1959. I grew up in Florida, an extremely bustling town about forty kilometers from Camagüey, the capital of the province.

Really I do not know my name. My parents decided po-nerme Alberto and so I told the priest of my people, "Uncle Guz-man." He was a priest passionate about Scripture and had within its fixed tips suggest families to put Bíbli-cos names to their children, perhaps to follow the Hebrew tradition of the name indicates the identity you want for the child. Alberto is unbiblical, and the priest suggested that my parents put me Alberto David, which my mother, tired of the problems in his official papers as name-do, he would not do.

I could never understand why this led to a battle between the priest and my mother. What always told me was that, at the time of baptism, "Uncle Guzman" grabbed the jar, looked at my mother in the eye and said, "Alberto DAVID !, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. " In the end, as my mother was carrying the parish archives, I was enrolled only as "Albert", but David survived.

Every child with two names knows that the only function of the second is to tell a verbal and obvious way is doing something wrong and that, or fix, or there will be problems. When I was going to play, they could and grandmother or my parents call me interminably to do all what a child is forced to do, like eating or ducharse<sup>2</sup>, for example, but the tone of the voices know if I ought to do case immediately or if he could follow in my wanderings. If the sound was "Alberto" or "Albertico" everything was in order, but when the tone hardened in a 'Alberto David !!!, I knew I had to hurry if you do not want to "sleep hot". In Cuba it is not much believe in that they give a good spanking a child so traumatized. There have always been more biblical and prefer the passage: "Do not save the child correction, which is not going to die because casti-gues with vara<sup>3</sup>" and sometimes literal interpretation was frankly.

My earliest memories are impregnated with a large, fresh, wooden house, with patio to run and huge trees in front just before the central railway line. I was the second son, halfway between two sisters. Then the equi-po join two cousins and a cousin, an experience that has given me a chronic com-passion only children.

We were moving in space play any normal childhood. Trees opposite were the ideal site in the neighborhood, and our only problem was the arrival of responsible adults pathologically incapable of understanding that if Tarzan could do certain things, we. Running, up, down, hide, hunt cats, bees put in a boat ... That was life!

They were difficult times for the faith, but my sisters and I lived outside-mos storms. My house was a home of faith, and as our world passed between the house, the church and related family, not the battering they felt.

At nightfall, before bed, we got into bed with my mother, to play or to tell stories, until she began to make silly and heavy questions: "Let's see, who's dad God ?, why we the church ?, why should I pray ?, why, why, why ...?" for us it was a game, for it was a workout, slow work by placing responses. (In Cuba the heat is usual, and it is essential to take a shower in the afternoon. Moreover, the afternoon shower indicates that the games are over, the final meal of the day is almost ready and that the time to go to bed about.)

After the whys, we put them to pray. When you start playing you used to start with an Our Father or a Hail Mary, how easy. She never interrupted us, but always insisted: "Well, but let's make spontaneous prayers." And you had to invent, but always kept three constant requests: "For grandmother, because it is very good; by toys, lest we lack; and the cat, so that we do not die "(which eventually died).

With my father, the system was different, he took advantage of the moments when we went out together in their old Zephir 60, and themes always revolved around attitudes to life. I believe I never said that I was bored. I only remember that when we went out and after a while he began to talk trying to interest me in his songs, I thought, 'You started it! ". However, I was good and did as he listened. In all honesty I have to admit that those so serious speeches, somehow managed to stay and were becoming necessary responses to very specific situations that would arrive with time. I also recognize that, after so many years, I have never sat with my father to agradecerse. Are those things that you always want to say but never he says and risks finished speaking them to a tombstone.

Economically, the country lived their best times, but there was stability. I never knew what they earned my parents, I do not think it much, but they both knew how to handle the domestic economy. Perhaps we never know deprivations prices nues-ters parents had to pay, but when the food always was a dish when dressing up clothes and when summer came a place to vacation. It was also true that sometimes we asked for something and the answer was; with absolute calm: "No money." Then we gave turned and we were going to play out there. Not having money or not to buy anything we wanted was never a problem. There were limits, period.

### Grown ups

When I check my childhood, one of the things I appreciate most about my parents is harmony in living, although they were very different. My mother was the river, sparkling, melodious, by churning moments, sometimes dangerously. My father was the sea, serene, deep, stable. I never saw them arguing, remember, upset with each other. Sometimes he came and pinched one cheek before us, and she called him to order, but it was obvious that he loved. My grandmother was in charge of malcriarnos. My father says that grandparents should not raise the grandchildren because being a grandparent is "enjoy the children without the responsibility of being a father" and also because "the grandfather is the grandson ally against the father." My grandmother did his role beautifully, especially when meals. Sufficed a "do not



like" for otherwise she invented. However, this earthly paradise lasted until my grandmother died and my mother took command, whose philosophy of parenting was a little different:

- I do not like this.
- It's what there is.
- But I do not like.
- But that's what there is.
- Well not like.
- Well do not eat.

Unfortunately, we never had a mother venal and end-mos accepting the stark reality that was not sensitive to hunger strikes.

My father was the head of the family, but that never prevented my mother existed. When they are talking not always coincide nor had the same view on things, but they knew reach consensus and respect in the midst of diversity. My mother was a woman who knew expressed freely and make important decisions alone when my father was not to share. I can not stand women tax, but I always knew

I could not live with a "woman-shadow" that kind of woman without opinion or judgment, which does not develop their decision-making, for which absolutely everything depends on the desire of her husband and renounces his natural space of independence.

My parents were one, and faith was among its strongest links. In fact, years later, when my sisters and I were young, we knew we had made the choice not to emigrate from Cuba to stay to defend the faith within a ten-mada persecuted Church. Without ceasing to be responsible in their work, they had no limits to the Church, in time and what was needed.

The link with the Church and the practice of the faith were the norm at home. When preparing a community event in the parish, my parents were always in the organizing team and the tasks were distributed, but rarely saw them work together. My mother was very good at coordinating people; my father was strong in logistics. They were good in different fields and dealing with different fronts, but it was a way to stay together, to bond. This was our daily bread at home, there was always something that had to do with the Church, and in those "somethings" also learned us to integrate slowly.

During my childhood, my Christian community of origin would not exceed one hundred and fifty people in a city of more than seventy thousand inhabitants, but it was a vital protective and warm world. We all knew, not only because we were few, but because there was one temple in the village, one community, one priest, one Mass on Sundays. "Uncle Guzman" was close, with its pluses and minuses, as with anyone, but busy and worried about his parish. There was a little of everything: Bible courses, excursions marriages, celebrations of catechesis. From there, getting into everything, sometimes where we were and where we should not, my sisters and I were opening us to this immense and globalizing world that is faith. There we learned to hear about God, to behave well at Mass, to discern when we could run through the halls and when not. And there existed by name.

Without us even we are noticing, that comfortable world was giving us an irreplaceable when we started to cho-car with what was already and could not help security.

Julia did not think to mention, because I felt that out of the thread of this story. However, there is something I call the "theological outlook" on life itself: take a break in our present and re-run what has been lived, looking at the past people, events or 'accidents' now we are able to identify as the time when God was touching our lives, making history with us, without us even noticing. Julia is part of the traces of God in my life. It was my godmother and emotional level, a family.

Julia was the eldest of many brothers and began working as a child in a home, as an assistant service. I had to scrub the dishes had to put a bench that did not reach the sink. He was there for years and grew up with the daughter of the owners. Eventually, he helped raise the children were arriving when the owners daughter married. She always remained unmarried.

When the Revolution triumphed in 1959, the family emigrated to the United States and Julia left the house. It was a large and wide, wooden house, with a large terrace and a huge patio. Julia always lived there alone, but knew avoid passing a single spinster. Had very good sense of humor, never saw her sad, sorry or upset. He worked at the time as an auxiliary cleaning a clinic near his home, where he also exercised greater doc-tora, classic spinster, as competent as cantankerous and one day he said, "You know what? I think that when God made the world cut in half many oranges and threw them to the ground, and one is rolling, and when you find the person with whom he is well, he has found his soulmate "; what Julia said, "For mine, in the tumult, the crushed."

He lived without anguish, in the solitude of his big house, where I often slept over. Julia loved me and trusted me. He never let me malcriadeces, but I knew that she was untouchable. I had a big picture of me at the entrance of his house and the priest, who already at that time was not the 'Uncle Guzman' when visited, made a genuflection before my photo to spite her. She followed him play on the joke, but everyone knew that his love for me was unconditional.

At night we would sit to watch TV, and sometimes went for a black hairy spider hole, I imagine it would not be the only one in the house. The first time I saw my intention was to kill her but she stopped me: 'You eat cockroaches' he said, without a trace of fear and without deviating much television. That was, serene, and had learned to live with spiders and a huge toad who lived near the bathroom and she retained because 'the bugs it also eats'.

It was in the yard a huge tree of custard apples, which in the lambing season was loaded with fruit. Cherimoya can not be started if not done enough, and when ripe is very fragile, so it is best to catch them climb the tree. Without her ever asked me, I knew that was my job. His only comment was a faint, 'Be you care', but never kept me up, never showed insecurity, although I crawled to the finest slices trying to reach the fruits of tips, many meters above the ground. He remained silent, grabbing chirimoyas I was pulling him from above.

In some intangible way he conveyed me immense confidence. When he finally smiled and told me 'you have done well' I played the glory. Many years later he dies of colon cancer after two years of admirable and patient suffering. It was at that time when I had decided to start the path of the priesthood. No one knew more than my parents and the priest who had accompanied me in the process. I went to see her a lot before going public and said: 'Tata, I go to seminary, I will be cured'. He smiled from an unconcealed pain, I ran her hand over her head and said, 'I knew it'.

Julia died and I never went back to what had been his home, but he used to pass by the yard and tree chimimoyas was visible from the street, until one day I went and saw that it had been cut to build a room. It was as if I had cut part of childhood.

### A secularist country

My sisters and I soon began to realize that the world was more than the house, the church and the trees in front, and was a threatening world. Since we started going to school, we begin to be labeled religious. We never called Christians, this was a title too honorable. Religious, he had the connotation of superstitious people and tontita lower than in the twentieth century still believed in "these things".

The Catholic Church never forbidden to wear the school uniform, or wear the scarf pioneer, a dilute and crude imitation of the Boy Scouts. We dressed like everyone else and we participated in all school events, but we realized that there was a "something" uncomfortable in us, but that much depended teacher we had before. Moreover, we saw the obvious marginalization of Jehovah's Witnesses, who admit not be pioneers, or salute the flag or sing the national anthem, they were really looked bad. With Catholics rejection it was perhaps not so obvious, but we were on the list.

In fact, the "persecution", to call in some way, was very subtle. For example, a teacher came into the classroom and said, "Stand up religious." One stood up and nothing happened except the uncomfortable feeling many eyes that you dug in absolute silence. After you sent them to sit and point, but one felt a weirdo. Fortunately, when my sisters and I started school, things had softened a bit in this regard. I remember a girl from Havana, which, when I was about nine years sent her standing in her classroom and the teacher told the other: "Now everyone laugh at this, which is religious."

Other times were phrases in the air: that if we were going to church is not going to be able to access higher education, that they saw entering school uniform in a church he retired kerchief (and stopped being a pioneer, which sounded a dreadful shame), etc., etc.

Time has taught me that in all societies where there is a secularist spirit or where the Church is seen as an entity INCO-way or obsolete, attacking the Church "saw". Go against the Church is something that in certain environments gives a kind of prestige: the person

liberated, independent, unprejudiced, modern, which is above the Church necessarily archaic and backward. Pricked buffet style delicatessen religious only those that are acceptable because they are "universal values", "heritage of humanity" and other cali-nificant elegant long as fads. And sooner or later any occasion takes advantage to make it clear that these values are accepted not by an absurd and outdated religious motivation, but because they belong to level humanly evolved.

This attitude, in a cruder style, was one of the usual ways of government to attack the Church and to "igno-rants poor" that we persisted stubbornly in not giving the quality leap that supposed Marxist liberation. A teacher could, for example, offend or threaten a Christian student, and if later the parents or the local priest appeared by the school management to complain, called the teacher and all, with respect and compunction, they apologized, ensuring that the fact would never occur. "Vaseline and mattress" as someone defined the method of making it all slip and bounce with relieved "never again."

What never did, at least I knew, was a public devel-Gravio to a Christian student, nor heard sanctions apply to teachers for that reason. The waters returned to their level, tempers calmed down, but the damage was done, and then a little later, again emerged threats, the phrases "heard John tell Peter" 4, the same dog different collar: Vaseline and mattress.

As will be understood, any child behind did not have a strong support in the key of faith, he had to be a hero to stay in the Church. Catechesis were meager and many people inside the nonexistent country. I myself, for example, when I was a teenager was the only one of my age in the Christian community of my people. With eleven years he was with the ten young people who had the parro-quia, all older than me.

4 is a term used in some regions of Cuba to indicate that the message is addressed to a third party intends to indirectly warn that it is present. It is a creole version of "when you see your neighbor's beard burn ..."

I never thank God enough the gift that meant at that time my family and my community. My family, on the one hand, it was very old in the village and had the prestige of the old clans, especially the mother's side. My community was a haven of cari-no, protection and security.

We had no choice but to learn to fight. The first was not to deny our faith in any circumstances, not hide to go to Mass, not hide our identity. Second, study how desco-authored, because, as was so decisive escalafón5, had to make quite clear the academic position so that when you move to higher levels, no one quedasen doubts about our right to choose a good ins-tute or a particular career.

### Learning to fight for faith

It was in this context that it happened what I call the beginning of my own religious faith, and that perhaps was the first important moment of my life of

faith. He had started third grade, was eight and maes-tra new. Neither I knew her, nor she to me. Some time after empe-I Zado the course can not remember what I said in the classroom the teacher looked at me and said, "Are you religious?" I gulped, I looked down and res-Pondi: "Yes, but not you tell anyone. "

I felt terrible. When I got home I called my mother and told. I remember his serious, but not hard face as he looked into my eyes and told me: "I'll tell you one thing, if you want to keep going to church, you have to be willing to kill you, otherwise you're not going more ". He turned and left me alone. Ten minutes later she was the same as ever. But I was never the same. A distress followed rabies and rabies, gradually, the decision that no one ever would disown me

For each step of a list of academic level students made according to the overall average score on tests. The place obtained in that list or 'ladder' depended on the type of school choice and access to university courses. my faith, and that will never depend on anyone to go to church. A par-tir that day I started going to church for personal choice.

I never knew if it was random or premeditated to finish the lesson, but later my mother asked me to go shopping with her, which he never did. At the end I said, "Come, we have to go through the school of your sister '(as)'. He looked for a teacher without much preamble he said, "Look, I am the mother of Martha Reyes. You've told my daughter more than once that if you keep going to church will not be able to get to college -reforzó voice, he pointed his finger and said, if you do again what I take the courts, because it goes against the Constitution, and you know it. " The teacher did not reply. I was stone. She grabbed my hand and walked out.

Years later experience teach me that in Cuba there is what is called "rule of law" that laws are manipulated convenience and a Cuban has everything to lose when in a legal process is "touches" in some way to system. Over time com-lit, in fact, my mother did not have the power that seemed to have, but at the time to have a mother like that made me feel like an invincible being. The poor teacher did not return to bother my sister. Most likely he had not clear how far he could lle-gar, and to make those comments by the environment in which the entire education system moved. They were used to present no practical-minded battle and ignored what might happen if someone aerating big things. Yes because something was important to learn from the beginning: the terror of communism bad image. In fact, in cases of obvious injustice and coercion that were made public, it was given the right to hit and threw back the decisions taken but later, through the storm, all follow more or less equal and punishment part ofensora was rather symbolic.

I remember the times when we got home telling that the school had been told (and, in general, like words in the wind) than those who went to church could not study in college, and I remember the face tranquility of my mother , while what he was doing, he said: "you study, that if they have good grades I'm going to see Fidel Castro. " And something told us he was serious. My father, before these things, he smiled, did not need to say anything.

Still, the threat of the teachers was not entirely INFUN-given. At the beginning of the Revolution it became very difficult for Christians university stay in their careers. You never expelled anyone from a university or a workplace for being religious. He was expelled for "proselytizing" -for which was enough to answer a simple question from someone about religion, for lack of suitability or for any reason that would remove from among the "influence bad Christian," but always so there could be no possible brandishing claim the right to exercise the defendido religion by the Constitution.

With some university courses were more things Dras-tices. A practicing Christian could not access Magisterium, Psychology, sociology, philosophy and, of course, military careers, including those associated with the military profession, such as aviation and marine. Over the years, this block began to break apart and permit Christians access to these disciplines, except those related to the army, prohibition remains today.

We were too young to be aware of this, and between ignorance and shield which involved our parents, we felt safe. But protected against the grain grew, feeling that we were not destitute, they could not abuse us. We who defend us. All this was essential to my faith because I was creating a very strong sense of identity and belonging, but above all, because it taught me to grow up and fight.

### Tactical games

There are events of history itself whose sense one gets to know over the years. I remember that some day we started going every Sunday to the house of the brother of my grandmother in Vertientes, A people-quote the interior, about twenty kilometers from Florida. My sisters and myself we really liked this house and also the people had a park with the highest canal6 all we knew. For many Sundays after church and added like a ritual, we were leaving the village uncle.

Many years later, talking with "Uncle Guzman" and recalling stories, he told me that this was not accidental. He had created in my school a group of Pioneers Explorers, and I had been invited to participate. Go to the field not only hike but "exploring" it was as if the doors of my childhood paradise opened. Anyone who knows me says I must have genes ibex. As a kid I was always on a tree, stuck in a river, climbing hills or looking for wild critters. In my wanderings I started by fractu-rarme one arm, then the other, later a leg and the best head or speak. Over time, they have remained the same passions but I've learned to be a little more calculation.

Apparently, I came home happy for the invitation to promising exploratory missions, "coincidentally" they were on Sunday morning when Mass. "Uncle Guzman" told me that my mother immediately said: "For me there is no problem, all that from next Sunday we will go after Mass Vertientes, but you can be you." My mother knew me, and looks that did not need anything else to make me change my interest.

However, outside of these "emergency strategies," my parents always tried to learn to make their own decisions, especially as it related to faith. The fact

that I remember more clearly it was when my older sister came home saying she had been proposed to be a member of the Communist Youth. The entrance to the Communist Youth was done in the early years of adolescence, about twelve years. It depended upon the selection of teachers, who chose students they considered fittest, the "best students". It was not a personal initiative but a direct proposal, which one had to give an answer and justify it if it was negative.

One day my sister came home nervous, not knowing what to do. My parents, with total calm, explained to her that the Church did not care whether or not she entered the Young Communist League, but they did not know whether to be Communist Youth will prohibit their religious practice. My sister was tense and the situation boiled over. He began to mourn and to repeat: 'But what I have to do?' My parents did not flinch, they simply say that the decision was his and that they could not choose for her. And there was no talk more about it. My other sister and I were silent sponges.

The next day my sister came home from school radiant. She went to the classroom asking publicly, as was the custom, the final decision of each student. Arriving at my sister she asked if a member of the Communist Youth could go to church. I said no, that could not, to what my sister said, "In-tonces not want." I remember my happy and proud self-my sister. I do not remember my parents say anything, listened and made no relevant comment. Life went on as normal.

When my time came, the process had changed and no longer were chosen to finger. all students were invited to apply for admission in the Communist Youth, and if one was not asked to explain why in front of all classmates. When he touched me, I remember that we were putting us up, one by one, to communicate our decision. I said no 'because I am Christian, "which was followed by an" ah! "By the teacher, who shrugged and continued with the rest. With my younger sister was never a problem, it was always the most independent of the three and could say yes or no, depending on what interested him with an enviable freedom.

Gradually things were taking another channel and decreased pressures. Years later, and partly by the growing weakness of the system, the Communist Party officially admitted the possibility that Christians were part of their ranks, even if it was something, as defined a philosophically schizophrenic Cuban priest. In fact, how it is conceived that a Christian, whose axes of life is supposed to be Christ and the Gospel, an active part of a system that by definition advocates a militant atheism?

One thing was beginning to be true: gradually, faith-do would occupy sites that had been expelled.

I never thought about being a priest

I shall digress before continuing with the story.

I am among those who believe there is a project that is not destiny in every person who comes into this world. The destination would be prede-completed and immovable that would be above personal freedom. It is the famous Greek fatum which you can not escape, and that idea is not Christian. Moreover,

Christianity rejects because it denies human freedom. "Project" is something else, because it is a proposal, and holding its-ness in the idea that God loves us and knows what he does.

Humans are most diverse. We can love and take the right decision, but also, sometimes, or do not love and do harm on purpose, or love but, without knowing it, we made the wrong decision thinking that we are doing the right thing. Desafortunadamente, love does not exclude human error.

God is different. God always, at all times, loves us and knows what he does. So one can trust Him and ask confidently: "What is my project, what you dreamed for me from all eternity and it is now time for" said Martin Descalzo that the great drama of many people is that you die without even *sos-pechar* that on them was a project. I agree with this perception.

Find that God's desire is not achieved at all costs so that-oars or what we would like, but what He proposes, for who better than the God who created us and called us to tell us where our greatest happiness? Sometimes we're like the girl who went to pray to the Virgin and said: "Tell me little mother, nun or *casadita*?" The child Jesus looks up and says, "Monjita" what the young, angry responds: "Shut up kid, I'm talking to your mother!".

True human autonomy is achieved when one has the courage to be obedient to God, overcoming two stereotypes: the God of enslaving and liberation understood as a break with God. Obviously, I presume that minimum-mind understood who he is and what the God of Jesus Christ, because unfortunately there are many personal histories marked by caricatures of God, rather than God.

I say this because on the path of vocational discernment is all. There are people who, from very small, are clear that God calls them a total surrender. It is not usual, but it is a rarity. Moreover, there are young people who want to be priests at all costs, but when you help clarify what they feel is obvious that their motivations are not valid and that the plan of God for them is not the priesthood. Others, like me, never thought to be priests and even wished, until the time when an outdoor-Brieron somehow their human fulfillment was right there. And then there is the case of very good people, very "of Igle-sia", who feel they betray God does not opt for *Consa-tier* life when, in fact, God has had with them an infinite generosity but not them calls for consecration as priests or nuns. The priesthood is a vocation, a call. It is not a ques-tion of taste, because it is a gift.

It is important that priests who accompany young know-we help them discern God's plan in them but, above all, to learn to respect their freedom, because while it is true that they really need people to surrender completely to God, the option for the consecrated life is a decision that does not touch him take one, and is serious manipulate a generous soul.

In my case, though as a child I was linked to the Church and involved in everything from she did, never entered my head to be a priest. Never, I remember, I played to be a priest, nor felt I wanted to be like this or that cure. Mine was climbing plants, fish *guajacones*<sup>7</sup> in rivers, rehearse surgeries with frogs and lizards, raise fish, pigeons or *jicoteas*<sup>8</sup>-not had a kangaroo or a camel-that in Cuba do not exist. And read, I loved to read.



Around my twelve years there was change of cure in the village. They moved to "Uncle Guzman," and got two new priests, Willy and Hector. Newcomers were like two sides of the coin that shaped my adolescence and unconsciously forged my priestly ideal. Even today, when I look at my priesthood, I feel my keys action born of what they printed in me, two styles that I tried to synthesize.

Both were great and with the bonus that comes from being young and living the illusion of the early years of priesthood. Hector was just orde-swim and Willy had a few years of cure. My relationship with each of them was, however, very different.

Willy was the active, practical, efficient man, that the same thing was touching the bottom of the soul with a spiritual retreat Discharging a cement truck, or getting government permission to rebuild a chapel. He knew to face the problems and, as they say in Cuba, threw foot on land for the community in whatever was needed.

The strength of Hector, meanwhile, was the world of spirituality. Less given to ecclesiastical masonry, it was instead the ideal to talk, to think aloud man. He was the man of the serene listening helping you build from within. Willy arrived as pastor of Florida. Hector, although it was team with him in Florida, attended Esmeralda, an area fifty kilometers to the northwest of the diocese, almost touching the coast, which would weekends. The bishop then, Adolfo Rodrí-guez, had established that his priests live together. According to him

himself said, had preferred to underserved areas but that the priests were not alone, and I think that system saved more than a vocation. They were times of great aridity, especially in small towns, where people were more extreme or more fearful and where sometimes seemed to be plowed into the sea. Staying team made everything better confront, despite the inevitable clashes of the whole community life.

So I found that I had everything I needed. Willy I worked side by side, in everything I could, and I learned mu-cho. Hector became my first spiritual director, the man long conversations, the mediator in my adolescent conflicts and the situation that allowed me to start making a deeper inner journey.

At that time, our integration into the life of the Church was very strong. The house, studies, friends, had their time, but were years that participation in the Church was almost frantic. Beyond the activities, say, normal, as the meetings of the youth group, pastoral commitments catechesis of children or sick visits, there was always something to do and the more diverse: an excursion, help paint, a retreat, lend a hand in the construction or reconstruction of a chapel, a pilgrimage, a zonal meeting of young ... more intense were even times Christmas, Lent and Easter, when the younger gave us a lot of work .

The church was a center of integration and, above all, was a space of freedom. There was careful not to speak, you were not Ciuda-dano second class, you were a stranger. It was a community with a very strong human cohesion and a place where one also felt useful.

I do not remember having so typical crisis of faith of adoles-cente, partly because in my relationship with God found answers to how to live and to live like this, and partly because I think I was paying off slow and subtle work of my parents. In that environment, and sixteen, I sought to take what Willy now and then repeated: "Every young Christian must-Tarse're wondering if God ever calls him to give his life completely."

Later I went to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, to ask "if God was calling me ... etc., etc.". I spent a long time waiting to see if he felt something special and looking at the clock every five minutes. Within half an hour, saw that he had done what he said the priest and had not felt anything particularly special nor or not, convinced that my way had nothing to do with the priesthood, I went to my house. And my life continued as it is, sure that one day I would marry and have a stream of children, four or five, at least.

An annoying God

I never finish to thank Hector gave me the opportunity to take out everything about what I felt the need to ha-blar, with full confidence and in an age in which one does not have many answers. When in full "aborrecencia" is good to have someone besides you loving valid criteria. For many things did my father, but everyone knows that there are things at certain ages, especially at the level of intimacy that one is embarrassed to talk to the family.

Hector was a great "all": friend, confessor, confidant, and was the person who taught me to look at me and a Deepest-do mode. The path for life gets out depends on the way one is able to make inward. Hector was for me the perfect listening and gradually taught me to question things that until then remained in the shade.

Once I went to him to tell him that when I started to pray, God was angry with me. I was worried because the medi-da that was growing and my relationship with God was transformed, regarding God had begun to appear a strange sense of distance I experienced as discomfort on your part, a God to dis-ease with me. Hector told me that "in principle" could not be, for-that God did not bother anyone, that there had to be something else going on and we had to find what it was that was giving me the idea.

I was far then understand that there are no discomfort or annoyance against anyone in God. He had not yet discovered that God understands everything and knows the deepest whys of our reactions, and that understanding is one of the foundations of mercy-.

How many times have we done something we know is wrong, and people have judged us for it, as we are the first to recognize that we are not, at bottom, we did not do well and we are much better than we have shown. And how many times has also happened to us that even having clear how we work and live, we do not, and we are bound by ties that we do not know how to break.

People are not always ready to believe us when we try to explain-our behavior. God knows us and seeks trans-mitirnos that, despite everything, loves and accepts, and is able to wait to go managing to be different, because God, despite what they say some bad schools is not driver nor accuser. God is not a cop.

I've learned that God, not to be picky, has much more patience and more sense of humor than a ve-ces we are willing to accept; but at the time of my juven-tude callow, understand all this was asking too much. I had just begun to feel a God who oversaw my life, now and then shaking his head in disapproval and sulked. Clarifying this feeling became a challenge, and Hector was helping me to find lights. I understood, as far as I was able to do at that time, that perhaps both fight for the cause of God had been removing the role God Himself. No, the problem was not pro-God was upset with me, the problem was that I had not yet realized that their love is free, and we want beyond our fidelity and infidelity.

God was not the center of my life. I was the center, I had to be perfect before God, I could not afford a mistake because, basically, had made up my mind that I had to deserve the love of God. If it was not perfect in the eyes of God could not be worthy his affection. On the contrary, if everything was in order, God could be pleased with me and be at peace.

It was the perfect way to religious unhappiness, because life is not that simple. In all there are lights and shadows, shoots and withered leaves. Life is not a straight shot into infinity. Life, but have to know God geared to infinity, up, down, speeds up, slows down, forward, backward, and thus makes its way. Not understand this was to open the doors to a neurotic Christianity and "neurotic" arrogant, self-righteous; but in no case at the tender and serene relationship with the God who loves you and asks you let him walk humbly with you. And the greatest danger was put on the armor guard your-blime of a God who needs witnesses of his love and no defenders warriors.

At bottom, he was suffering a hangover from the past, the hidden wounds of battle. From small we had to grow up and fight, without allowing weaknesses in our faith and much less moral weaknesses. Keep the faith was a matter of life and death and that conditioned all our lives. We learned to fight, to be strong, to defend our principles, to be autonomous when thinking, and could even be said that all this helped us have a more virtuous youth, but the war was long, and the long wars stiffen too.

Begin to understand all this was helpful but did not heal me. When at twenty I entered the seminary decided to become a priest, I was, almost, San Alberto: proud of my history, born warrior, tough soldier. In fact, beyond my slow walk toward a God with a human face, I was rigid, unforgiving, too radical to me and everyone. But God has patience, and smiles. His plans were ready with me without me suspicious

# His plans and mine

## Scholarship

At fifteen I began high school studies. Already at that time the only way to do that was living in what are called in Cuba 'scholarships' boarding schools in the countryside where he studied for part of the day and farm chores were done in the other. Conditions, physical and moral, relied heavily on the place. In my scholarship, IPUEC 26, slept in long barracks with bunk beds lined up. The bathrooms were divided into two ships, one of showers, which were tubes coming out of the wall, without divisions, and the other with health services, where you had to make the greatest needs uploaded into the cup and bent over, because sitting was the height of disgust. Food better not to talk.

It was a depressing atmosphere we experienced all students and teachers, although the latter had the compensation of the freedom to leave the center at will. The moral level was low. No wonder he had theft, abuse of power of the largest against the weakest, and a permissive sex life, according to the style of each center was to control more or less, but generally not worried-ba too. The grants were not profitable economically, but they were in the political arena. It was a way to get young people the family environment and in our case also the church, and keep them in an environment where it is trying to receive a proper "political training". At the beginning, we went home only on weekends, but after new rules established outlets in eleven days.

In general, the moral life of the inmates was not interested. Indeed, at times I thought-and it's not just mine- criterion, moral degradation that existed in scholarships was part of the "program", because in a morally broken person is harder to emerge tall and strong ideals. Without moral integrity, the best dreams off, it is much more difficult to have the strength to fight and much easier to be manipulated.

But he had to study, and that justified the risks. It was the mo-do more direct to get to college. In addition, not all was nega-tive: we learned to live with all kinds of people, to make lasting AMIS-doms, to eat everything and to face many new challenges. The start, however, was very hard.

When I entered the scholarship, in eleventh grade, was the only Christian in the whole school, there was no one else who was prac-ticante, neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor even a Jehovah's Witness. I felt the whitefly, and were frequent peer groups asking questions about religion.

I came home wanting to lock myself in my room and cry that did not return to the scholarship, but had no better option beyond that in my house there was always the unwritten law that stu-diaba or worked. Each homecoming was like my mother-tándome're wondering what was wrong and I using the standard old lie: "I'm tired."

## With the world at my feet

As usual, little by little I adapted, making friends. The following year there were more believers. Upon reaching third-mos we felt the kings of the institute. That year also had entered my bro-na child and her friends from church. It surpassed those distant times of the beginning, I felt good. Studies were great, had good friends, had defined my career, I'd just get the driving license, car and motorcycle, and Sara had appeared. I could not ask for more.

With regard to what I wanted to study history it is not simple. My first vocation was the sailor. Son of an island, after all, the sea is part of your life. I did not live near the beach, but every year we went on holiday to the sea.

The sea fascinated me since I introduced us, and my first one back in my five or six years, was to me sailor; but then, on the mainland camagüeyana, I started thinking that I should not be so interesting stay months and months just seeing water everywhere, much as I liked the sea.

In the midst of that terrible first vocation crisis and the circus it came to my people and I understood that my vocation was not the sea, but be ma-labarista or animal tamer. I think deep down I have stayed pretty true to the last two vocations, because cure does not say anything about juggling to do with people who sometimes do not understand the half of it, and the beasts with whom I I had to deal, that better not tell you.

A vocational intuition followed the trials. What he ended the balancing act more than once in the emergency room, and the poor beasts at his disposal can not say they were very impressive. That was when I thought I could maybe be a veterinarian, and began to fill the house as bug appeared.

Still he is dreaming of kangaroos, but no. Still I do not know if my desire to know Australia arose because a child my fantasy were kangaroos or teenager because my fantasy was Olivia Newton John.

I soon discovered that there were two types of animals, for breeding and those for experimentation. With the profes-nal help of my sisters I started to make inroads into the world of surgery, although I admit that I always suspected about bad recupe-ration of my patients.

I do not know if my surgical failures compensate me, finishing the pre-university had decided to be a doctor with horizons of surgery, including a small parenthesis that had led me to become a pilot of aviation.

I've always been attracted to risk, and when they reached my boarding a military looking for those interested in aviation, I was in the front row. While describing the various military options "aerial world," I saw piloting commercial aircraft or helicopters maneuvering. The more you explain, the more increased my desire to try the height.

He finished the presentation and before asking stakeholders to give their names we communicated the necessary conditions: height, weight, health status, etc., and other back in the fifth or sixth saying, "No profess, absolutely, no religious belief".

It was like waking up from a beautiful dream, but dream at last. With the same determination with which he had entered I got up and went, and the chapter was closed, no more. Only years later I would put me to think how different my life would have been if at that time had decided to change my faith by aviation.

Maybe today would be a prestigious pilot, perhaps, who knows ?, a war hero, but I wonder if, deep down, I would have been done keeping, perforce, a clandestine relationship with my God and Father.

In Cuba, to study in college, not enough to ask the career you want. Depending on the location in the hierarchy, determined by the ratings, and assigned the number of races that year, you grant or not the square you asked. In the case of Medicine, who had reoccupied my preferences after my aerial illusions crashed, there was also going through an interview where they asked from religious beliefs to political ideas. I had no problems with the qualifications and interview all went very well. So after a journey of so extensive, was determined vocational interests, it would be a doctor.

Sara lived in Camagüey, but we are for the first time in Florida. She had gone with her aunt Ana Maria, a play in the church. It was a first meeting inconsequential, not when later we met again in Camagüey. Ana Maria was a doctor and was working temporarily in my village. It was a very committed Christian with his faith and had also grown in the "style of resistance." As to me the issue of medicine longer interested me and niece had begun to interest me even more, he was to see the hospital whenever he could. Somehow you have to get one invite him to the house that interests you.

Sara was two years younger than me and a little lower in stature, with a rich black hair almost to her waist and dark eyes with a look that made me fool me. She was intelligent, applied, practice and, especially, was sure people know take the necessary decisions at all times. I loved it.

The relationship with Sara was in its infancy, and what would come next, never became the classic love mature adult, there was not even time to have discussions. It was a love that arose between two who had not yet taken a back adolescence, but lasted long enough to know that indescribable and beautiful experience, to feel energized and alive by the presence of someone who lets you share the most intimate.

### And suddenly, the wind changed

With the passing of the revolutionary process in Cuba, they faded from theaters movies with religious themes, a standard that continues today. Jesus of Nazareth Franco Zeffirelli, or Jesus Christ Superstar or The Passion, Mel Gibson had to be projected inside the temples.

Near the end of my senior year of high school, came to Florida two young Franciscans who were touring the island community projecting each Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Zeffirelli film on San Francisco. The projection, which would be unique, it was announced on Sunday night. I had to go to boarding school in the afternoon, but as it was relatively close to the village, my father told me to stay and that the end would take me away.

The movie fascinated me from the beginning, possessing the unique magic of Zeffirelli productions. Maybe today you can reach even pa-recerme too sweet, knowing better the life of San Francisco; but tonight was a time it crossed my mind a "I want to be like that," although it was only a fleeting thought in the middle of the projection.

The function ended, the lights came on and I stood for a moment anchored to my seat. Without knowing why, I felt uncomfortable tremen-mately. Without linger to greet anyone, I gathered my belongings and looked for my father. In all the way to the scholarship I was speechless. Upon arriving my father asked me if something was wrong. "Tiredness, Daddy," I said. I got out and walked through the entrance. It was late and to-dos slept in my hut-shelter. I made the bed quietly and went to bed saying: "Do not eat shit, you've identified with actor and you think San Francisco, tomorrow will be over." I wrapped myself in my blanket and fell asleep.

But it is not happened to me. The next day I got up worse. It was a sen-sation of unease, discomfort, they would even the insegu-rity, fear, a vague fear, unclassifiable. So I spent the week ended forward as never to go see Hector. When I had before my greeting was: "Neither you think you'll be cured." Hector looked puzzled, uncomprehending, and I told him everything calmly.

Hector listened attentively and then said, "Try to tell me what you feel, not what you think, what you feel DefineMe." I found time to answer. "Everything is going well, 'I said, but I'm not happy." And it was true. At school everything went smoothly, finished the course and had secured the entrance to the university, with the bonus that many of my friends had chosen the same career. At home I think we had never been better and in the church I was more than ever the "Albertico" loved by everyone. Sara-mately super-Mare everything was good and I felt that I loved her as he had never loved anyone before. But if I stopped a bit there was a "do not know what" some dissatisfaction, a kind of no particular search I had always thought it was simply part of growing up.

Hector told me then: "Alberto, for a long time I've been thinking very near you is a vocation, but that you have to discover. I if you want to help you, but only you can determine. " It was as if I sow in cement. It was the last thing he had wanted to hear. The mere possibility that what I was feeling was that defined as a "call"; I was terrified. I did not know what to say and Hector did not insist. In the end, all he managed to say was: "I will not break with Sara." Hector shrugged and said, "Do not put the cart before the horse, you have not made any decisions."

Nevertheless, no I managed to explain why, I sank the world. To begin with, the situation seemed stupid. Ape-nas few days earlier was around, as they say in Cuba, 'loose and unvaccinated "happy with my present and looking to the future, my future. No sense that a simple movie, no matter how well done it was, had the strength to change things. But on the other hand, that "something undefined" was evident inside, and did not leave.

I kept telling myself that this could not be happening to me, that God could not do that. There was a lot better than I do people, and above all, I had my life planned. I wanted to go to college, become a doctor, surgeon me, serve the world from there, was it not that important? I fantasized help as a layman in the church, as he had done so far, as did my parents. Sara was the best thing happened to me

in years and besides, I wanted children, play with them, take them to the field, teach them to swim, and tickle in the mornings. That was the ideal of my world, and I liked that ideal.

Hector's words hammered me: "For a long time I've been thinking that close to you is a vocation." According to begin with, it was his opinion, and we also talked about this ever. He was aware that he had always been very careful with my freedom, I always had scrupulously respected my personal life and had never tried that raised me another way that I was sharing with him, but that he took me by surprise. Shit!

I felt a jumble of thoughts and emotions rather blocked me, so I said something like, "Well, I will not think it was a stupid movie, God called that, is not elegant. Also, I'm not interested, I always have asked for vocations but did not tell him to call me, nor I deserve it, I'm not as good as that. So no, normal life, study as always, Sara weekends and more careful when driving because if I give another rasponazo the car of my father I will cut your head off. "

Unfortunately, there are storms when they come to life can not stop crossing your fingers. It did not take long for me to realize that this was only the beginning. For long

I tried to tear it from inside I could not. I went to bed and got up the same, or worse. Many people tell me to explain how that the "call" is, and I try, but really understand it myself when I experienced. I think the example that most resembles is that when you fall in love, when suddenly you realize that someone has made special for you, and without wanting or look you find yourself thinking about that person. Everything begins to talk to her, all references to it. You try to dismiss it and can not, you want to escape and remains.

I began to feel afraid, afraid it was true what the moment was a possibility, a subtle intuition. What if it was true that God wanted me cure ?, not supposed one receives the news jumping like ?, what about Sara? For months I could not bring myself to say anything, but it was a mess inside. On the one hand, I did not want to keep her out of this. we had always shared everything and I had no right to hide what he felt, but what was I supposed to do ?, come and say, 'You know ?, the end do not know if I'm going to marry you or I'll cure ..., what, we go to the movies? 'On the other hand, I would not have forgiven never hurt her. What if I continued as if nothing and end this unexpected and imposing new insight ended ?, what if after feeding an illusion was that I took another path without having never told her anything about the process? It was not fair, was not honest, but on the other hand, I was not sure anything about what I was experiencing. It became clear to me that God wanted something, but could realize his desire-is in many things. I had said the same Hector, that something could be the priesthood, but could be a call to a deeper or more committed Christian life, perhaps it was a time of crisis so that I take my faith more seriously.

But I knew he was cheating on me, trying to deny that indefinite and strange feeling was gaining ground. I was afraid, afraid of what God might be asking, and fear of hurting Sara. They would last perhaps three months from the movie when I decided to talk to her. Not really thought to be clear, I wanted to just put a little on notice without that meant putting in movie-gro our relationship. I started to take detours, to tell that maybe it was best we saw less and maybe we should ideally build a good friendship. Sometimes one is no more awkward in this life



because it can not. Sara obviously did not understand, and perhaps began to think that the bottom was another. Without cutting at all I said, "Alberto, good amis-tad have now, and what happens?". I told him everything, you have to be highly trained to resist a woman who wants to know, and I was not. I told him I was afraid, afraid it was a call to end-ra imposed and that this would make her suffer.

Sara was looking at a pair of huge eyes, fighting back tears. However, she did not lose serenity. 'Things of God,' she said while looking at me, they produce much peace, and if you do not have peace with this may not be of God. I prefer you to leave and not come back. Decide what you have to decide, I can wait.

At first I thought replicate, tell we could do otherwise, but I knew it would be useless to insist. Pre-precisely one of the things I was attracted to Sarah was his deter-mination when he saw something clear. Perhaps it was overly sharp at that time, but by then Sara was too young to understand that there were things that could negotiate. Moreover, as far as he knew, it was clear to me that if she felt that what was happening to me could be a thing of God, she would not fight against God. He had told me one day, talking about the most and the least: "What I would never do in life would be to fight against God."

The road to the bus terminal would never end, and waiting for the next outing more. I sat in front of the terminal, on the same bench where he had spoken for the first time in the sin-ings she already intuited. I thought back, tell him to forget everything that we continue like that, but I knew not func-nary. I was confused. He had not come to lose. Arran-ed bus, crowded, as usual, but I was alone with my an-gustia.

### Alone with God

My relationship with God became painful and tense my prayer. "You can not ask me this. Ask me what you want, the greater the sacrifice, but I do not ask this. I have everything I love, everything that makes me illusion. Besides, I have my organized, defined life, why suddenly you walk in and you break my plans ?, Why destroy me dreams? I do not understand you. I do not want to be a priest nor have I ever wanted. I was not excited nor is it something that you've thought, (well, except that half hour at sixteen, but that was for heeding the priest) ".

God was silent, and yet I could not disconnect. It was ironic. I, the faithful boy, the soldier of God, the defender of the faith, not haggled time for the things of God, who prided himself talking to others the God of the universe, passionate catechist, young happy be part of the Church, erigiéndome proud before the One who always I defined as the meaning of my life, marking lí-mites, especificándole far I could ask for. Yes, it was ironic, and pa-thetic: Cornered and fearful, while angry and defiant before God watching me.

From my neural network they soon arrived reason to avoid me. "Hector, I am not worthy of this, I do not deserve to be a priest." "No, no, of course. -answered me-. Nor are you worth now or you're going to be, even when you they are laying hands. If what God wants from you is a priest, that's a gift that He wants you because he feels it is take it or leave. " I had already wanted to say, "No, thanks," but did not work I look back away.

Eventually he would meet people who said, "No, thanks". But there was a lot at stake: my realization, my happiness, my inner fulfillment in this world. I realized that I could not evade the question, it should not. If God wanted something should look for that something. I was terrified to find what you did not want to find; but I felt I had to take a search, no matter what. Pen-saba which was equal to skydive he had always wanted

do, and thought about the answer he gave people when I decided not to do: "If I am eighty years old and I have never been able to pull parachute accept it, but would not forgive me never had the opportunity to throw me and, out of fear, not having done so. "

I think there are times when one decides to take charge and choose the way he considers his own, taking risks and paying prices or life left to decide for one. In many areas of life, not only in the religious, I have known persons, too many for my taste, which never dared to confirm his intuitions, and remained in secure grounds without deciding to make a way to clarify them where he was its place. People to a job, a profession or a couple, were passing the time because, although deep down they knew it was not what they wanted or-later, things worked, and ended up adapting and accepting him as their final state of life . Many have come to the end with doubts and never will be answered, and die with love-a question of whether this or that moment must have taken another path. I was terrified at the thought of meeting a God who asked me to everything, but one thing was becoming clear, he was going to cope.

I understand that when you have stability, even on something that we know is not what we really want, is re-denounce the security of what you have and to go look for what is not known whether it will be difficult. In my case, I confess that, while it is true that I had been afraid to discover that God's plan for my life was the priesthood, the more I dreaded the idea of waking up one day at the peak of life but feeling that simply I was out of place.

# On my way

## The difficult art of discerning

It's amazing how different it looks when a path is taken away. How it changes the taste of the mountain when it has reached the top! How different is the calm after the storm have faced! During these years of priesthood I have accompanied many young people in their questions before God and life and I have seen ascender for a painful journey, searching light shadows able to clarify their doubts. I remade them the way that Hector made me their stories offering permanent keys of any search.

There are three elements that guide the discernment of a vocation of every vocation, not only the priesthood. The first is SENSATION-lity, that what the heart tends spontaneously. I'm with-up that God never dreamed for me a project engineer because neither physics nor mathematics was never my passions. Ad-I look at the people who study, for example, pure mathematics. To me nothing thinking gives me a headache.

Of course, I rule as sensitivity what I call the "ideal romantic priesthood 'vision of the young man whose image of the priest is the man dressed in elegant ornaments, which le-Vanta the host amid a reverent silence as the wind It makes you fly the chasuble in what looks like the final scene of a movie. Yes, then do not look for help in anything, either inside or outside the parish. Theirs is believed the idyllic reincarnation of John of the Cross, and it is very difficult to understand how anyone could doubt his vocation.

When I talk about sensitivity I understand not only the taste you can feel a person for what he is and does a priest, but as the perception that your life is out there, that somehow this is your place.

A second element refers to the capabilities. For every profession in this life do skills needed, and if you want to be a priest but has not developed, for example, ability to listen, or do not know how to live in community, is indiscreet, or an inveterate selfish, it would be best that unless that work thoroughly these shortcomings, do not throw this way. A person can not be legless runner, and to be a priest takes more than a good head for study. I think I will be a continued disconcerting to find very smart people on the road to the priesthood but in other respects not convinced. However, they meet the schedule and take optimal grades, and this seems sufficient to their trainers.

Finally there are the circumstances. Nothing is accidental. St. Paul for those who love God everything converges for bien9 says. God speaks through mediations, is his style. God manifests his will through people we meet, things that happen to us, "coincidences" which I prefer to call "diosidencias". The difference between people is not God speak to some and not others, but that there are people who quietly and creates interior space for escu-charlo, and people who have so much noise inside it is virtually impo-sible to perceive his voice.

## Between Camagüey and Esmeralda

With the arrival of September 1985 I became a brand medical student, spotless white coat and long hours of study. Because the idea of turning Cuba into a world medical power, the Faculty of Medical Sciences, had been separated from the rest of university disciplines and new buildings were erected at one end of the city of Camagüey, between the Provincial Hospital and Cancer .

Monday through Friday lived on the campus of the university. The atmosphere was demanding but I enjoyed it, despite my spirit perfectionist, which made me lie often late at night, endlessly seeking to dominate matter on which I evaluated the next day.

I remember that time fondly. If you were born again, even knowing it would cure again, I do not save me the years I spent there. He enjoyed the professionalism of my teachers, the strength of their knowledge and ability to teach. Every hour class began with two or three random questions about the previous class with which anyone could assess to what that was strange that one day we did not have any practice seminar or added. Anatomy, Histology, Embryology, Biochemistry feared ... we lived assessment evaluation, with a train of constant study.

As a university generation were a good group, preoccupied by learning, excited with the profession and with a large capacity-ness of friendship. We learned to be running mates make-dose ranging friends, not rivals.

My inner restlessness had not diminished, but never interfered in my studies. Monday through Friday I was a bookworm machine, and I reserved the weekends to give more space to my questions.

He had begun a process of discernment with Hector, which included go with him to Esmeralda, a part of every weekend. I was not going all the time because he held responsibilities in Florida and did not want to stray too far from my community mother.

## Coordinates

Hector had defined me several coordinates. One was the stability of my prayer life, and had insisted much as to "stable". "I prefer --me had said ten minutes every day, two hours once a week."

I actually gave me time to pray. Already at that time he had discovered that two of the most important keys to a life of prayer are defining when and where. I knew if I got up saying: "Today I have to pray," but did not put me time, the day ended complicated and my relationship with God was reduced to moments that he remembered amid comings and goings, but ignoring that time key "being" to meet "just you and me." It was not alien to the idea that "skills" is one of the great secrets of any relationship. Without this there is nothing survives, nor faith, nor the relationships or friendship.

Moreover, the need to find a suitable place to pray was obvious, because as with friends, not every place is suitable for conversation, especially when you want to be alone and at ease with someone else.

As constant in prayer, Hector had told me not to stop asking God to make me understand what he wanted from me, although I had warned that "God speak when He understands." I had made it clear that God did not intend to catch me by the beard and repeated much: "We must let God be God."

For Hector was clear that God wanted something from me, because he said that God does not trouble the heart if not to take him somewhere. It is telling me, like thirst cause you look for the source, and it would be cruel of God to make you feel thirsty if the source does not exist.

Often, many days, many hours, my question was the same: "What do you want from me ?, where you want to take me?" But God was silent, and remained silent for a long time. Only INSIS-tence remained within a "something undefined" concern only made me go in search; but no lights or answers. Only signs that slowly come later.

Another was the accompanying coordinates, because the path of vocational discernment can not be done alone. You need to have someone who has already done that can help you and confront you, someone you serve as a benchmark and help you see what is God and what is not.

Of course, it is key that person not only has the capability guiding you know but do respect your freedom and maturation process. I feel violent when meeting formers, or spiritual guides or whatever we want to call them that, with very good intentions, what they want is not so much that young people discover God's will in their life but assume sooner or later, a path of consecration. I understand that there are people you wish some-mind were called by God to be priests or religious, but one is not God, and only God has the right to propose a project as well. I remember the case of a friend who had grown very close to the nuns A (to give a name), and one day discovered that God was calling her to consecrate himself with the nuns B. When it was, all excited, to tell her nun friend A I went with the B, it said, "I'm disappointed." And I wonder: Who gives the vocation, God or nun, God or the priests?

When accompanying someone in the discernment of your life, you have to give lights, tell you how to look, but leaving it free. In this field, it is another serious attempt to take one of your ideal. No matter how beautiful that ideal is, if not his, if not coincide with God's plan for his life, the only thing it does is put the other on a path of confusion, frustration and sadness, if not resentment .

The last coordinate scorer Hector was the importance of having a strong pastoral involvement, although this came I already ha-ciendo in Florida. I found it logical. What we call "grass-ral" which is nothing more than involvement in practical service from the Gospel, it helps to understand how that service absorbs the mind and senses. Share as much as possible all that the priest makes sense if it helps to like it, but not enough to devote life, or whether, on the contrary, is where one wants to spend time, energy and heart. It also allows to know the style of the priesthood from the inside, and introduces many dimensions that are not apparent if the relationship with the parish priest is superficial.

The pastoral work is a good indicator. Sometimes one encuentra with young people who love to get all possible rags to help mass, or are first offered to take

the children from the parish to the beach, but do not look for it engage in catechesis, or care for the sick, nor missionary call to go to a town because when weighs heat, weighs them cold, or rain, or drought, or dust or mosquitoes. Well, gentlemen altar, but people in the trenches. The life of cure is much more than the time of the Mass or the feast that makes you the community for your anniversary of priestly ordination.

A priest I know has a comparison to me pare-ce me crass, but it helps to understand this. He says the dog, when you teach a bone, wags his tail, and if not moved or is no dog or something happens. If one who you say he wants to be a priest you teach what a priest has to do and has no illusions, or sneaks how difficult, then you'll want to be a priest for other reasons, but not because God calls him.

I know that Cuba is a bit different from the rest of the world, also to exercise the priesthood. In my beloved island, apart from all the proper pastoral work, care for children, adolescents, jove-nes, couples, elderly and sick; Caritas work with the neediest of people, care for families of prisoners, the mission church in places without requesting the presence of the priest; in addition to being available for hours of confessions or the gene-you simply sit and vent; despite that and everything that can be stuck on the road, you have to define planes of construction to repair temples, exercise electrician, bricklayer, carpenter, mechanic, plumber and gardener and, incidentally, learning to kill murcie invaders-lakes.

People not cut to criticize the priests who "do not get wet" with people's problems, or those that people call priests "Mass and table ", and is that the priesthood, but has an identity pro-pia , much it depends on the mode of being of each person and their background motivates ation.

A cure is king in its territory, and although it is subordinate to his bishop or religious superior to his, his parish is their space. If as a cure one gets up at five o'clock and goes to bed at half-night, you will work to fill that time and more, but also one could get up at ten o'clock and weigh anchor at eight the night. Of course, the customers may be uncomfortable and even complain to the bishop, but even if not responsive to the needs of people, while the priest not do anything that goes directly against the essence of the priesthood, is not much that the bishop can do to remedy the situation, as not moving it, but that just moves the problem, not solve it.

I live convinced that the life of a priest can be an exciting and wonderful adventure or it can be a mess. When he had decided to enter the seminary, I was going spiritually with another priest in Camagüey, Fr. Sarduy (I will explain then why the change). Once I mentioned that one of the things that worried me was the cure being reduced to four walls without reaching far into the interaction and helps people see me. He looked at me, smiled and said, "Let me tell you have a great failure of vision."

Sarduy was right. Eventually I realized that as a priest he could do things and reach people and places that at that time I was not able to imagine. But I've also learned that if you want to live with narrow limits, nothing better than being cured. God calls and agree with you, but do not work supplies in equipo.

## Jiquí

So, I went integrating coordinates Hector suggested me, and started to help in one of the villages he was attending in the area of Esmeralda: Jiquí.

The jiquí is a tree that grows in Cuba, famous for being extremely hard-matedly, even while serving as the foundation for houses ma-dera. In those years, about faith, Jiquí was like jiquí.

Life was very hard at that place. It was one of these people come unless after the Revolution, with few jobs and where young people seeking to emigrate.

The streets, in its May-ria of land, remained permanently covered by a red dust raised by the wind and should permeate to the bone.

The temple, although quite large for the site was an old wooden building with a precarious roof invaded by bats

happy. The community was formed literally four old to Hector called "my four cats' Maria Dolores, Emilia, non-paign and Teo.

The experience was simply bleak. I spent Saturday visiting people who never see at Mass in the sun Aug Biante of Cuba. It was a town with typical mentality that the church is women. Men attended very well when the saw-sitabas, greeted on the street, stopped to talk to you, but the church or speak, seemed to enter his mind. Women told you their problems, their jobs, you said they would like to be part of the community, but everything was in words. It was during the eighties and religion was still a taboo subject for many people, especially in field sites.

On Saturday afternoon, Hector celebrated Mass for the "four cats" and for me, before returning together to Esmeralda.

Once I told Hector that a neighboring church had told me enjoyed irony, that if we thought closing the church when the "four old" they died, as had to make the Protestant pastor, at the time. Hector did not flinch: 'This,' he said, more interested in God than you and me. "

The years passed, the "cats" were killed, but the prophecy was not fulfilled.

Jiquí today is a thriving community able to encourage the faith of anyone. And that answer to my concern has continued encouraging me throughout the time: "This is more interested in God than you and me."

Children

But the most important thing Jiquí contributed to my discer-tenance process was not teaching me how to persevere in aridity, but the experi-ence I had with children who, without knowing how, started making-ed me.

One day, returning from visits, I found myself suddenly ha-soft with five children, all boys. We sat on the website of

temple and we started talking there. They knew nothing of religion and I had to pay attention to use the simplest terms. Simpa-Ticos, unwrapped, bombarding me with questions and I watched with that childlike curiosity to discover new things.

After the first meetings, invariably they began to appear, and they became my rest and my source of ani-mo, although, in the end, never entered the temple.

When Hector empe-zaba Mass farewells, and I respected his decision to leave. Would someday step, I thought.

And that day came without notice. One evening, returning from visits to the houses, found that there was a popular children's party in a sort of large

outdoor site is very close to the church. There were my children saw me separated from the group and went with me to the temple. Without knowing how or why, one after another children followed and suddenly we were all inside the church, strangely full of children who had brought the party atmosphere.

They rang the bells themselves, toured the temple from top to bottom and when calmed down, sat. Hector knew that the Mass would be heavy or strange, and moreover, there was not going to stop mass. He improvised a little celebration with them, pray-mos, sing, and after a while we all went out for Hector celebrate Mass with the "four cats". I decided to go with my children, telling that at the end Hector go alone, I already look the way back to Esmeralda.

We spent the rest of the afternoon together, climbing bushes on the mountain, looking fruits and birds' nests, and I returned from Es-Meralda night, tired and happy.

The week went by and I could not wait to get back to Jiquí. That Saturday I arrived early with the idea of looking at the boys before I make visits. I left the church and around the corner to the house of one of them. Right there almost I stumbled over the black guy of all. When he saw me he stopped, rooted to the floor, looking at me with eyes of horror that I keep in my mind, as if still looking at me. Within seconds, he turned and fled from me as fleeing the devil.

Then I knew. They had called at school and had threatened them and their families. They had been forbidden to return to the church and talk to me. I could not get close to anyone or reach their families. They were terrified. I ended up at the home of one of the "cats" who told me that the previous week had been the scandal of the people and tried to conso-larme as best he could. Hector had not arrived yet and would not come until late afternoon, so I decided to go home teacher who had directed all.

If my eyes had been able to cast fire he would have burned. A fury knocked on the door. When I had before I explained who I was and I asked why, I said I had no right to do that and it was an abuse. The teacher was a poor man, small and scrawny, but I felt that slammed me against a wall, a wall that went far beyond that bony face looking at me not knowing what to do. He did not answer me, I had no answers nor waited for my reaction. In the end only he managed to draw their little daughter say: "I only know that this will never go to igle-sia".

I cried with anger, helplessness. I felt unable to digest anger, he could not accept that this, in one fell swoop, everything was over and that stupidity and fear imposed. However, amid all that I was beginning to understand that beyond my life as a man of faith, the things of God they cared about.

Years later, I was already a seminarian, sent during Easter to work Esmeralda. Hector was still pastor there. One of those days came to Jiquí the evening, amid the usual sun, sweltering heat and red dust that enveloped you every time that ramshackle guagua<sup>11</sup> slowed. I went down to the village entrance and as he picked up my stuff and waited for the dust to settle heard a voice behind me: "That is not Alberto?". A few minutes later, I had before me five teenagers, grown, uninhibited and happy. There were hugs and memories. There were all

11 Bus.



you need a reunion. ... Then they accompanied me to the door of the church.  
Priesthood or marriage

The first year of medicine passed quickly, although I ended up with the feeling that I had squeezed the brain and a great neuronal exhaustion.

I arrived at summer tired inside and out. The pace of the university had been strong and, on the other hand, my inner world still undefined. I liked the race and the university environment I felt like a fish in water, but still did not know what was on my way.

Hector had written me give you an exercise that is very classic and is one of the first things you do to try to organize ideas. It is simply to divide a sheet into four and write why yes and why not on marriage and the priesthood, in the order you prefer.

I do not keep that sheet, but I remember two answers. In the priesthood itself the first reason was the attraction exerted upon me the idea of being available to God in all my time. MANA-na at night, be to Him and be at your service. There are still those who defend the priesthood or religio-sa life is "the best vocation" and that marriage is a kind of "lesser vocation", something like Christians second, which can not fully address the things of God because front they have more earthly obligations. For me it is a fatal way of approaching the issue and it is unfortunate that this view has been used to highlight the value of consecrated life.

The best vocation is God gives you, because there is not only your personal happiness but your chance of fulfillment. In addition, before the call to the priesthood, religious life or marriage, a previous call, a wider vocation is to live as children of God and from there to make God present in your daily life.

When you have clear sonship of God and the conse-count brotherhood with the rest of humanity -humanidad which, by the way, begins at home-, everything that is done it becomes manifestation of that identity and all It makes sense. Each has simply to discover what field you happen to make God present in the midst of everyday life.

Christianity is not an ideology or a philosophy, but a choice of faith that part of an experience and involves a way of life. Once you have experienced the presence and love of God in one's life, the basics of the Christian is to make that God present in the environment where you are: home, school, work, neighborhood, friends, wherever. That is to build the Kingdom of God and what it means to be salt and light. It other words, is that where is someone who has decided to opt for Christ able to live and transmit what God is love, peace, forgiveness, justice, joy, solidarity, hope, and everything we know. This is the first vocation for all, and that's what ca-da one has to learn to do. The other answer I remember was referring to marriage and had to do with the illusion of having my own children.

I am very sensitive to the issue of life. Enjoyed as a dwarf of my classes embryology just as how-do violence to me in genetics showed us that procurásemos "by all means" abort pregnant if we detected one malfor-tion in the fetus. I have always believed that a child is a blessing, whatever form it comes, and it's up to one to accept and love him from the start and no matter what happens.

It was clear that the priest does not renounce paternity, on the contrary, multiplies. In fact, the priest comes often to be father for some, that biological

parents themselves. But the prospect of giving up my own children, entrance, made me nostalgic.

I thought how wonderful it would be to know that in the womb of your wife is growing a life that has spawned yourself, which is part of you, carrying your genes, your flesh, your blood and that without wome-go, be different. Like it or not, once you have been wondering how your kids, how would your eyes or smile. And you wonder

how would that time, right after birth, you take him in my arms for the first time, tiny, wrinkled and ugly, but immensely tender. You think of the first "Dad" when your child joins a word with your face and makes you know that you identified.

My nineteen years was enough to understand that everything in life has a price age, and to give up carnal children is one of the prices of priestly way. I could understand it, but I assume it became difficult.

student assistant

With around September he began the second year running. It was the last year of what we called the "basic cycle" to distinguish it from "clinical cycle" which began after the third year. During the basic cycle we did not practice in hospitals, because we were still learning how the liver works or how the knee ligaments are assembled. However, there were what the 'assistantships' is called.

The assistantship was the integration into a medical team spice-team unit, used in the branch in which one hoped to specialize after graduation as a general practitioner. Each year several assistantships which were distributed among applicants according to the criteria of a team of teachers were offered. Have meant an assistantship start sharing medical team that guards from the late afternoon until the next day. The benefits were not just start learning more about this specialty but have the possibility, in prin-ciple, to make "direct route": to start the specialty immediately after graduation, without making the two-year rule-mentary social service.

That year, surgery had come just a square. While he had no clear ideas about my future, she knew that, if not cure would be a doctor and, if physician, surgeon, so I asked the assistantship as I could. Not much hope of that concede me though because my grades were good, not me

I forgot that I had absolutely no political affiliation and religious being was still a stigma. In fact, shortly before they arrived assistantships, and had approached me a team of surgeons to ask them to let me be in the guards with them. The first question he asked the doctor who spoke to was if I belonged to the Communist Youth, to which, of course, said no. The next day I called to tell me that he was sorry but they were dema-siados in the team and for that reason could not take me there. However, against all my predictions, I got the assistantship and was placed precisely at the team of "too many".

Life sometimes is very ironic. The doctor who had spoken and apparently was very good professional, he was transferred to another hospital, and when I started on the computer, he was gone. Many years later, as a priest and in a context where the despres-tige of the Cuban Revolution was increasingly evident and be part of the Church began to dress, I met this doctor with his family in the office of my bishop , which I came by chance. The bishop was

delighted with them, professional Christian family, and when I presented said: "He was studying medicine." The doctor, atentísimo, greeted me as he said he did not remember me. I shrugged, I smiled and said, "It is we were many."

The "boudoir cures'

Start working with a team of surgeons was an experience that helped me mature a forced march. Between the second and third year I had two top: Ramon Romero and Julio Blanco, both exce-professional lens. Along with the rest of the team were teaching me everything would need to know.

I learned symptoms, ways to feel, how DISINF-Tarme hands thoroughly before entering the operating room, how to organize the clamps for an operation and how to give them. I liked what I did and I enjoyed butt, which did not prevent some blunders here and there, fortunately without serious consequences and certainly treated leniently.

In the operating room it was, for obvious reasons, pawn. My kingdom was increasingly taking shape in what we called the "boudoir cures." Each time came a minor injury or a simple case, taking him to the parlor and my turn to examine it. If you were superficial wounds, she sewed. If you were abscesses, he drains. If it was a stomach wound had to numb the area and explore: if it was superficial, there were only sewing up the skin layers, but if the wound had penetrated the abdomen then had to take him to the operating room. It was on one of those days when Julio Blanco, who had gone to teach a type of suture, gave me some advice that I have thankful forever, applying it to many times: "When you make a 'l operation said, remember that you have be welcomed or criti-ed is yourself, because sometimes they all congratulate you when you know that what you did was shit, and sometimes all you criticize, but you know you've done the right thing. "

It was not all good times. It is not easy to live between Plum-Janos and I at that time was still too naive, dema-TOO 'good guy' for an environment like that. But I survived and I feel encouraged that prevailed have good memories. One of the anecdotes of those times occurred Saturday guard. I had come very early to the hospital and had been a day dead, with virtually no urgency, and that exhausted than when it was in action. Near the eleven p.m. came a man with abdominal pain and was diagnosed with appendicitis. We estimate that the preparation required and the operation itself, by the one o'clock we could go to sleep if no one else lle-gaba.

Murphy's Law, to compensate for the inactivity of the day, a few minutes later came two stab injuries that had to be taken to the operating room.

We entered the operating room at half past eleven p.m. and ter-we undermine the six o'clock, standing all the time, without stopping. The next day, Sunday morning, I got on a bus to return to Florida, died of sleep. When the bus arrived, everyone got out while I slept. I was awakened by two sturdy claps driver as I hit the shoulder, said gruffly: "Up, that drunken night passed out there and then come here to sleep it off on the bus." I looked at him and humbly got off the bus. He was too tired to respond.

Incomplete

Gradually, as time passed and my practices were being more common and less novel, other reflections were taking up space. I began to notice the kind of people passing by the "boudoir". As I shared the guards only at night, apart from occasional minor accident, it was common to see young people, more or less drunk, with wounds received in discussions and pe-read.

I remember a man who came totally drunk, which he had every right pectoral up with a knife and had deviated nasal septum clear. I remember among other things because, while trying to control otorrino nosebleed, placed behind his head, stood before the pectoral ligand vessels start to stitch his skin. Blood from his nose had begun to accumulate in the throat until she coughed force ... on me. It was one of those moments when the doctor mé-love becomes desire to strangulation.

And yet, in his semiconscious he looked at me and laughed with me are-that silly smile drunks. Big and burly, but overruled by alcohol and oblivious to everything, he remained on the table until we finished "repair" and sent it to the observation room more than anything that just happened drunkenness. I had stayed in my shirt, while a nurse tried to take blood to my former white coat rubbing it with hydrogen peroxide. While waiting, at some point an idea crossed my mind: "Tomorrow I will go, and will heal soon, but your life will remain the same."

In the following days, whenever attending a young patient I turned the same idea. I knew what I had to do and "modesty turn away", he did well. He knew how to disinfect, how to glue the edges of the wounds, how suturing to not be reopened and to leave the least marks possible. Since the start of the race our teachers had insisted on the need to be good professionals, and I kept that school, but could not shake the feeling that I fell short, incomplete, half. Who then helped to look at life differently ?, who showed them another horizon ?, who taught them a different way, a new way?

Sometimes former patients came with fresh wounds. The same situation, the same smell of alcohol and sweat fighting. I felt useful, and knew it would always remain there, and more how-do my turn to wield a scalpel, but for me, it just was not enough.

Had ever even questioned me if God's plan for me would not be a lay consecration in medicine, a total commitment to the medical profession that I would become a kind of doctor without borders of space or time, but that idea I dismissed soon. I did not know what God wanted of me, but it was clear that the fact about Jesus Christ had to be present. If somehow did not show Christ, I always feel half. Moreover, while the celibate life was part of my horizon, it was always an idea linked to the priesthood. Choose celibacy

as a condition of priestly vocation understood it and considered acceptable, but otherwise not raised me, but reconozco that for many people can be a valid option.

Christ was important to me. The more matured and I got into the world, the more I reaffirmed that his gospel was the best way of life he had known, but I realized that Christianity was not the only way to live. There are many good people and, why not ?, holy, although not live evangelical values explicit following of Jesus Christ and even less belonging to a church arises. However, I was happy to have met the gospel and thanked him infinitely God have grown up in a Christian environment, because I felt that lit my life, it gave me answers and above all filled with meaning every decision, every step. Many times I had wondered, and would continue to do many others, what would have become of me if I had not known Jesus Christ, where would it be, how it would be.

Moreover, he was aware that many people are not open to the Gospel because they do not know, have known-bad or who have had a disastrous experience Church. For example, when my teacher of Marxism in Medical Sciences spoke of religion, I said she did not understand how I could believe in God. (In Cuba the study of Marxism is included as a subject from high school to college). However, she described to me a God who was not me familiar, that did not match my experience. I understood years later when, in the seminary, they explained to Hegel and his idea of God, which was the same as was my teacher of Marxism: An Abstract-to God, distant and impersonal in which I would never have believed .

I continued working in the 'boudoir cures "and followed sintiéndome incomplete, with the same questions that would be repeated later in the third year, when we started to practice in the hospital wards. I mastered the steps to compensate for diabetes, hypertension or asthma attack, which analyzes indicate in each case or what care have a crisis of angina. Patients enter and leave the hospital, get on a stretcher and walk away, recovered the body ready for the day.

However, I could not help wondering how were inside, if the disappointments and despairs of me talking in the sleepless hours of my guards were also discharged. I wondered whether to stop at the hospital door knew where to direct his steps and his heart or, on the contrary, his body healed back, resigned to the meaninglessness and nothingness.

### The Lightning

That was happening that second year of college. Studying to the limit, learning in the guards, talking with Hector, lock-Jando in my parish and, as if time left over me, had entered the diocesan youth pastoral team, who ran the P. Sarduy and coordinated the activities for young people throughout the diocese.

God's plan for me remained an unresolved question. He did not see or did not want to see. In the deepest part of me was a struggle, a difficult balance to tilt. I grew up in an atmosphere of generosity-ness with God and from God. I was taught the meaning and the joy of giving and me. What we experienced was not rejecting a life of service. I was far from wanting to make a brilliant career to climb social cusps. I wanted to make my life something useful, serve everyone he could, but my way, my style from my decisions. Accepting a call to the priesthood meant to give the reins to God, myself entirely under his control and let go. And I was inca-pable to take that.

From the academic point of view, the second year was more bearable than the first, but the internal wear was mayor. How long the lack of light ?, how long the same question to God who always kept silent? He had two years of searching, of-tas're wondering, dialogues. I realized that both the pastoral work as

the hope that Christ became more evident in my half were things that made me vibrate inside, but that did not solve my doubts.

Summer came, and with it the preparation of Diocese-wide youth meetings we did once a year. Sarduy had created these meetings, where all the youth of the diocese got together for a weekend as a way to meet us, encourage us and share our faith. From thirty or forty young people at the first meetings, the figures had been growing slowly, but we were more than two hundred young people we identified with the church in a diocese that, at that time, was roughly the size of Belgium.

That year I worked a lot for the meeting. The previous days were frantic but ultimately it was about. I do not keep special memories of those days. The topics of discussion, the vigil on Saturday night, team work, left no traces consubstantial in me. We ended Sunday afternoon with the closing Mass. I was sitting in the front pews, left, stuck near the hall. I do not remember the readings of the Mass, or the homily of Father Ignacio, who first presided. Actually I was tired and wanted to go home.

After Thanksgiving and before the final prayer, Father Ignacio said a few parting words and ended up repeating those phrases I had heard since childhood: "Let every young Christian should ask at least once in life if God would not be calling to surrender completely and etc., etc., etc. ". Then I knew. It was as if a lightning bolt opened in the evening and as a certainty cleared darkness. With an assurance that he has not abandoned I never understood that intuition was true, that my project was the priesthood, that God was measuring the rest of my life.

I did not cry, and I jumped for joy. Basically, I did not react. It was like watching what she was looking forward to eagerly long time and to find it, feel it was unable to respond. It was like when you get to the top of a tall mountain labored and, once there, nothing but sit still comes up in the solitude of height, staring into space.

That afternoon, when I came to Florida, I went to see Hector, who had returned from Esmeralda. I sat opposite him and said, "I think so." After hearing me, Hector asked if I wanted to enter the seminary in September. I said no, he needed time to mature what I had seen, I did not care to do another year of college.

Every fruit needs time to ripen, no more, no less. Many people have asked me why if I saw so clear I decided to "lose another year," just as many have asked me why I did not finish the race. But the third year was not wasted time, because it was the year that my decision matured. What would follow would not be easy and I think I could survive everything precisely because I had time to think what to do.

Unfortunately, sometimes the priests do not respect the natural maturation process of the people. It is true that the time you sharpen your senses and learn to intuit a vocation, sometimes long before the same person understands that what you are experiencing is a call, but we forget that anything else serves our intuitions. It is they who need to see the road and feel that the time has come to take the plunge.

I suffer for people I love very much, I am convinced that they were called to the priesthood, but who think they sped up the process. Induced them to make a choice that was correct but which were not yet ripe, and when the storms come-ron had not taken enough to persevere roots. Today I see life made, often with a halo of sadness, a nostalgia that can not hide, but there is nothing to do.

When I told Hector did not think as soon enter the seminary, he did not even tried to get me rethink. He accepted it as if waiting for my answer. About two years ago, in one of our first conversations, when I wanted to quickly clear and immediate answers from God, that Hector had told me: "This is not a marathon. Also, if you enter the seminar tomorrow you will not resolve this lack of priests of the Church, so take it easy and give yourself time. "

### Yes but no

My meeting with Bishop was preceded by a lot of indecision. My mind was clear but my heart resisted, and I was thinking of doing the fourth year career, perhaps to allow time for that unlock a bit of my uncertainty, but in the end I decided on the 'no'. "What can happen? I wondered, what to do to reach the fourth year after the end feeling the same? If you're going to jump just give and point, and that whatever has to happen. " I asked for an appointment with the bishop.

Monsignor Adolfo Rodriguez was one of the "heavyweights" of the Episcopal Conference. Consecrated bishop at thirty-nine years and at the time the world's youngest bishop, he had received the diocese as a residential bishop in 1964, although the diocese was already in charge since 1961 by the prolonged absence of the previous bishop, Riu Angles. Those were times of euphoria communist full and complete annihilation of the Church. Of the seventy priests who had the diocese only seven, him included, had survived the expulsion of religious, carried out by the government in 1961. At first the priests went from town to town to officiate the sacraments six priests, more bishop, for a territory of twenty-six thousand three hundred forty-six square kilometers. They came running, confessed, celebrated the Eucharist and continued way. They say that once one of them came late to church, and he still had another people for attending. He went like a flash in the confessional to get back out immediately and tell those waiting: "Only you have freckle-two serious". Obviously, no one confessed.

Adolfo was not the man to despair. He lived the mystique of his episcopal motto: "It is good to trust in the Lord" and was gradually achieving the revitalization of the diocese.

High tall, elegant demeanor, was a close, serene, which could be reached without too many complications. I was not a stranger to him. I knew him since childhood and he knew my whole family. The conversation with him was simple. In fact, I do not remember details of what we speak. Actually it was the formal presentation of my decision to enter the seminary for the diocese. He sent me to talk to the P. Grau, who was responsible for the diocesan

vocations and with whom I had a short interview that focused more than anything in my motivations. He also told me that in those days would pass Camagüey

Father Machin, rector of the seminary of Santiago de Cuba, and it would be good to talk to him. Machin, my future rector, seemed anything but a Lord Chancellor. Scruffy, nothing formal, connected with you in two seconds and I was like I know of life. Physically, if you put in Bombay nobody would notice that it is Cuban, his amazingly Indian appearance, very rare in Cuba. However, under that aspect that could seem even surface he was one of the most acute and intelligent minds I've ever met, with an incredible balance to lead and a great capacity for dialogue.

In two seconds I explained to Machin my process and confessed what then constituted for me the basis of my crisis was convinced that God wanted me priest, saw it, at first I assumed as a project, but I felt that I did not I wanted to be a priest, my heart kept the brake on and the other had not joined rational yes affective.

Machin was amazed not. He said if I was willing to try, despite what I was experiencing, he accepted me in the seminary, and gradually all would be defined, that the important thing was that I did for a personal decision and it it was designed. We do not talk much.



# Preparing the leap

José Sarduy

Hector had begun to leave on weekends earlier than usual, and I had trouble seeing because between the demands of college and my growing pastoral implications in Florida, had stopped going with him to Esmeralda. Given the difficulty of finding more often, I recommended that in the time left me *carre-ra*, I do accompanied by Fr. Sarduy, one of the priests of Camagüey city that had a lot of experience in dealing with young people. Hector and I continued to see at times, but without the regularity of before.

A Sarduy, "Pepe" for friends, I have always pitied. Accustomed perhaps less problematic to work with people, he had to endure a very immature Alberto and in some *momen-tos*, frankly unbearable. Hector I had received as a teenager and had time to accept my doubts and *tor-pezas*, but Sarduy had to take me in too little time, and some things I was still light years away from maturity *Deep-da*.

However, Sarduy was unquestionably good and was able to give-me many lights. One of the most important was the day when, trying to make way for a *yes affective* asked me that among all *sacer-skills* of the diocese, whom I would like to be like. I took a quick glance at all the presbytery (not more than thirty) and found that none wanted to be like .... This understanding was crucial for my way in the seminar and has remained in my priestly life, because as a result of that question I understood that my answer does not mean-*ficaba* undervaluation or rejection of the other priests, but the *com- understanding* that it should be the fusion of priestly identity with a personal style. He watched the priests of my diocese and it seemed that They were good, each in his own style, but I realized that if I ever wanted to be was a priest Alberto Reyes style.

I felt a great affection by many priests, "Uncle" Guzman, the "uncle" who had worked *Mestril Esmeralda* before Hector and my house was like the family, Willy, Hector, of course, but did not feel desire to be "like them". They were them, I was me, and that was a key that would allow me to go after integrating the priestly being and doing my own history, my own coordinates. Moreover, it would help to integrate the style of Christ in my own vital synthesis. From that moment it was easier to understand that if he became a priest, would have to do what he does every priest, but the way the seasoning, the soul, was strictly personal. Moreover, it was that much of what he could bring wealth to the whole presbyterate and of the Church.

I think one of the problems of misunderstood priestly formation is not considered the basic identity of the person. This means that instead of helping the person to integrate the essence of the vocation in his private self, instead of seeking a personal synthesis only that respects the being and doing priestly or religious group, attempts to form the *die style*, and obtain copies of a model that can be very good but it eliminates the freshness of the staff, which is an irreplaceable and unique gift. The result is very good but people plastic taste.

Another day I asked Sarduy, who already had his years, if not made difficult time without a woman. Old and wise, he struck me as the voice of someone who has lived many storms and speaks from the serenity of the sea lion and tanning. "Over the years he told me not so much the woman waist down as strange woman cin-ture up."

Dear Pepe, do not know how much I've remembered. Not take many years while dema-cure and if life follows its normal course I still lack many storms, but it's been enough to confirm your response time. Sometimes one has to pray that original prayer of St. Philip Neri, "Lord, do not let me alone, that I betray you," but in fact are often isolated moments that happen sooner or later. Another thing is when sometimes you end the day and after put everything done in God's hands so that it fertilizes, you fall into bed, exhausted and exhausted, and feel the desire for a caress, a kiss, or falling asleep, naked, hugging a woman.

### Two very great loves

I can not deny that celibacy is hard, and I confess that when a young person tells me he wants to be a priest and tells me that it costs the price of celibacy, and input tend to question because to me-us has made a way impressive that, in general, is not the case, or does not know what he is talking, or is there something weird.

Contrary to what many people say, I do not think that celibacy is unnatural. What is unnatural is not love, it's something else. The priesthood is not a renunciation of love but opting for a different and love, deep, wider.

The beginning of the road to the priesthood is not a 'no' but 'yes', 'yes' to a project of God, therefore, is 'no' votes. No young man sitting in a park watching girls while thinking: "That I do not like ... this ... very thin ... not very gor-da ..." People go through life, we relate, know people, and there comes a time someone asks you "click" and begins a road that ends in an election, a "yes" that, if they are to make things right, involves many, many 'no' votes. "Noes" not only to others but to times, tastes, preferences, including proj-tos, but assumed because it is much more important to keep the "yes" and open up to the permanent consequences of that 'yes'. Love is a choice that involves many changes in one's life, but that choice is not mandatory, so, life comes next has its origin in a free option that has been accepted and which one has decided to commit.

It is no secret that celibacy is a matter of "church discipline" and that for centuries the Church accepted married men as priests. The Church has never said that priests can marry. He has admitted to the priesthood to married men and could return to do, but that's different, because once made the vow of celibacy and the condition of the person changes. But the question, in my opinion, is beyond that. For me, marriage and priesthood are two very great love and, make no mistake, both live fully is not possible. Living the two experiences at once yes, of course you can, but volcarte in both, go to the bottom in both, is not posi-ble, not us comfort us with romantic illusions.

Many people "pities" the priest because he has no sex, as if marriage were reduced to the exercise of sexua-lity and like a scandal put certain values above instinct.

A woman needs time, space, shared intimacy. The children, meanwhile, spend not to be the children of your wife when they have problems or when you have things to do. Children need a father who knows how to be and to do so when they need. The time of children is sacred, as sacred as may be the time to celebrate the Eucharist. Moreover, it would be illusory to think that being a priest no marital crisis or that children never give you a headache, and in those moments you can not say, "Sorry, but I'm meeting with the parish council ' .

All this assuming that this hypothetical wife is minimal-mind as it should be the wife of a priest. It seems that those who advocate the return to optional celibacy take for granted that all the wives of priests will estupendísimas women, strong in spirit, unconditional and discreet collaborators and especially sympathetic to the fact that part of the work of his husband is sit down and talk time and as often as necessary with anyone, man or woman, who wants to confess or seek advice for your life, as day follows its rate of twenty four hours.

Moreover, the priesthood is a love that sucks you in, you inun-da and you overflows. You get up and besides your time per-sonal prayer, which is not good to give up, you encounter a world that wants you and to whose needs simply do not give supply.

In your prayer time you have to remain faithful, if you do not want to wake up one day feeling that, despite being a priest, God is a stranger. That time apparently lost, "burned" for God is accurate-mind that makes you able to go ahead and re-qualify again and again for the actual love, without which the priestly ministry loses all meaning, a time for solitude and peace that is needed.

The rest is non-stop, unless you're a priest who spends oblivious to the problems of the faithful, who has been blind to the needs of his people, which has become mere administrator of the parish and at which time the others just come. Of course, I wonder if a priest and would also be a good husband or a good father.

Precisely one of the dangers of the priesthood is the hiperac-ness. There are so many things to do, so many people to attend to, you tend to stretch more and more time and end up breaking the natural balance that your body needs to work harmoniously. Ter-mines as sometimes even many marriages end: working, but not living. You get up and do, you do, you do, but at any time of the day you meet God, or yourself, or anyone else.

However, the main motivation of celibacy is not a practical pro-time distribution problem, is something that is in, in dealing with a God that you are perceived as unique and exclu-yente. At bottom, it is a matter of belonging, is the option belong in your totality, manifested not only by offering your time but

also your life, your body, your spirit and your effort. His, and no one else and, precisely why, for all without distinction, without privileges, like Jesus, the man of the Father and man of all without being tied to anyone.

Celibacy has hard times, but allows a style of freedom needed for all, fully Dispo-ble effective delivery, and to stay where you are most useful, and not where you feel most comfortable. And yet, this service so understood is nothing but the logical consequence of the identification with Jesus Christ, because a priest is much more than the service provided to the co-munity, is someone who has answered a call to a vocation of full union with God, not only identification with being and doing of Jesus Christ but also with his style, and this is what enables it to full delivery.

Yes, you have to pay the price of the loneliness of the prophet, the loneliness of the man of God who, by giving his life completely, to become a witness to the love of God, has to meet the demanding ideal of leaving home, family, even the homeland, and become the wandering voice of God in the midst of his people to revive the project describing Isaiah and repeating Jesus Christ to "proclaim the good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the Lord "14. This is the project, then as a cure if it is assumed fully or is it a cartoon, it's up to each.

Many people also criticized the celibacy alleging infidelity-des celibatarias of some priests, but in fact, infidelity to celibacy is not the result of a problem in containing hor-cuter but the manifestation of a crisis of the spirit. The optional celibacy does not mean the end of the scandals, only change. then we speak of adulterers priests, divorced, battered-res or incestuous. The priesthood, beyond being a way of life, is a gift for identifying with Jesus Christ. When that sense of identification and belonging is broken, then everything becomes unbalanced and priestly being desestructura, precisely because it breaks the cohesive element of all that you are and do. At this point, married or celibate life fails.

Whatever the case, people should sympathize less because we do not practice sex and become more case in what we say and do not want to be heard because it touches the Awareness-ences uncomfortably. We live in a pragmatic society that deep spirituality rankles him and trying to evade the Gospel when it makes him see his flaws. Often whole show that forms around celibacy is a smokescreen for other more obvious and significant problems remain in the appropriate shade of eternal seconds flat.

Moreover, one of the best ways to live celibacy is not to lose the sense of humor. One day, in seminary, one of my colleagues asked a teacher in class. "Father, when you go out into the street, can you look?" (The female sex, of course). The professor framed above his glasses and said, "Look son, if you go out into the street to look, there is something wrong, but if you go out and there is something watchable and do not look, there's something it is very wrong. For example, the other day I passed by gasoline, arrived and before me was a red car, a stunning mulatto got a short that could not be shorter,

opened the trunk and put half in what he would do I at that time, saying the rosary? ".

This same priest told us, half jokingly, half seriously that "the only ones who managed to overcome all carnal desire were mystics and when they succeeded, died the next day."

It is called Marciano and Carmelite, and it was the same that a young girl once said, "Oh Marcianito, I can not understand how you can live without sex!" to which he replied, shrugging: "m'hija, I have no fault that you're gross." ('Gross' Cuba used to refer to a person of little understanding.)

### I decided to jump

Before finishing the course I was on a retreat with Sarduy. Needed not only to clarify my ideas and determine what he would do but join forces to take a step that would change the life I knew. I remember that retreat have become aware for the first time in my life the last verse of Psalm 26: "Wait on the Lord, be brave, take courage, hope in the Lord." Even today, whenever that verse crosses my path, I encouraged my heart.

I know I could have finished medicine. Three years was not too much for a college degree. However, I felt it was my moment, a kind of "now or never". Everything has its time and if it is true that you should not accelerate, think the same way when the time comes you have to jump, no matter what happens. I granted it was taking a risk because my heart was not wide open saying, "Oh, yes, embrace the sacer-dek." Rather, it was the opposite, it was a slow and cautious walk. I understand that I could have asked for a license instead of disenroll of the race, but maybe in the background wanted to burn the ships. I do not know.

When I had all the qualifications I made my resignation letter, thanking my teachers all received in those years and speci-fying that my abandonment of the race was not due to a rejection of the medical profession but to understand that my way was another . I accep-they Tharon the letter, but was not told when I could pick down. In September, when I started my first year of seminary, my nom-bre appeared in all lists of fourth year of medicine. I went down absence.

Sometimes I meet people who say they do not feel prepared-da for release in a job, try something new they want to do, take on a challenge, having children, or having a child more if you want. I have become convinced me that life must push, because it turns out that start in the profession and you're fighting your way, you try that again they were afraid and end up dominating him, or the son comes and solutions you never thought you would appear appear. And both this and that, you find that you do so bad either.

I do not know if there are perfect moments, and I do not know if there is a perfect moment to leave everything and say, "I do cure". Just comes the moment when you realize that you have to take the plunge with your insecurities and your fears in tow. Any decision carries risks, and however much we calculate, in every major decision there is a leap to assume. It is true that it is not jumping like crazy, things have to pensárselas but, for example, who assures us, after a well run courtship, that we are marrying the woman of your life, or is the right man, in the case of a woman? HE

supposed to work, but only supposed, infallibles no guarantees. Same goes with the children, who assures us that all will go well and that we are not bringing the world our biggest headache? What are we gonna do?, breed a cat and make sure that grows well trained?

With faith is the same. There are reasons to believe that God exists but who shows us that God exists? Believe or disbelieve are two options of faith, because we are unable to prove that God exists or does not exist. One look, he asks, thinking, experience, and ultimately decide on what he believes more logical and reasonable, but deciding means betting, jump off saying "I think this is the way."

In any case, always it is preferable jump to do nothing, to become paralyzed by fear of error and consequently suffer. Although the risk of being wrong is real always be worth a try. Even the error experience can serve and give us a vision that would otherwise never have had. In addition, I think that God also uses that and let us commit "errors of choice" to take us wherever he wants and where we had not come otherwise.

I remember the case of a friend who was a doctor and left his spe-tiality of internal medicine to enter the order of the Teresian. Two years later it was clear that religious life was not his way and left the order. Today is a married mother of four children and wife, but does not accept being told that those two years were wasted. She says her current way of taking life had never been the same if it had not been those two years with the Teresian.

Almost always, to say that something "is" is preceded by a time where we can only say: "It seems that it is." I would not advise anyone to take the path of the priesthood if they do not have sufficient clarity to think that the consecration may be the plan of God for his life but, just as it is not common to have a clarity when taking the plunge .

### Make it public

A few months before the end of the third year, Hector asked me to communicate the decision to my family. He explained that he did not consider fair that relatives were sometimes the last to know or found out two days before the others. Also, my family was cris-tiana and I assumed that my decision would not lead them pro-problem and not to divulge prematurely.

So the first time I talked to my parents. They stared without speaking, and I noticed some tension in the air, those in which it seems that it is better not say anything else. Of course, they had to suspect that my conversations with Hector and my trips to Emerald hiding something more than just a spiritual direction, but my hypothesis that non-response was always that to see what happened the tiem-po and I He walked for the third year of medical school, thought he had decided to become a doctor. I had the impression that they did not expect.

The next day I found my mother who was preparing breakfast in the kitchen. "You have not told me anything," I said. His answer made me understand that the thing was not yet digested, "It is true what your father says that if this had not been a possibility you would not be educated as we did." My father was in a small office, between the living and the co-Medor. I went to talk to him.

'You know it's hard,' he said.

-Yes I know.

-Have you thought about it?

I've been thinking almost three years.

And he did not ask anything else, but spent half an hour talking of obedience. Yes, my dad knew me very well.

After the atmosphere was defused and was noticing them more and more happy. When my older sister knew she hugged me crying, di-ciéndome I loved. Judith, the youngest, said one: "Ah, good!" She finished fixing her hair to leave home as a bolide, ie, as usual. «Judith nearly shouted before they outside-, what can not be said yet!". "Yes, I know," he said, slamming the door behind her.

Before finishing the course, I was calling my friends most cer-canos college, all officially atheist, to communicate my decision. The reactions were very different from me did not miss them until I was mad.

I particularly remember the conversation with a friend, Jose Ra-mon. convinced communist, used to tell me not stop until me "atheist or confused," what I said he did not stop until seeing "believer or confused."

One day it was I just went up to him and said, "Joseph, I have to talk to you about something." He looked at me as if reading my mind said, "No, you do not you do that shit." "Yes, I'll do that shit." I had never spoken to anyone at the university about my vocational concerns, and today still amazes me that Jose Ramon it would capture so fast. He asked why, with whom he had to speak to me this idea to take off the head, and if he had to go see "the bishop that". He tried by all means to convince, but ended up promising not to say anything until I made public. Before I go to seminary, I dedicated a Bible and he gave me a Diary of Che in Bolivia which, of course, I still have.

Announce officially missing my community, it was as a group that should know first. However, Sarduy wanted to be told before the youth of the diocese, youth meeting at the end of that year. I was lucky that it ended Sunday when

the youth meeting in Camagüey, the bulk of my community coexistence was the Sanctuary of El Cobre, in Santiago de Cuba. So while the news began to spread, my community entity-raría not until the end of coexistence. It was the advantage of a society without mobile phones.

Willy, however, did not like the idea that my decision to the youth of the diocese was announced before the community for fear that the news would leak. We agreed to speak at the end of in-encounter and ask the youth of Florida to be discreet in days together, to finish the stay at the Copper with the news.

Incredibly, nothing filtered and could announce at the close of coexistence. If the youth meeting was cause for joy, the reaction of my community could not be more elated. I was impressed, because sometimes you are not aware of the love that others can have you, and people were happy. And I was impressed people I saw lie to mourn, who came and embraced me strong, saying nothing and saying everything. There are faces and looks of that day-servo still in my memory.

My mother was not there. Julia, my godmother, was dying slow after two years and suffering from cancer, and my mother had said that if Julia died in those days she did not forgive not have been at his side. Julia died a few weeks later. I went to his house when we returned from El Cobre, but I never saw her again conscious.

That trip was for me a grace and a gift, because they were days when I could put everything in the hands of the Virgin, the path but also what began and, above all, my desire for a yes that was beyond my brain .

When we returned to Florida from El Cobre the news had spread. The reactions were as different as the people, from the most sincere joy to the most radical disapproval. There were people who came to encourage me or to tell me that "seen it coming" and of course, there were those who told me I did not understand or was committing the greatest stupidity of my life.

I will not say that negative reactions did not affect me, especially because among those who did not understand my decision was very close to me and affectively important people, but the decisions of life can not be taken following the criteria of the people. I came to mind a phrase he had read and saying something like: "I've spent my life worried about what people thought of me, and now I realize that very few people ever thought of me" . It is a mistake to consider what people think about you, but I had to think of me because if I was not happy with myself at the end of the road, it would not be able to make anyone happy, no matter how successful social, professional or economic that might have been. I knew I was playing a lot, but it was just that, my bet.



# Seminarian

## Santiago de Cuba

Two weeks before the end of the summer and at the gates entering the seminary, fears returned, but decided to ignore them. I had given my word, formally requested my entry to the seminary and pe-dido downward college, so I thought I would enter though I burst.

I started with two other seminarians of my diocese, which would come out after a while. Our entrance was scheduled for after September 8, feast of the Virgin of Charity, Patroness of Cuba and the festival of the Virgin throughout the country. However, there was a delay of almost two weeks.

Throughout Cuba were only two seminars, San Basilio Magno, in Santiago de Cuba, where did the first two years of Philosophy and Humanities, and the seminary San Carlos and San Ambrosio, in Havana, where the rest was done, two years of philosophy and four of theology. That year, however, San Carlos began to also offer the first two years of Philosophy. At the time of starting the course, the bishops were in the visit Ad Limina in Rome, and Sarduy, who was our responsibility, decided to wait for our bishop regre-sara to decide whether we were sent to Havana or Santiago. (The visit ad limina, ie, "the thresholds of the apostles," referring to St. Peter and St. Paul, is a visit that the bishops of each nation make to Rome to meet with the successor of St. Peter, expressing communion with him and to account for the state of their dioceses. usually done every five years.)

Archbishop Adolfo decided to send to Santiago and there we went, nerviosillos all. Santiago seminar is on top of a hill and see the sea in the distance, mountains with stunning sunsets. The day was clear and sunny formidably.

We opened the door a seminarian from the Diocese is now Bayamo-Manzanillo (at that time still belonged to Santiago), Luis Carlos, also first year and would become my friend and brother. It was Cauto Cristo, a village in the present province of Granma. A little older than me but much more shaken-and-trenado- for life. He had an experience of the world to which I was a baby. Transparent, open, witty, started from very soon my companion of adventures, with Rene, Palma Soriano, who over the years discovered that the priesthood was not his way.

Luis Carlos took me much affection and early-oped a natural tendency to take care of myself. He said I was too naive and had to "espabilarme". One afternoon we had a solemn Mass celebrated at the seminar. When finished, he arrived in the sacristy, where we changed, approached and said: Isn't saw how I was looking twinkie?

The "twinkie" was one of the girls in the neighborhood famous for its insistence on "catch men", though not in itself evangelical sense. I remember looking at Luis Carlos with an expression that he had to look silly. 'No,' I said, I was attending the procession.

Luis Carlos put his hands to his head as he said: "You are going to violate, pussy, so I have to sneak caring!". Santiago experience marked my life a lot. The seminar was carried Interdiocesan but the Jesuits. Machin was the rector and he had a team of four priests: Ramon Rivas, Guillermo, a Mexican-looking gringo, Rovira, a Catalan Catalan and P. Herrera, who we called "boy". Completed the picture a Jesuit brother, "hemano Gómez" which, among other things, made some sweet dried figs as to challenge the will of the espatano diabetic. (Spartan eye will that what you mean?) The seminar had been in its infancy in El Cobre, near the shrine of the Virgin of Charity, but then had moved to a neighborhood of Santiago seeking greater integration into the population. It was a poor and tough neighborhood with a high degree of crime, such we could see more than once to see removed our clothes hanging on the ropes.

The team was good. Machin be revealed as not only intelligent and academically capable but as the person who lives authority from within man and therefore has no need for give-trarle anyone who's boss. With Machin could discuss anything or manage any permit application without conflict. Was a good listener, he was able to assess your reasons and if the answer was no, there was always a reason and, I remember, a reason valid enough. When we put a test one moment there were doubts if he stayed, then departed leaving us alone. Off-state was taken for one who wants to be cured must be honest with yourself and do not need to be watching him. When we finished the exam we hung on your door, he not even picked him. Ramon Rivas was tiny, but "torbellínico". Always active and, above all, incisive and sharp. Worth conver-sar sit with him on any subject he knew to show edges that were not always obvious. Everyone said it was very good-ment accompanies spiritual. Rovira, Catalan, had little time in Cuba. It was the sabidu-ria and authority. More seriously, affordable although severe, was embodied-ing discipline.

William was the other side of the river. Spontaneous, creative and a little poet even. His world was not the disciplinary rules but of fidelity in freedom. His obsession was to live from inner freedom and the world's poorest people.

Herrerias, "the child" was the joy of the house. Originally from Palencia, already working in Cuba when the Revolution triumphed. It was part of the list of religious expel that drafted the government in the year 61 and therefore destined to leave the country on the boat La Covadonga. However, he began to move from one house to another Jesuit constantly, so that never found and the ship sailed to Spain without him.

Brother Gomez, elderly, took care of the maintenance of the house and had in the back of a room full of junk intoca-bles were his kingdom and domain. In principle, everything was fine, but almost a month after arriving at the seminar had not yet chosen a spiritual director. I had no one to talk to, think aloud and do witness my personal process. The trainers were good, but did not feel enough chemistry with none to ask you accompanying.

## Juan de Dios

About a month after the start of the course, came a new priest, John of God. He was born in Holguin, eastern Cuba, but his family had moved to Havana long time. He had just arrived from Rome, studying spirituality in La Gregoria-na, and the Society of Jesus had intended the seminary of Santiago.

He arrived one morning, smiling and friendly to everyone. At lunchtime I met with him at the table. That day I had stew of beans and someone had put Tabasco sauce on the table. When John, wearing a light blue shirt, was to serve it, his shirt splattered inadvertently broth with beans. His reaction was a soft, "Thank you, Lord." I kept eating up my beans like that, but I thought, "This is either a fool" misticoide ", or the person I'm looking for."

It did not take long for John to attract the attention of a number of seminarians, and shortly afterwards asked him to be my spiritual director. I said yes to the first, but give me a little more time to know him better. However, the more I listened and lived with him, he was convinced that he was the person I needed. Luis Carlos, René and several others also decided to make their process with him.

At our first meeting I put two limits. He said that the important thing was that I grew up, and asked me if as time went on I saw that was not what I expected, she told him with full confidence and change his spiritual director. "And the second thing he told me is that you are clear that I will work with the data that you give me, if I give me false or incomplete data will not waste time, and you'll lose. I'm only asking you to be honest. "

And I fulfilled this request. Helped by training the years with Hector and Sarduy, I went with John as transparent as could be, and I got to play with him all the background that my age and time allowed me to play. Juan got to know perhaps as nobody has ever done, and I always say that good to talk to John was that when I say green, green he understood the tone in which he said it. Eventually, John just enough for you to look-me know how he was my soul.

However, starting to open up to John was the beginning of a painful journey. Entrance, living wrapped in a haloed vision of myself. He came from a family of Christian tradition Foolproof, had faced bad times, he had been a soldier in the trenches, siem-pre I had behaved as a "good boy." Well, the best of the best, the one that even God should be grateful for his dedication of a lifetime.

John was given the task of confronting leave my deepest truths: my fears, my complexes, my repressions, my sophisticates-das autodefensas and, above all, my insecurity dressed pride.

I was like those amphoras submerged sea and weather coated coral and shells. When the jar is brought to light, its appearance may even be tremendous, but if you want to recover its originality, you need someone starts to dismantle gradually added rooted in its structure. That was the patient work of John that, to the extent that accompanied my vocational process, seemed to be telling the amphora, hammer in hand: "This is false, out; this is not yours, out; this is useless outside. " It did not take too long, drawers that had never been opened and had started to ventilate them more than Cucara-chas. The perfect and flawless Alberto began to collapse under the weight of self-evident truths.

### Jesuit style

Initially, the road became unbearable. True to style Jesuit, Juan used to not give me answers or point me immediately what was wrong, much less to tell me what I had to do. I was telling him my life, my motives and my questions. He only question points to ask questions that I had never raised me-do, to put my thoughts in a broader framework that made me look at things from other points of view.

I never responded to me why? but I myself asked me to give me an answer, recalándome I had to learn to think for myself, I was the first who had to take questions and try to answer the first. We said that foreign aid was very valuable but always in team spirit, not of substitution. I could not help but remember the day when someone told me the joke about the woman who tells a Jesuit priest: " 'Father, is it true that the Jesuits always answer a question with another question" To which the priest replied: "And you who he told you that, ma'am?".

Another component of his style was that, without being hurtful and never ironic, was true to the brutality. He knew how to do that you felt loved beyond how well you decided to behave, your availability to walk or that you would prefer to sit by the roadside. And from the love you made it easier to digest hardness to you I would have preferred not to confront truths. Also, when I had to say something that could be tough he told you so casually, as if I were commenting on the weather, as an obvious and evident fact.

At first it was like swallowing dry and feel that the package does not go down, but then, although never stopped being a little hard, became comfortable and I saved a lot of time and energy. As we saw, told him what he had said, he thought or done, and I tried to interpret my motives, where he thought he had been so honest and clean and where cloudy. It is a mechanism that helps to be ever more aware of self and allows one progressively more able to handle life feel.

Moreover, John, knew always respect my rhythm and my moments. From the beginning had made it clear that the protagonists of the process were the Holy Spirit and I, and that he was simply a witness to my process. He accepted the term spiritual director to consider it the lesser evil, because he did not direct or intended to lead anyone. "It's your life, Pucho was her loving way to call because Luis Carlos and Rene were also Puchos-, I'll walk and you escu-cho, but I can not walk for you." How would John of God wanted a more directive, more like 'this is done, this is not done and do not ask. " Sometimes we yearn children mechanisms that do grow but they give us security and we disclaim responsibility to come to our own conclusions. Often the fear of making our own decisions and assume-mir the consequences of our actions.

With John it was clear, I would not give me answers made not shorten my way to the solutions and not drag me if I decided not walk. I remember the times I told him I had to confess, or I had to talk to him about this or that subject, but he had no desire or that I was not able to do so. He never pressured me. "Well he used to decirme- when you sit in with-conditions, come." And point. John knew, as we all know, there are times when we like to difficult for others to pass our hands and we sympathize a little, but he was immune to that kind of blackmail. Its principle was blunt: "It is you who have to walk, you decide the pace."

## A score

The process with Juan de Dios worked, but I was still pending with God. God "mad at me" kept looking at me with a straight face, perhaps because, somehow, in the depths of me, I still maintained the irrational idea that had to deserve the love of God. Worse, that the way to ensure the love of God was leading a perfect life. Shortly after entering the seminary he had got into the habit of staying at I pray alone at night in the chapel, after Com-plete, community prayer marking the end of the day. Just a few more minutes, in a kind of "you and me".

One night distracted me from my prayer. I suddenly came to mind first and then my only nephew, who was about four years. I loved that child, lively and awake. I got carried away by what he felt and his memory brought a wealth of sensible affection. I realized that my love for that boy was a mo-do safe from any eventuality. If he went to him and he handed me his hands and gave me a hug, I was happy. If, however, rejected me or, to hold him, I dirtied, or vomited me up as it did more than once when he was pequeño-, I did not like, but I could not think why stop loving. I also realized that if tomorrow my nephew received a Nobel prize, I would be proud, but I would simply for being my nephew, not the Nobel prize. Moreover, if one day ended up being a criminal, a drug addict or an alcoholic, I would not like, what its-friría certainly, but I still want. In any case, not wanting-it or turn my back was out of the question. It was that the moment I said, "This is love without conditions" and looked almost automatically the Tabernacle and discovered a God who had stopped being angry. I felt embraced by God in-returned in Him, in the deepest spiritual experience and I've never had affection dex-esteem. I realized that if I was able to love the way I loved my nephew, how would then the love of God to me, to everyone.

In two seconds I understood from the gut what had so often read in Scripture only with my mind, that both had committed priests in convey: that the love of God is incon-conditional, which is above our acts, that God is not that the same thing but what we do, whatever we do, you can not not love us, or feel rejected, even being annoying. His love for us is safe from any eventuality, even our rejection. We love although I despise, even-we want you close the door, it will remain faithful to his love although we choose "no" eternal.

I realized then that the commandments are only means and not ends in themselves and to comply with them is not the ideal of Christian life, but only part of the beginning. I saw the commandments as ways of freedom whose purpose is simply to make us able to understand the love of God and connect with him. We have not been given as a condition to earn the love of God, because you can not expect to win something that is given to us for free and continuous supply.

The commandments are not the goal of the relationship with God but are the way that allows you to understand your eternal and untouchable love for you, the way of life in a spirit of belonging and connection that leads to harmony. Nothing we can do to make God love us more and nothing we can do to cause God love us less. We can only choose to accept or reject what is offered to us, open up or close ourselves to the love that is, it has always been and will remain beyond any circumstance. When a young man out of addiction to alcohol or drugs, for instance, the main effect is not that their parents or their friends begin to love him more, but that is capable of in-tender and connect with the I love that has been there for a long time but he was unable to see.

So he had heard so many times say that the ideal of Christian life were not the commandments but the beatitudes. The beatitudes I then presented as the status of the person who has understood the love of God has opened to him, has opted for him and does not care about the price you have to pay in order to remain faithful to that love.

I was never the same thereafter, because that night the Alberto judge and jailer, uncompromising guardian of the law by law, was disarmed and started becoming human. Since then I do not think I've been more sinner than before, but first I authorize to not be perfect, I gave permission to make mistakes and I began to accept that had the right to be wrong.

The world ceased to be a place to impose the law of God and purify of sin, and became a place to live with others who were wrong, but they were not so bad and could not be defined by their mistakes. From there I started learning to listen in a different way, no ready-made answers based on what "should be" or what "has to be," and I began to make an effort to understand rather than judge. I discovered the Gospel and invite-ing and understood the strength of the proposal that Christ pronounces many times when speaking of accession to the Kingdom of his Father: "If you want ...".

We are definitely made to love, but true love is only possible from the experience of being loved, and have been, despite the errors and imperfections themselves. Not learn to recognize unlovable despite the weaknesses and limitations is a disadvantage, because it makes you proud and pitiless (or perhaps actually sad, isolated, broken ...)

My relationship with God changed from that day. I stopped worrying about "be in order" for "be good" and just started to accept that God walks with me and with me at all times and in every decision. The deal with God became more fluid because I realized that what mattered was not whether or not goofed, but allowed to be present in the construction of my days. Also, I lost my fear of dealing with it certain themes and content of my prayer became more what I was, what I felt and lived, instead of asking insistently than it should be.

When years later studied Theology Law of the gra-duality, ie, the need to present the Christian ideal considering to open up to that ideal every person needs to go a gradual way according to the time, and the base was assumed. It was very easy to understand and accept that accompany a person on their way to God, we must take into account all that has been and what is, its past history and its present, its weaknesses and its strengths. It builds from there.

The experience of that night left a perennial echo. From that moment, in every time and situation it has remained serenity source of strength and a sense of closeness and a permanent echo: "Whatever happens, whatever you do, do not I can not love you."

## Warnings

Life in the seminary had many components: prayer, classes, study, living, spiritual accompaniment, sport, teamwork and weekends, cleaning and pastoral seminar at al-guna parish. In this first stage core academic subjects were philosophy. The goal was not only to know the history of philosophical thought of humanity but supported in this and with the help of other subjects of philosophical reflection, learning to think, that is not little.

John of God remember us much insisted on this point. We remembered that as priests would receive one day mu-cha people who come to us to ask us a problem or ask-us advice, but they would not by our ability to be friendly but looking reflection and inner experience of man God, and here were not worth recipes.

"You said to himself -we are going to work with people, and if a person breaks broke, and it is very difficult to remake it." Years later, in Havana, another priest would say, 'Gather well, because sometimes one gives a very well-intentioned but very misguided advice, and can destroy a person with the best of intentions. "

It is much insisted foster in us a spirit of studio I could stay after ordination. "A priest must read, because if you do not, it is not renewed or is updated, and ends while maintaining the same speech. Then it happens that it has been twenty years in a parish and his last homily is identical to the first. " Another of our trainers would be even more drastic: "Cures not to study or read -we said to himself commits a grave sin, and when I say serious; I say mortal. "

With the homilies spent as much. According to our teacher, there were two basic principles to keep in mind before learning the oratorical techniques. The first: "Never, under any circumstances, under any circumstances, talk shit." Second: "The homilies that are like miniskirts, short and teach a lot".

These criteria have remained a wake-up call. The priests are part of those few privileged people that people come to listen, and listen to us because through the word of God we are called to preach, seeking answers. They are RESPONSE-tas they need to live, to make sense of what they do, assess whether they are getting along their existence, forgive receiving wounds and repair they cause. It has never ceased to amaze see in a temple, at the time of the homily, to elderly people with au to your hearing, stand and stick to the speakers, to hear better. You can not take lightly that need, nor is it ethical to say the first thing that comes to mind because you have not prepared, or do a mock homily to cover the time. This is not to entertain but to enlighten, but if we live unenlightened priests inside, we have a proble-ma, and very fat.

People say sometimes that does not support the homilies, but how to endure anything if vapid and hollow? How is it that with all the richness of the Gospel which is transmitted is insubstantial, decaffeinated and irrelevant message? People go to church to nurture their faith, not to listen threats or complaints, church or political speeches economic needs misplaced. We insist that people go to Mass, but we wonder whether people have found in this Mass the answers you need, or if you have gone the same or worse as he entered, with the same doubts and contradictions-tions in their mind and heart. If what you hear there is a light break into the darkness themselves, then the natural reaction is to disconnect or simply not return.

Santa Monica insisted her son Augustine, that it is off-cuchar homilies of Bishop Ambrose in Milan. Augustine one day he agreed to go, and sat in the last pew. The following Sunday vol-saw, and sat closer, and remained so, advancing ranks, increasingly attentive, while the preaching of Ambrose, the conquered and opened the horizon that would lead to their total surrender to God. They say that mothers do not want their daughters listen to St. Ambrose, because ended up entering a convent. My bishop, Adolfo used to repeat a phrase much when he spoke of "difficult" sites faith: "There is no cold places, but cold pastors."

The seminar had theory and practice public speaking techniques, but we always insisted that the most important thing was to speak from our own journey of faith, because that was what came to people. In fact, I have met clumsy priests in speaking, without bri-ght examples and elegant phrases, but explaining the Gospel from his experience of faith, from what they discovered in their relationship with God, and of them I keep lights that follow breaking (or avoiding) my darkness.

## Learning to focus

Be a priest can not be improvised. It is necessary to follow a training process that involves not only acquire knowledge. The priest is not a scholar, not a counselor, not a problem solver. He is an apostle, a witness. Have to learn a new way of living, centering his life in God from God, reach people.

The great problem of our time is that we live "de-centered". Tucked into a myriad of things, pressured by the responsibilities, overwhelmed and out of time, end up feeling atomized. Incredibly, instead of setting priorities or stop not only to stabilize but to take stock and rearrange our priorities, it gives the impression that we are convinced that there is no other way to live. We carry and accelerate more and therefore we sacrifice time it really matter-you, that of being alone with ourselves, with those we love and God. And this is a virus that can infect anyone at any time of life, and to be able to recognize and tackle on time.

In my case, one of the first things John of God made me discover and accept living was fired. It is covering more than could materially and was in a thousand things at once.

Not easy to learn to stop. The first step, we de-cyan, is to find a rhythm of life that allows not only be aware of what you do but enjoy it. I once knew a priest who told me: "When I'm doing something and not enjoy myself, I know something I'm wrong." And it is true that the acceleration cut the enjoyment of life, which becomes an eternal steeplechase interspersed with small breaths. Obviously, opt for a lifestyle less estere-sante involves choosing, prioritize and, above all, learn to say and to say NO. Nobody has time for everything you want to do and, moreover, it remains true that "time does not forgive what is done out of time."

The aim of this training was to learn to give-us time to live connected with our own inner world: what we felt, what we experienced, what life was dicien-do of ourselves and those with whom we relacionábamos .

If this is not done, it is easy for us to become blind, unable to perceive our inner and processes still unable to understand what others are experiencing. When you get away from yourself and the way of God in you, you move away from others. It can happen to want that-: spouses, parents, children, friends ..., and the priests with their communi-ties. It's as if little by little we began to talk in different languages to discover one day that we are simply strangers to each other. We arrived at this point, lived together while we live in different worlds.

Make contact with oneself meant to discover, to light, be aware not only of the virtues and personal strengths, but also the wounds, weaknesses, limitations. "The seminario -we said Juan, is not a tunnel they have to go to, at last !, be cures. Priestly ordination does not remove the proble-mas, rather increases them, and they do not discover and work here, then it will be a pending problem. "

John knew that however much one life work, not lle-ga to priestly ordination with all deficiencies, as resolved. You are not reached to professional life, or marriage, or parenting a resolute yet, but we insisted that we sought to reach the end of our seminary training with the greatest possible clarity about ourselves. According to him, learn to live involves the wisdom to know what is basically one person, how it has influenced us our history where our strengths and problem are, what we face alone and under what circumstances need help. In short, be aware of how we react to difficulties and challenges and be able to manage our personal map, which also is prior to a healing path step.



Juan was based on the fact that all have something to heal. For him, people are not divided between those who need to heal something and those who do not, but between those who recognize that they have things that heal and those who take refuge in the idea that everything has always been very good in his life and problems are invariably others. That is why we insisted that one extreme to avoid is obsessed with personal face shortcomings, but another is to endeavor to not see them or remove all weight and value.

Heal something could mean two things. One, overcome the problem, eradicate it completely. Another which for John was the most commonly mechanism handle it. Driving meant not only know the problem but recognize how, when, where affects us, and how we can neutralize their effect, so that we can live with it without having it take over us. John warned us that there are negative elements in our person that worked can be kept at bay, controlled, even foreseen, but that will always be there, present in some way, with very little chance of being eliminated. With them we must learn to live together, driving them to prevent them from interfering in the way we want to do.

A classic example to understand the sense of "handle" is alcoholism, which as such will not heal ever. A person who has become an alcoholic always will be, but you can learn to not drink and live the rest of their days in the greatest simplicity. This makes one understand, in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, someone who says, "I am an alcoholic and twenty years ago I do not drink." They are people who have recognized the existence of a problem and have APREN-dido to manage own coordinates so that their tendency to alcohol does not mean a difficulty or a trap.

Our seminary training was to learn how to apply this principle to all those burdens that would hinder our freedom and we became less available for others. Evidently, the first condition was the need to have a great honesty to oneself.

### Between freedom and free will

Every year the seminary became a retreat than a week. It was a long and strong experience of prayer that is usually placed at the beginning of the course. They were days of reflection and personal prayer in a sober-te meditation and silence. The withdrawal of the first year we did already started the course and directed Juan de Dios. We moved to El Cobre, to the retirement home and coexistence of the Archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba, next to the shrine of Our Lady of Charity.

I had high expectations. That retreat was an opportunity to organize my ideas and have enough time to say them. However, if something has endured in my experience that memory was because during those days, all the anxiety that had experimented at the beginning of my vocational process seemed suddenly revived and multiply. One night, after the final meditation of the day, I went to talk to John of God, on this, walking with him in the forecourt in front of the retirement home. John kept telling me to define my concern, he tried to put a name, but I was unable to decipher. That conversation did not help me much, except to vent. I did not know my identify the source of discomfort and John was not a magician to guess, plus at that time I hardly knew.

The retreat ended without me clarify me, and that feeling of apprehension against something undefined kept reappearing every time we made an experience of deep prayer. It was years before that, one day, close and my ordination, I made clear why.

It was fear of freedom. Over the years the seminary had been making me see that often call freedom to what we might define rather as autonomy. An important light came the day buy-I gave that freedom is not doing what one he pleases, but the ability to choose the greater good. Evil does not release. Ata evil even when it is done deliberately and even when they enjoy.

I learned the technical phrase of "free will", which said in "understandable" precisely means the possibility of making any decisions, good or bad, and do what we want. Freedom is something else, it is to have the light and courage to choose what is right and do not always coincide with what we like, what we "should" or what we would do. Letters of the devil to his nephew, C. S. Lewis said: "The best trap of the devil is making us believe that evil is liberating."

I was afraid of freedom. He had learned to see the sacer-dek in key soldier, who is under the command of a Supe-rior called "the God of Jesus Christ" and who is able to stand in front of the upper and say, "To order" . But if I became docile, if I was guided, how far I would ask my superior ?, how far I would walk?

On the one hand, it is true that our humanity likes aco-modarse, favoring their own interests, seek assurances perso-nal and even living income but on the other hand, it is also true that growing up means being able to risk those achieved securities and sacrificing comfort themselves, voluntarily refuse to live off the income. I returned to my mind the same thought that had so often made me: God is an "always more" . If one provides honest-mind to God their freedom, their ability to choose the greater good, to live with a God-backpack and hiking boots, but if you say 'here' and turns your life to enjoy their comfortable small private garden, will become deaf to the claims of God asking him to conquer the horizon.

In fact, there are people, priests included, who live with what I call flat horizons, but deep life is not possible when you have flat horizons, because what does not challenge and challenges not move, and the lack of movement is death. When the ability to feed illusions and challenges the person is immersed (sometimes without noticing-lo) in the monotony and routine, the horizons are gradually flattened and then the power is off and one is immersed in coor old age is lost -mica. Barefoot Martin wrote that: "There are people who retired life long before he retired from work." And this happens when we bury the deepest longings and lose the illusions that keep us vital or simply when we settled into a kind of life in which we become increasingly demanding and me-we helpful.

Abraham looked when you leave home and family and goes to a place "that I will show you" -go, very clear and precise-, or Moses, fugitive and sentenced to death, returning to Egypt to ask Pharaoh the freedom of a people or Jeremiah Change Facing a nation that the last thing he wanted to hear was the voice of God. Mary looked acep-Tando a project that would pierce her soul, or John the Baptist beheaded by his fidelity to the truth. He saw Jesus taking to the end the consequences of their docility to the Father and the disciples being eliminated one by one. He contemplated the history of the Church, with so many examples of that mixture of love, pain and heroism that called-mos holiness and we recognize as exemplary.

When you walk through the characters in the Bible or the his-tory reviewing of the Church, it becomes clear that God takes us seriously and that if we open ourselves to His will, He will not play with us. God will, we will launch even we never foresaw, but will not give us more security than the one that offers the Scripture from one end to the other: "Do not be afraid, I am with you".

I remember once I told John of God: "To me God will not ask me what to San Francisco." John shrugged and replied, "Do not you asked moment, God can ask that-WANT anything at any time."

Despite having taken the step of entering the seminary, I knew my heart was the brake on to God's plan. I had never liked things halfway, and I knew that if my way through the seminar confirmed that the priesthood was my vocation and end-ba to accept this call, did not want to be a priest half. On the one hand, this attitude seemed nonnegotiable, but on the other, the idea of a mediocre priesthood terrified me.

"What I like about you 'I once told John of God, is that you look like crossing a wooden bridge, such as particles of Peli-west, and you grabbed the rope and fumbling the steps di -ciendo: "Alas, alas !, how scary, how scary!", but you keep walking. That's what matters to me. "

### Specialist fears

The day actually made my old dream of parachuting, the instructor asked me nothing introduce ourselves: 'Do you feel ready to jump?' And I replied: "Years ago I'm ready."

I do not consider myself one of those people who claim not to be afraid of anything. On the contrary, fear has been my traveling companion for a long time. That feeling of insecurity to something that can hurt you and you do not control has visited many times as I wanted. But I've learned to talk to my fears. I have been com-prizing to be afraid, it is not only normal but in many cases it is normal, and that the problem is not to feel fear but be paralyzed by it. The greatest weapon of fear is their ability to create ghosts, because ghosts terrify and terror clawing into the ground.

I have talked with many people who struggle not to be afraid, and this claim is absurd, because what you feel is not controlled, coming, going, it is or is not. I do not usually tell people "do not be afraid 'is released but" in spite of fear. " I discovered that when, despite the fear, overcome paralysis and do what you-nemos to do, we discover that, or nothing happens, because what

frightened was a ghost of the mind that evaporates when we launched, or spend what we feared, but then we realize that we have the ability to cope and deal with it. In either of the two variants, we grow.

The experience of my way to God has been very brand-da by fear: a wrong, to not reach the end, not measuring up, to do things wrong ... and I had to break the paralysis again and again . Perhaps this is why I insist so much that the criterion to walk through life is not having fears but know go ahead despite them, just as the important thing in life is not no problems but knowing continue despite them . In this long journey to face fears, the first thing I had to do was learn to name them. Fears are like ghosts, they have no body, so we can not fight them. When we name them, we give body to the ghosts and then we can fight them, because we know what we enfren-tamos.

It is true that sometimes our fears have names we do not like, humiliate us or shame us, but the reality is what it is and it makes no sense to pretend we do not see what lies ahead.

## Surf and training

In addition to this strange feeling that over the years identify as fear of freedom, it was another important experience in that first retreat at Copper: dryness in prayer. We began the retreat on a Sunday night. When we finished receiving the pun-tos meditation I went to pray and I felt like a spring that gushed. "This retreat will be the most" I thought.

However, the next day I woke up like a tile placed in the midday sun, tasteless and dry, without any desire to pray without feeling the presence of God anywhere. And it was the first eight days where the only thing we would do was pray.

Fortunately I took it calmly and perhaps because of that came a new intuition. I began to understand that God is always better, feel or not, and that prayer is not something that is activated when you feel God and discarded when it does not feel. Gradually I learned that prayer is simply being with God, you feel like you feel, exultant or depressed, elated or dry, as the friend who you book time and with whom you share your life, in any situation.

It seemed that God wanted to make this clear, because that emotional dryness about God lasted months. It was the first of many, but I think I healed health. I've gone through times of more and less fidelity to prayer, but I think I've never done it again rely on my time for God than or stop feeling sorry at all times. I know that He is, and I live grounded in that certainty. If I feel your presence better, but if I can only say simple: I know you're purely cerebral, nothing happens. I know you are and I do have to raise my soul to Him to be heard.

It is the same dynamic of what we define as faith. Faith does not exclude the sensitive affection, but faith is above all a certainty, the cer-teza of his love and presence. It may be accompanied or not experience emotional, commonly mentioned as "feel God", but goes beyond faith, and not grow or mature as dependent on that sensitive affection.

Of course, dryness of affection is not pleasant nor does the easy way. These are moments as uphill as when life turns upside down and everything seems to goes backwards. There are times when asked where God has gotten even intersperse some inelegant word between "where" and "meti-do".

I have learned to call "training". I think God now and then gets into the skin of coach and throws us on track. At first it is hard and we are fatal. When not train, the body becomes weak, we are weak and everything costs more. And back to the exercises always gives us a first night we hurt to the soul. In the inner life, this training is worse. The experience of God's absence costs: wonder why we

We complained feel we can not, we just gave, that is unjust, God is gone and left us alone, perhaps when they most NEEDS-tabamos. However, in the end, when everything happens, when we assume that situation and continue forward, we are strengthened and we feel that we can return to beat us with the world. It helps a lot not take too much to heart difficulties. I remember once I talked about this in a homily and a few days later I ran into one of my parishioners on the street. He was fast and with an expression of despondency. "How are you?" I asked in passing. She, without stopping, greeted me with her hand as she said, "Here, in between-tinging!".

## The miseries of Mother Church

My experience at the seminar also allowed me to meet a world that until then had not noticed: the miseries of the Church.

I was born and raised in a very healthy church environment. My community of Florida was united, open and apostolic. I do not remember hearing at home no adverse comment on the community, nor never saw anything scandalous. People were not perfect as it is nowhere, but overall the ecclesial community environment my mother was very positive.

Similarly, priests and nuns who went cone-ciendo in my childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, were optimal. They were not perfect, and I was aware of his mistakes, but I think that deep down there was a desire to unify forces all work for a common cause called Church and Kingdom of God.

When the seminar I started hearing that if such Congregation rivaled such other or if the priest or nun may have said or done such barbarity, I realized that my vision of the Church was, as she said to me once a priest, "very beautiful, but very ingenua". It is not easy suddenly find dirt on what you have loved since childhood as something clear and neat. It's like when you grow and one day, without understanding exactly how, you realize that your parents are not perfect, the heroes of your childhood are human consistency under costumes flawless yourself wove them, and "they were happily ever after" is not the real end of the story.

"In the Church 'I would say John of God are getting very bright and dusty, and you have to fight not only because the dust will not stick but remove it when you find it." It was hard, especially when the miseries of the Church take-ban in the light not to seek solutions or to learn from them, and me-us even to pray for what was wrong, but as sterile criticism, sometimes without consider that the person who was in front might not have the ability to understand the human sinner and fragile side of the church. There are times when we speak regardless of the damage we can do to those present, especially if they are small, and we are so irresponsible as an elephant in a china shop.

Today I think that faith is not an adult until he stumbles upon the inconsistencies of the Church, the whole Church hierarchy and lay-do, because if it is true that there are things that scandalized in the depo-sity of priestly ministry also it is the same among the lay members. One of the priests of my diocese put a sign on the door of his church that read: "We are not here because we are good but because we want to be."

All faith needs to prove, because a love, no love is not solidified, while not had to suffer for it. The guarantee of love is suffering. Only when it has had to suffer for something or someone who loves and is able to remain faithful and keep betting on love first, only then the person reaches a strength that had not before. Love is tested in the difficulties, the problems in the disease, minor errors and these biggest mistakes you never would have committed but definitely'll Stay-ceramic hob in history and time and whose acceptance is only possible with large dose of forgiveness and understanding.

In life there are many situations that test faith and are more difficult to accept and understand that the errors of the Church. However, meeting the miseries of the Church and decide, from love, remain faithful and fight for it from within, it offers optimum opportunity for faith matures and becomes more adult. I am in total

agreement with which he wrote that "the first step to reform the Church is to stay inside."

Moreover, without denying the darkness, we can not forget that the Church is made by human beings, who aspire to an ideal that is woven into everyday life, between light and dark, good and bad decisions. We all want to be good at what we do, whether as students, workers, friends, spouses, children or parents; we do well and we try, but that does not prevent falls, errors, stumbles, setbacks. It is important to ask dedication and commitment, but it's crazy continuous perfection ask.

Over the years I have been better off knowing my parents, their virtues and weaknesses. What I discovered an ordinary day turned out to be true: they were not perfect. In our education made mistakes, some things maybe he lacked vision, in certain punishments were perhaps too hard, or maybe it was just the way we perceive it. But we always loved and tried to do my best. If you were born again, I not want it to be in another family, yet can never change me surnames. Similarly, if you were born again, he would also grow as a son of the Church.  
three levels

Love is not easy, because to love is to give, exercising the ability to grant that makes us increasingly less earrings and other earrings ourselves, and making the happiness of the other food for our own happiness.

This does not remove our need to receive. The ideal of the total donation is a myth. You can make much progress in the ability to give and take and make thicker the arrow out, which indicates what one offers, but always need to receive from others, feel loved and accepted.

In the way of growth in love, Juan de Dios ha-blaba us three levels he applied to deal with God, but in fact are valid for all human relationships.

The first is black and white: what is OK and what is not, what is right and what is not. It is the most basic level, the same as translated into a friendship or relationship means having clear what can enter into this relationship and what can not enter.

The second level is "what is God and what is not of God." There are things that are not sins, but they are not of God, and things that are not sent, but they are of God. It's like when a relation you know there are things that would feel good to your partner, but if not do nothing will happen, do not the demand. Similarly, you know that there are things that if you do, will upset your partner, but that will pass and there will not even discussion about it. These are things that help or hinder the relationship, but they are inserted into a long-term path.

And the third level is the detail, delicacy to God, that which can never be legislated and maybe even suggested, which will never ask anyone and will always belong to the most intimate sphere of your relationship with God. Born here offerings to God that spring from the most disinterested and spontaneous, freer love. It's like when the husband not only gives a flower to his wife but that flower that she likes best, or when a mother or a father raise their young children tickling and tucking them into bed or simply when a smile is given away, just-so.

No institution in this world never legislate on Regular flowers, how to wake the children or how to use the smile. We can even do without all this, but life will never be the same without it.

"They'll come -we days Juan- warned that you have reached a level of relationship with God or their delivery with which everyone will be happy communi-ties. No one will demand more, but you know, in conscience, they can continue to grow, both in their relationship with God and in service to the community, and if they have the mentality to go beyond will end up stagnating or simply learn to function as priests. " "Stagnate", "work" were damn words, cancer of any relationship: with God, with oneself, with others, even with a profession. And it is unfortunately true. Many people, priests or priests, married or single, end well, operating, adjusting so that the gears work and make moving the machinery, but lifeless, like a human body sustained by breathing artificial.

Eventually known functional many people, priests and mon-jas, but also married men and women, off families, workers without hope, faith tradition. People who had learned to survive vegetating-do and had agreed with that style. People standing despite having functional tissue gears.

Three times a year the seminar were leaving to go to our diocese at Easter, to help in a parish that assigned us; at Christmas, when we insisted that you dedicate time to the family; and in summer, when we had time to go out with the family, seeing friends and also to assist in the activities that organized the diocese. Our holiday ended nine days before the celebration of the feast of the Virgin of Charity, on September 8, when we were located in a parish to help in whatever was needed.

In one of those novenas I worked with one of these weary priests. She had not stopped being a good person and it is true that I had a lot of work, but he was a man discouraged and overwhelmed. Finish-bamos Masses at night and he was going to watch TV. I thought people who stayed to talk in the church after Mass, young people who had come for the first time attracted by the invitation to the novena of the Virgin, how much could read or write. But he went to his television. We were together for nine days and never once talked, nor asked me anything. He would just tell me what was the content of my work and point, and I did not feel confident or had the ability to take the initiative to promote a deeper dialogue with someone his age.

Many times I have wondered if that priest would not have been in his day a young enthusiastic, eager to change the world and to keep alive the life that makes you vibrate inside. The possibility that I could end up like scared me.

### The principles:

Need and danger. One of the criteria that illuminated these concerns I found in Guillermo, Mexican-looking gringo. Very white skin, blue eyes and light hair, was a curious and exuberant type. Passionate about the issue of freedom, he was a man who continually sought to break barriers, but starting with those that could be theirs. One day, for example, in a literature class, he sat in the classroom with the group of seminarians. We were talking about José Martí, one of the most representative figures of the history of Cuba. A she lays teacher taught us that in the middle of the class went to William and with obvious intent to flatter him asked, "Father, you know a lot of Martí, right?". "Mrs. Wilhelm said I have no idea."

That was all brutally clear, crystalline, desacom-complexed. He observed: "Nobody knows everything about everything, so, learn the wisdom to say, I do not know." Of course, at times it was unorthodox, verging on the controversial, but his life was very consistent. He was known until the foot-dras the neighborhood, the tough neighborhood where the seminar was. He was a friend of all, unprejudiced and close.

One day he said: "Give life for people, not by the principles". I looked not sure I have understood. It is that the principles were not important? Are not the rules that mark the camino?

Sometimes I thought that William had looked like to me that hardly goes hatching and does believing that is ready to understand the world. Sometimes we move through life with proud ignorance.

Guillermo had the gift; rare, that with it one did not feel stupid for not understanding. He explained that it was not with-nature traponer things have to go together. He did not question the principles, ideals, or the ultimate goals, but he understood that not get to them by the simple desire to achieve them. The ordinary life of the people is more complicated, and ideals of faith live within the everyday ups and downs. An alcoholic husband, a chronically ill child, an insurmountable material poverty, lack opportunity of, loneliness, lack of solidarity, the death of loved ones ..., pain and tears are often the threads of the fabric which is inserted Faith. Of course the last ideals are necessary because without them, where do we go to look ?, but the road passes before or des-after and sometimes before and after the shoulder that supports you, the shelter of a hug or trust that allows mourn.

Years later would Monsignor Adolfo us the example of the missionary who goes home of a little old lady to speak the Gospel and an-ciana he says:

Look, I have a foot ulcer.

Ma'am I'm not a doctor, I come to speak of Jesus Christ.

And the ceiling is falling and me and the rains come.

Neither I am an engineer and also it does not matter now what im-holder is the message of Christ.

And do you know ?, my child does not speak to me.

-You What you have to do is read the Bible ...

God! This is caricature, but how blind we become, how much can the caricature resemble reality and reality overcome the cartoons!

Guillermo words of my backpack were: "Give life for the people." I have been more or less true, but the light of his advice has always been there, inviting me to see, to hear, to touch the soul of the people suffering.

It is not difficult to discover the secret. It does not help people to reach God skipping his life but precisely through his life. Only a God credible through me is interested in an ulcer, repairs a roof or attempt a reconciliation. The rest is indoctrination and that, ultimately, has never worked.

Moreover, when you learn to look, to touch, to feel the deep pain of people, do not stop looking at the ultimate ideal, but you learn patience, mercy and sweetness necessary to make compa-AHEAD road. Tomas aware that if today you are an apostle of Christ is because at some point someone was able to receive your share of history, joyful or sorrowful, and you helped lead her lovingly, into the hands of God the Father.

Sharing life, simple as that. Accompany and from there dis-cover and teach discover the gentle hand of God always present, in joy and sorrow, in joy and desolation: Wedding at Cana and anguish in Nain, haven at Bethany and lepers not avoided, meals encounters with Pharisees and publicans, available for Jews and pagans, close to Pedro, close to Judas.



## Friend and Lord

Gradually my universe was enriching, completing, populating whys. Living in a much calmer atmosphere, Christ was no longer the God to defend and would be more the traveling companion and friend to share, without that impair respect for their transcendent reality.

I remember once Juan de Dios returned from a seminar in a Latin American country and came disgusted by the way they lived neglected seminarians. The liturgy, for example, which is always a sure sign of how the faith is lived, was extremely neglected. The ornaments were dirty, seminarians not seem to mind in the least their physical appearance, and everyone was on their side, no sense of community. When John told them this impression, the single common excuse was: "Christ is my friend." And John told us: "It is my friend, it is true, but it's my Se-Lord!". John of God is a passionate man and quite vehement when he says connect with what you feel, but rarely have seen I say something so hard.

John, made us realize that when someone is you really have to rise friend details, attentions become spontaneous, and looking for the best for him. But then, as he explained, we can not forget that there is a part of the relationship with Christ in which we are not at the same level. Christ is not just a neighborhood friend, who treated as equals. Christ is our Lord, and that demands respect and offering our own being.

Over time I thought it is perhaps this awareness level difference in our relationship with God that's hard to accept. For me personally, the most difficult sentence, Pater Noster is "Thy will be done." Otherwise, however difficult it is, I is easier. How many times have felt, after saying "Thy will be done" implicit "as long as match mine." And how many thousands of times have made decisions without carrying prayer because I knew beforehand, that intuition that "it is not your will" would be confirmed overwhelmingly.

It is easier to present to God fait accompli, because deep down we know that He will always be forgiveness and a new opportunity to start over. It is part of the common cynicism in which we move often.

It seems laughable, but today is not difficult to find half the world and willing to defend a friend as Christ becomes even guerrilla. There seminarians in whose room you can Encon-strate a photo of Che Guevara, even without a box-to Jesucris.

Often we not sympathetic Christ as Lord, that co-mo that marks a demanding way, that tells you what is right and what is wrong and, above all, always asking you. So many people have made him a comfortable friend, that all "understand" for whom "nothing ever happens" and if you hurry, you can take it to flirt, get drunk or smoke pot with you. Seen this way, we do so human and earthly which becomes justification for our indolence and the best contestataria weapon.

Despite the years, I still seem to see John of God, standing, energetic, almost annoying, repeating ourselves: "He's my friend, but my Lord."

Friends are greater and one of the best bendi-tions that can be received gift. A true friend is able to com-catch anything, but says that something is right when it is wrong; not abandon us, but that does not accept our missteps. A friend is hug and shaken, is support and reproach, is fidelity, and fidelity without truth does not exist. How can I trust someone who says my friend and dare not stop me when I walk into what can hurt me?

Moreover, I also believe that one of the things that makes it exciting to Christianity, but difficult time, is that Christ-God asks of us the best and make the best of ourselves is not something that excites us, to least not always. It happens to parents with children, the teacher with students, the coach with the athlete. If you do not seek them bring out the best, if not help to give the best of themselves, what they are doing then as it is created limp and mediocre people? One thing is to have patience, respect personal rhythms, understanding falls, tiredness, setbacks ... and quite another to engage minimal.

The Gospel is a program of human fulfillment, which connects with the best of oneself, with the best of others and with God, who made us in his image. It is taken for granted that for that we must have the courage to accept Jesus Christ as not only the running on the track with you but as your demanding coach, not only as he gets into the trenches with you but as your superior in experience-weapons. Thunderclouds

## Havana

With the end of the second course I ended our time in the semi-nario of Santiago de Cuba and spent the Havana. What more sorry (and I was concerned) was the separation of John of God. still-they gave many issues to discuss and review. When the holidays came and went back to my diocese I could not guess that, in that incomprehensible and mysterious plan "diosidencias" during the summer Juan would be transferred to the Jesuit community of Havana.

In September, finishing almost reach the capital, just before the opening Mass of the new course at the seminary San Carlos and San Ambrosio, I met John leaning on the railing overlooking the vast courtyard of the building. I went to him like an un-known and said, "Father, do you think that it would be possible to be my spiritual director?" He raised his hands as who makes a plea, he made a face of resignation and said, "What remedy!."

Havana is a careless princess, and a plural world of sensations. It is a city to be lived, not counted. Spacious and bright, has the charm of the pier next to the sea, the legacy of a past cultured and elegant uninhibited air of its inhabitants. It would be an almost perfect place if it were not for the other side of his painful reality: poverty, overcrowding, the burden of a life of hard survival that makes every moment struggle and challenge.

I knew Havana of the many times he had gone on vacation with my family. Nevertheless, the prospect of living there descolocaba me. Accustomed to smaller, more manageable sites, the capital seemed to me immense and strange. I felt "Guajiro" which is the term that is defined in the peasants Cuba but it is also a way to jokingly call that comes to "the big city" and feels like a palm tree in Alaska. However, human beings are creatures of habit and, as usually happens, the site where life ends up becoming familiar and the immense becomes smaller and smaller. So, Havana gradually per-diendo his strange and aggressive face and ended up sticking to my skin and seeping through my pores. Gradually I came to feel identified with that habanero world where everything is Cuba seems to merge into a continuous synthesis.

The seminar was at one end of Old Havana, at the end of one of those extremely narrow streets where the charm of colonial architecture with ruin and neglect, splattered sections with clothes hanging on balconies shored comes together. San Carlos and San Ambrosio

The seminar is an old Havana, spacious, bright and welcoming building, built around a courtyard colonial town of vegetation and chaired by a huge image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Located opposite the bay, it offers a perfect view of Morro, the fortress of La Cabana and the giant statue of Christ of the bay.

During the weekend each seminarian had assigned pastoral work. To me I was sent to take over the group of young people of the parish of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, in the municipality of Playa. A John of God would see to Villa San Jose, home of the jesuitas in El Vedado, in the heart of Havana.

Trainers and teachers, as everywhere, have their pluses and minuses. This is not really a problem if one is aware that in this life all served if you know use it. In the end, we can always thank some should have taught us how to be and how to live and others have taught us how not to be.

The atmosphere of the seminar was good, although being bigger and with more people living inside, did not have the intimate and familiar air that had so enjoyed in Santiago. In my case, everything was 'technically perfect': studies, pastoral work, the relationship with my colleagues, my collection of bonsai trees pruned mathematically. I was the one who was a mess, with my strengths in tow. Deep me a take away subsisted regarding what was seeing God's plan in my life. A project that I felt unable to resign but decided not to hug me.

In every human life there is always crosses; crosses, as my bishop said, "do not stop, they change." At that time, my heaviest cross was the sadness that is not decided once and for all to surrender and to offer life, despite clearly see the camino, with the lack of inner peace that generates. It was like sitting on the edge of a cliff, surrounded by space and light, but feeling hopelessly anchored to rocks. Many times, the solution was to give up thinking and immerse myself in an exaggerated and frenetic activism. By nature I tend to open more fronts than I can hold, and when my times of crisis raged, my escape was to do more and more things, to exhaustion. In fact, compared to my early days of seminar in Santiago de Cuba, something that made me intuit that my life was not going with good course, it was that he had begun to accelerate.

On the other hand, I was aware that there were some hiccups-Cresia in my relationship with God. When the bell rang indicating the time of prayer, personal or community, there I was entering the chapel two seconds. In fact, scrupulously fulfilled the statutory schedule of prayer. Then, often felt inside a kind of "sit with me", "give me extra time," but I always had many things to do, more urgent and aprelipid-. He had time for everything and everyone except the alre-dedor God which was supposed weaving my life.

There is no better psychologist who lives with you and I advice my trainers were not lacking. "Do more of what God wants, is to do what God wants," he had told me once Fr. David, a French saint who for many years had given up the Gauls charms to go to bury literally anonymity day to day seminar in Havana. "Let the urgent not prevent what is important," was another of his advice. But I kept offering to God strict time performance while covering elegantly my infidelity to the deep relationship with Him cramming my time of good deeds.

And why not I can  
He deceived me?

A new question came up in that state of evasion and crisis. What if the background was all an illusion? I had called so far "vocation" could it not be, in fact, a mirage of

early youth taken to heart? What if it turned out that the semina-rio was merely an escape, an escape from the material world and real? There is nothing worse than a rodent in mind, and I felt me with all the litter in the head.

Juan de Dios, was not in Cuba at that time, and it would take almost a month in return, so one afternoon I went to the Carmelite church to see Marciano. Although it was not the shortest way I went down to the jetty and then climb Neptune. I do not know the face but halfway lead passed me a teen bike and I shouted, 'What happened acere, left you the jeba '? (In the Cuban slang, acere could be translated as 'partner', 'compadre' or, as they say in Spain 'uncle'. The jeba is the girlfriend or wife.)

After Marciano give a quick summary of what he had been living, I ended up asking him how he could be sure that those first experiences call and all my discernment process with Hector had not been actually an elaborate process of self-deception. How could I be sure that my entry to the seminary had been the answer to a real call? His first words were: "You can not, that's impossible, but we will consider the hypothesis that you autoengañaste, and at that time it was all an illusion and just saw what you wanted to see in the background. For a moment forget the past and tell me now, do you feel that you are where you belong? Every day when you wake up, Do you feel that you belong to the world in which you live or feel in a world that is alien to you? "

Truthfully, I did not feel bad at the seminar, and I felt uncomfortable on the skin of "pigeon cure". In fact, one of the reasons that kept me at the seminar was precisely the certainty that this was precisely my world. What he did, what lived, he gave meaning to my days.

"Then he said 'I do not Martian hot over head. You have no reason to think that three years of discernment were false, but even assuming they have been, the only reading would be that through this way God brought you to where he wanted and where you had to be. "

I returned to the seminary again along the boardwalk, pretending to ignore the drizzle of the night closed. He was calmer. In one of the first conversations with Juan de Dios about what was the voca-tion had told me: "This is a road, and life will confirm or not what one has experienced in the beginning." Many things had been changing in me during the time it was in the seminary, but amid all tides had remained as a faithful buoy, deep conviction of a proposed project.

Life continued. They finished the classes, passed Exa-volumes, returned home on holiday and in September, after the feast of the Virgin of Charity, we met again at the opening Mass of the new course, for me the last of Philosophy, door to theological studies, the final link.

### When the rope taut

Study times are always stressful, especially for a compulsive like me in that field, but it was not academic stress which destabilized me. As time passed Acct-ta gave me the crisis raged. I felt increasingly insecure and symptoms were increasingly evident. I felt increasingly self-ority with the youth group of the parish. I had to say the last word, if only to repeat the correct answer the last speaker. I started doing weights in the mini gim-nasio the seminar and to look in the mirror to see if the pectoral growing (not increased). Sexual thoughts became more insistent,

overcoming what could be considered in me the normal average. He was increasingly depressed or irritable, according to the moment, and it all made me very uphill. On the other hand, it was beginning to feel a sense of suffocation regarding seminary training. What they are teaching me, I thought, okay, but being a priest has to be more than this. So I decided to leave the seminary. I did not see it clearly, but was about to begin theology and my internal struggle was not defined.

I went to see John of God and told him I thought it best to take me a year outside the seminary to better rethink my vocation. Juan de Dios, with its radical Jesuit style, shrugged his hom-bros and simply say, "I do not see, is more, it seems a trap". I went without comment, perhaps because he knew that John was right. If left, it was likely not to return to the seminary anymore. He was aware of the attraction exerted on me at the time a worldly life in the worst of its meanings. He was tired in body, mind and spirit, and I do not feel strong enough to return to my village as a good Catholic boy to help in the parish. I wanted to erase everything, end this story of "yes but no" wallow in all that help me not to think. I felt Aug state, exhausted. But that night I do not dare bags.

There is a passage in the Gospel that I have always enjoyed. It is in John 6, 66-67. Jesus is talking and people start to say that the message is very hard, and go, leaving him alone.

The text says that Jesus turned to his disciples, his friends, his close group, and asked: "You also go away?" I always imagined that question thrown defiantly, made by a man who has clear ideas and not flinch-considers. I like to imagine that moment, firmness in look, voice security. The deep, serene and free man.

Timidly, Peter replied: "And where do we go? So-so you have the words of eternal life". Sitting in the chapel, at night, alone, I repeated again and again the same answer. Where do I go? In the depths of my silence remained the certainty of a call. I knew I was where I needed to be. I was not frightened to return to the old life. I was able to find a job, labrarme future, perhaps even managed to be readmitted to medical studies.

But it was not fear to change their lives what held me. Leave the seminary was like losing the spine, it was to abandon what gave meaning to my life. I figured out and I looked lost. However, my heart resisted. I did not feel strong enough to hate God, but I was not willing to love him as he wanted. The night was closed.

An envelope

A mid-course I received an envelope from my bishop with a written note saying, "Read this, word by word, sentence by sentence, and then you comment me." My bishop was unaware of my crisis, at least not in all its details. Whenever we talked, after asking around a bit he told me: "Well, and Alberto how are you?". My res-sunsets were partial, always hinted of what was living but was not explicit with him. I was sure my process relying John of God, and avoided going into detail with my bishop because he feared he wanted to explain what happened to me, and at that moment, even I could see clearly why my resistance. I never knew how intuitive mini could be the information I gave him.

When I received the envelope I thought it was working. He had recently sent a letter on biblical themes and knew that he liked a lot, so I figured I would want to draft something so-bre a topic, perhaps a review of a book. The envelope contained something big, but I was not very good for anyone, neither for my bishop, so put it in a drawer without opening it.

The days passed, Easter arrived and with it the return to the diocese to help in pastoral work. I made my suitcase and went inside the envelope still unopened. That year they sent me to Santa Cruz del Sur, where he was pastor Willy Pino. Willy had done something for me verged on the heroic: ask the bishop to change Florida for Santa Cruz. Florida was paradise for any priest, with a strong community, alive and committed, besides being a well connected, centrally located and with people able to solve any problem or need. Willy and Florida had made a happy mix, because the energy and creativity of Willy had answered the best of the spirit of the community and even non-practicing people. Willy was loved, respected and helped by all.

Santa Cruz del Sur was, however, the people cursed, brand-do in its history by a flush mar19 that destroyed much of the po-population when a hurricane struck the island in 1932.

About eighty kilometers from the provincial capital, was a place where the government sent the poli-cos professionals or leaders who wanted to punish. It was the place that nobody wanted to go. The Christian community was co-attending from Camagüey, once every fortnight. The temple, built on wooden stilts, emerging from a lake of stagnant water and grasslands, shelter toads and a long list of bugs. After eight years in Florida and a func-ing community on all cylinders, Willy asked the bishop to send to Santa Cruz del Sur, with the promise that, at least during the first year, marriages in Florida would you turn-based company. The bishop agreed, while many townsfolk what a mistake so grave and wondered undercover allegedly committed by the father after he had done well in Florida punished him by sending him to Santa Cruz del Sur.

## Dark Clouds

When that Easter came, the church of Santa Cruz and looked better. There was no lake, no herbs, no frogs, no bugs. The site under the piles had been completed and the temple repaired, while the community picked up new momentum. Willy can not sit around. That was a lot of work Easter, strangely marked by conflicts with Protestant communities, which occurred that year not only in Santa Cruz. Coincidences of my Cuba, perhaps.

He arrived on Easter Sunday and I had to see my bishop the next day. Almost at midnight, when all trades were over, and the unwillingness to do things because there is no other choice, I opened the sealed envelope, who had traveled with me all the time. Inside was a theological studies program offered by the Legionaries of Christ in a seminar for Diocese-healthy seminarians in Rome. I think I managed to sleep at about three in the morning in-na. go away

The conversation with the bishop was not long. Actually, I felt very confused. The first impression about the possibility to go abroad study was gradually submerged by my lack of encouragement. I just tell you that the curriculum seemed very good but I wanted to check with John of God and that in the following weeks would give the definitive answer.

When I returned to Havana I put John the Delante program and said, "You know how I am, and I'll do whatever you tell me, I do not care to go or stay." Juan did not answer. This time he did not face me a personal decision, as was his custom. After a long silence he said, "Rome is Rome, go." Like an automaton I started doing all the paperwork, as word spread and people congratulated me. But I was wrong. One day I ran down the street to a friend who was not even a Christian:

"I go to Rome," he said in a tone of joy as if the trip hers are going to learn Italian." My response was automatic, without even pensarla: "I think it's the only thing that interests me" I said. He changed her face and I thought, "I'm serious". However, gradually Rome was emerging as a table of salvation. Havana and had no answers for me. Rome was at least a possibility, a hope, perhaps the only, perhaps the last.

With the best smile of happiness that was able to pretend, tra-Tando leaving my family as quiet as possible, I got on the plane. My brain was a mess of disparate feelings.

After spending a few days in Madrid I went to Rome. On arrival at Fiumicino is one of those memories that have been anchored and man-I had been alive over the years: the plane flying over the airport, signs in Italian, preparations for landing. No woman-go, what I remember most is a sense of desolation and sadness, that uncontrollable feeling like the waves turns, envelops and devastates you. I straightened my seat belt I made sure the best I could and I thought, "Well Rome, we see what it going." He knew the airport would be waiting for me a religious, Carmelite Missionary Sister Concepcion Arellanos, "Concha". Young had sent to Cuba to work in Vertientes, that little town where my uncle lived. In Vertientes he made his final vows and was working there while he was in Cuba, considering inter alia the parish school attached to the church. The parish priest then was Fr. Adolfo Rodriguez, that there would come to be the first bishop of Camaguey after the Revolution.

Concha and Bishop Adolfo and had kept the communication-despite the distance. Adolfo told me about it with passion; I had described as an extraordinary woman, and I had the idea that I would find at the airport a stocky and robust nun at least six feet tall. To my surprise, how-do I picked up my luggage and went suddenly found myself in front of a small and petite nun-faced good. Despite being the only nun in sight my question was hesitantly: "U ... you are Sister Concepcion?" Her voice was sweet but firm: "And you are Alberto?".

## Shell

If the expression is allowed between a seminarian halfway and a nun in years, that was a love at first sight. Concha gave off a magnetism that made you feel connected, like the co-nocieras forever.

It was Guipuzcoa, in the Basque Country. He had entered the convent of the Carmelite Missionaries in Pamplona when he was nineteen. Twenty-four was sent to Cuba eight years after a group of militants dressed in olive green played at the school gates to tell her and her community school education was confiscated and passed into the hands of the revolutionary government.

"However -reconocía Concha- did not drive us from the country. We went. " And it was true. The general direction of the congregation, alarmed by the situation of instability and uncertainty created by the revolution of Fidel Castro, and the spectrum of the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, with its trails convents assaulted and raped nuns or he killed, ordered the sisters leave the country. On the other hand, he had just begun in Rome the Council Vaticano II, which would bring much light to the life of the Church. But that light had not come, and from the historical coordinates of the point, a congregation dedicated to teaching thought he had nothing to do in a country where the state demanded absolute rights on education.

Concha and another sister asked the per-manecer Congregation on the island, but was not allowed. Daughter of obedience, was a large group of religious and priests who had been expelled and that different ships were sailing from Havana bay towards the distant Spain.

"It was a mistake to leave -contaba Concha-, because later we understood all the good that we had been able to accom-pañando the people, but it was no longer possible to return '(and indeed, it was not possible until nearly forty years later, when the government accepted several sisters entered the diocese rebuild the old covering). "The only good thing that -agregaba- experience was that thereafter never been asked to no sister to leave the country where it is, no matter what happens. They are given the freedom to choose, but nothing more. "

Concha never had the romantic idealism that has so moved pro-Cuban Revolution and so many people have believed and still believe. From the beginning I knew intuit what hovered over the island, the lack of freedom and all the injustice and misery that it would generate. However, I never heard criticize or condemn Fidel. "We must pray for him," was her answer when someone asked. Accustomed to speak candidly, or defend a totalitarian system and demagogical hidden behind promises of improvement and popular liberation, nor the capitalist model proposed as the solution. Concha was, for a long time, one of those people who have understood that human beings have failed to achieve justice and freedom between equilibrium. Made in the style of the Gospel, deep-mind identified with the message of Jesus Christ, nor condoned the violence guerrilla to Che Guevara nor subjected to the rule of indivi-



dualism and arrogant and conceited feeling of superiority that generates economic welfare.

"The secret is to change the heart 'he said. It's like what happened after the Second Vatican Council, which asked the Congregations renováramos us. Well, we no longer use habit or leave it optional, Mother Superior call her "sister" and went in all vocational magazines playing guitar, but we are not humble, charitable, or merciful, because that is what most Cues -ta change. And still we wonder how we renewed religious life and things do not improve! ".

Concha was dangerous and uncomfortable, not only because every free person is, but also because of the obvious logic, serenity speaking, the lack of aggressiveness, made it difficult to refute.

So, Concha left Cuba "when most needed us to stay." All he wanted was to not send you to Rome but somewhere in greatest need. And so it was at the start, destined to the Philippines, where his health broke. Three years later it was claimed by his congregation and destined to Rome, and Rome had twenty-six years when I met her.

## The beginnings

No place is wonderful when you have the sad soul, and at that time Rome was only room for hope. Nothing else. The next morning after my arrival I was taken to the house known as the Directorate General of the Legionaries. It was the place where we would live but there was the rest of those who would my com-drapers.

Cuban finally born and raised in a reality that Cubans call "third world with ample opportunities to spend the fourth" would soon give stumbles. When they served the food sources spent a few slices of cheese, prosciutto, asparagus and salt crackers (name only known so far). Ter-they mined to serve and sat down. In Cuba custom is put on the table everything that is going to eat, and I had no idea what in Italy is called the antipasto, which usually follow after a first and second courses. I remembered my bishop had told me: "I do not know much about the Legionaries not know how much will the austerity of the seminar, but you ten-Dras to adapt to what you find." I had responded as if it were capable of any martyrdom, but before the contents of my ration scarce and the inexplicable tranquility of my companions not ocu-curred me nothing but look where the nearest source with conte-ness was left over.

They say that "happiness is not happiness without food," and while I ate that shows symbolic thought, "If this is so, I extin-go like dinosaurs." But the alarm passed quickly. Soon came the pasta and more pasta, to calm the stomach and nerves. Then came my first encounter with a microwave and the happy discovery that it is possible to successfully manage many botoncitos, automatic faucets where after trying everything, you find that if you put your hands under does not leave the water, sanitation ser-vices with sensors discharge without any sign showing you that although there are no buttons to view hygiene is Garanti-Zada, super cool shirt you are given and that sometime discreetly someone sends you to remove because it is actually nightwear and not to walk through the halls of the seminar, and etc., and etc., and etc.

As a postscript, one day I was invited to eat the picturesque Cam-po di Fiori, where in a separate round table was all the anti-grass to choose from. Right in the center, it

was a great source of natural mushrooms. Mushrooms !, I had only seen in books! When he invited me to his plate arrived I had already served me three giant mushrooms, enough reason to blush and my friend told me softly: "That does not eat well, they are ornaments".

Despite the time he lived, it was clear that you had to in-tempt what I felt not affect the relationship with my colleagues. The "Cuban" became someone happy appearance and always had a new joke. The door of my room out I was joy and energy, knowing that then, in the stillness of that closes behind the same door, they would stand before me insecurity, restlessness and anxiety. Someone asked me once if I had met Alberto in those years was false, and I said it was not false, but partial. I always really enjoyed the life of a seminarian, stu-dios, pastoral work, group outings, but certainly had also other Alberto inside, tired and sad, fighting shadows.

Apparently no one guessed what I was living, except Father Duenas, the rector of the seminary. Duenas had spent many years as a trainer and had years experience and intuition of mothers. I never talked to Father Duenas of what happened to me but apparently did not need. My bishop would tell me one day that when nearly two years after my arrival- passed through Rome on ad limina visit and pre-Gunto for me, his response was: "At the beginning it was very bad after because it was different." Father Duenas took me free love and was with me pastor and father. He trusted me from the first moment and among other things gave me a freedom that I needed and had not even had seminars in Cuba. It is true that in relation to my everyday life I never had secrets with him. Dueñas knew my comings and goings, my friends and the world with which I related, but I do not think his attitude constituted a response to good behavior on my part. I needed to deploy wings, and Father Duenas never denied me the space to do so.

One day, some friends invited me out to dinner. That required a permit from the rector because it meant missing the evening prayers, not dine with the community and return God knows what time. The next day I sat down to breakfast with him.

-At what time you arrived?

-On The 0:30.

'How did you get?

I looked as if he had to know the answer.

Father I said, I jumped the fence and walked through the reception window, which has the broken safe.

Ah!

That would not be the last supper outside the seminary, and the only time I returned late. Insurance reception window was never fixed.

Over the years I had him as chancellor, before each project, to every new idea commenting him, his invariable answer was: "Calculate your time" but never stopped me, she never prevented me try something, and I was never controlled by him . On the contrary, Dueñas made me feel free.

## Hell

We lived in Castel di Guido on the outskirts of Rome in a site-disíaco amid the lonely and green peace of Roman pines, surrounded by wheat fields whose paths we could run to infinity.

After month and a half of intensive Italian, we started stu-dios. After the first news of a different life to that of Cuba and facing the new everyday, it was as if, suddenly,

arreciara the hurricane. The long process of crisis began to add other sources of stress. For starters, my Italian was insufficient, which made me feel a sense of helplessness *comunicativa* insuperable. I did not understand half of the things and, of course, he could not speak fluently. To make matters worse, the Italians repeated every two seconds, "Hai capito?" "Hai capito?" (Have you understood?) No, of course that "non ho capito niente" (have not understood anything), and sometimes niente di niente (Nothing at all.)

Worse, when you happier because you think you're seizing the hang of the thing, there are some who comes and says, "Your Italian is divine." One, poor naive, he gets excited and asks why, just so you respond: "Because only God understands." On the other hand, suffered from the insecurity that is sometimes found in those who were not born in the developed world and at the moment we are catapulted into a very different society, we do not know and *mitificamos*. My thought was kind of, "Oh !, I study at a European university, with German, English, French ... will I be able to be on the same intellectual level?". At the end you end up realizing that if you have learned to study any aca-demic challenge is surmountable and that if the brain worked in the Caribbean *tam-well* you would in Europe, but there is a time of great tension until it reaches the confidence. In addition, he is suffering from chronic academic perfectionism, much destabilized me feel that I had with-trol over that area. To give the final touch, and unexpectedly, it made me hard the remoteness of Cuba and mine. I've never been very dependent on being close to home, in fact, I usually say I'm like the stones, pulling me and I miss moss, but it scared me aware suddenly that my home was thousands of kilometers away and what whatever happened it was not a matter of two hours to get home. Not to mention what frightened me at that time the newly discovered world passport, airports and customs, something like science fiction to which we had grown away from the aero-port reality.

Loads increased too fast for me and my world began to crumble. Psychically exhausted, I ran out of energy to face the insertion into my new reality. Moreover, I felt alone. The atmosphere at the seminar was great, deep-mind fraternal, but I did not feel confident to tell anyone what happened to me, even trainers, although I recognize that from the beginning were very close. It was Shell, with whom he felt an immense connection, but I dared not unburden her.

Out the door I was the constant smile and "salsa" of the Caribbean. After closing the door I sank into despair and "blues". I got to spend hours lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, while the growing mountain of books on my desk. Blocked, paralyzed as ever and ever after.

It was the only time in my life where I have known what psychologists call "suicidal ideation" and the possibility of a glimpse why people are able to take his own life. Everything is closed, everything is dark, and nothing indicates the minimum emergency light. There is no present, and no future. At the bottom of your soul you are convinced that nothing will never change, that the storm will last forever and that whatever you do, nothing is going to work. At that time, nothing is more *atrac-tive* cease to exist.

Later I would read an interview with a French that its "self-gifts" as he called them, was that of having crossed the Atlantic in a small boat. When describing the storms that had faced she said that there comes a point where struggling to survive, believes the storm will never end or last long enough for the forces themselves are exhausted. That was, he said, the critical moment, where the temptation was drop the oars and stop fighting. And it was then, to give up the fight, when the sea and the storm enveloped you annihilating you. The man believed strongly many castaways

drowned because at some point they were convinced that they could not continue to face the storm, a storm that always, always, ended at some point.

Many times throughout my life I have told this story cure, but in those beginnings in Roman soil was one of the con-overdue that there was nothing to do. He wandered at times by the muddy banks of the Tiber, thinking that dark (short-mind?) Was my life. I thought it best to admit defeat, or perhaps throwing the passport and walk, walk aimlessly far give me strength. I could not get to cure as well. Stubbornly persisted in my mind the idea that my way was there but that did not matter, my heart was in stubborn resistance. Feelings are uncontrollable and mysterious universe, and when your soul feels unable to embrace something, no matter how beautiful it is, arms are heavy enough not to peel off the body.

So I decided that it was over. I would contact my bishop to tell him that I was sorry but regre-saba to Cuba. He was aware that my life came to a standstill. I also thought about all the people who watched with such good eyes my future priesthood and so much hope had put it, but I could not receive a sacrament of life for people, and could not be ordained priest clinging to a mental certainty. Returned, it was over.

Back at the seminar I went to the chapel. It would be good to pray, tell my God that I was sorry but that paid me. Had spent years hearing that "when God gives a vocation also gives the strength to do it," but I came to tell that maybe I was the exception to the rule, he would try to be at most a good Christian, but only that. And that's what I started to say, until a new question was emerging: "Why do not you wait a little longer?" Were certainly the first months and had to deal with many experience new at the same time. In fact, some things were better. From the beginning he had begun to teach catechism to young children than in their usual innocent cruelty they laughed at my Italian precariously on my face. However, soon understanding and acceptance

Mutual had grown. In college I was paralyzed until the day when they asked something in the classroom and I raised my hand like a racing car in the middle of a very strong "Io", which made the teacher looked at me with a face "OK, if you want I leave to class".

At the same time, they started coming memories of other early: the catechesis of children in El Caney in Santiago de Cuba, where the only thing missing was to come with bows and arrows, awe of villager who comes to live in the vastness of Havana, pastoral experiences in country towns amid "colorá land" and mosquitoes, where the first day you want to go to Plu-thon and at the end you feel part of the family which has welcomed you. There had always been a bloody day and a final feeling of satisfac-tion and growing up. "Why do not you wait a little longer?". "What I can lose?" I asked, without really knowing why, I decided to take some time and wait.

## Bonanza

Months passed. For Christmas I realized that I was me-jor. My Italian was becoming decent and my academic perfectionism began to feel safe. The atmosphere at the seminar remained brotherly, my colleagues began to befriend and was approaching some families in the neighborhood. Whenever he could he would see me Concha, if only to hear it.

Rome had begun to be loved. From the sacred magnificence of San Pedro, which is like the divinity that integrates you, to the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, which is peace; from the strong testimonial root of the catacombs to the unique beauty of the Trevi Fountain. His inescapable magic blood was bewitching me and my spi-spirit surrendered to its ancient grandeur, the charm of its intricacies and the unique feeling of be face to face with a blast out of the most ordinary alley. I began to realize that Rome has its own spirit, a life that passes through its people but It exists beyond them. Noisy and chaotic around you, you besieges and gradually, as the great loves, becomes irresistible.

And outside Rome, Assisi, the place where you have the feeling that you'll run smack into San Francisco to turn any corner, and where ever you go you feel you would like to return, even if you've traveled a thousand times.

As expected, he never missed one who told me that of "if you want to lose faith go to Rome," but I am convinced that what makes the difference between people is the spirit in which we live, the heart with which Wanted. It is true that Christians met in Rome antites-timonios both people "hierarchical level" as lay Christians on foot, but were not very different miseries he had known in Cuba. And it is equally true that in Rome met testimony of charity and faith, at all levels, of which I still food. The problem is not Rome, nor is Paris or Calcutta. The problem is the heart with which you go to Rome, or wherever.

It is also true that the anti-Roman complex saw, and in many environments any criticism (the more acerbic best) to anything having to do with the Church as an institution or carry the label "Vatican" is applauded and valued as a sign of liberation and maturity. Sometimes you meet people that, for the Catholic Church, you give them a feeling that lives with the motto of "tell me what you mean that I oppose." In the days when I was in Rome joke that Hans Küng had elected Pope but had not wanted to accept it was made. "How is it not? -they asked-. Do not you realize that is the opportunity to extend your ideas to the whole Church? ". "It's not -volvió to respond Hans Kung because the day is Papa I will not make the case that make me now."

Many times, since childhood, my father kept repeating a phrase that took me a long time to understand: "Think like Church", I said, and I think I understood being in Rome. This church is like any family, great and reprehensible.

I do not want to hurt feelings and understand that the between-sijos of history are complicated, but the saints and schematics have always lived together in the same environment of crisis. Some have fought and suffered from within and, in the short or long term, have helped the Church to overcome its crisis and to be more faithful to their identity and their ideal. Others have gone to the street to throw stones, and ended up causing divisions and resentments, some of which appear to us ether. Over the months came the first winter away from the Caribbean and cold "real", giving me indescribable encounter with the first snow. For someone in the tropics, snow is almost a mythical experience. My teammates told me: "Can you tranquilizar ?, you look like a boy." But I had waited too many years the arrival of that day for me phlegmatic.

And after the cold spring explosion, the frenetic burst of the earth. Cuba is always green, always fertile, without abrupt changes between seasons. The rector told him how much he had me impre-I sioner the speed of change and told him I attributed my amazement it was the first time I saw something. "I impressed the first time, 'he said, and the second, third, and forever." Perhaps for that wonder I keep a small flowery

with one of those good sentences for bad times calendar that says: "Can they destroy all the flowers, but they can not stop the spring."  
Yes, I felt better. Only one thing remained stagnant and apparently intact. "Why, Lord, why deep achievement not accept what you ask me?"

## John Paul II

One day I was approached by Father Duenas and said, "Do you know that some seminarians school will acolitar (make an altar boy) the pope at Mass?" I put tone "I know you know I know 'and I answered with another question: "And if by chance you know I'm in that group?". Today is more used the word 'acolyte' that 'altar boy'.

Being stuck in a Mass John Paul II is part of what one keeps in the corner of the extraordinary. A young Italian practicing not tell me years after John Paul II "the saw and loved him." I do not know if it is possible to convey what the man communicated when he was held face to face. I do not know if the magnetism exerted on one it could be defined as human weight that gives holiness. It was Peter, was the rock, was the deep and serene man, connected with Christ, interwoven with a reality beyond the pure and earthly pre-present.

John Paul II conveyed security and peace. Amid the countless flashes of cameras, amid the oar-linen outstretched hands as he passed, he was the calm sea, look-do, playing, blessing, listening. Humbly imperturbable. He seemed to be a fully focused man who knew where he was going, what I wanted and what I wanted. Deep-mately a free man who spoke seeking applause. And a man who did not care about the criticism, because what should be said must be said, even if it hurts or not like. A person ultimately not mani-pulable, which can not be bought because it is clear to whom it belongs.

Pope we saw just before the mass start, and sa-ludos were at the end. When we finished we were lined up and we were presenting. Upon reaching us showed me that he said that I came from Cuba. John Paul II looked at me and said, "When you return to your land tell them that I pray a lot for the Cubans."

The first summer exams and after them the months of summer vacation approached. "Uncle Guzman" had decided some years ago to leave Cuba and ministered in Passaic, New Jersey. Knowing he was in Rome I had sent an invitation to spend the summer with him in the United States.

I wrote to my bishop for permission but received a negative. In his letter of reply I said I could go at the end of the studies, before finally returning to Cuba, but not that summer. I knew that, at least in part, the refusal of a desire to save the forms are due. For the mentality of my Bishop I did not look quite right that a seminarian that the Cuban church could not hold economically in Rome and was fully financed by foreign aid, is away on vacation across the ocean.

So when a friend of my bishop invited me to spend the month of July in Madrid I accepted without further ado. Finished exams and thrashing the bug again inside, I prepared everything to travel to the Spanish capital. It had been almost five years since my entry into the seminary, and there were only two for the diaconate, the step prior to priesthood. By then I had decided to stu-diando to the end, but he knew he would not order me if it is not produced in me the necessary change. Keep looking, praying and asking you-ta the last moment; try to be available to all that was needed, but would not give way to the consecration if somehow never left my resistance.

A few days before I left, a seminarian of the Legion of Christ he told me that the order had in Madrid, a missionary working with adolescents in the tough neighborhood of Vallecas and asked if I wanted help, in the first half August at a summer camp in the mountains of Navacerrada. I've always had masochism need to enjoy working with the world of aborrecentes, so I told him to leave me the rector consulting him. Father Dueñas received me with the widest of smiles and discovered that, before inviting me, I had consulted and he had given his approval.

## The Almorchones

Towards the end of July I caught talking on the phone with one Raul Herranz, a man of forty-three years would be in front of the campamento. We agreed to the day and time to pick me up.

Affable and serene appearance, bushy beard and eyes tellers, the first impression was of closeness. I was picked up at the exit of Metro station Moncloa and went straight to Our Lady of Almorchones, a camp in the heart of the mountains. With him his son, a few years younger than I, and some other monitors going.

On reaching the camp we met to explain what was our work. He began by saying that we take off the head the idea that we were coming as saviors of the poor boys of Vallecas, they were as children of God like us, with as much dignity as ours, and that we were coming as partners, not as their bosses.

Ear that sounded good, but I was under the impression that I was missing the purpose of the message. Gradually know that among the monitors came more than a "daddy's boy" boys "good family" used to a very high standard of living, socially 'Distintos.' He did not know at that time the bad reputation that Entoces had Vallecas and contempt that some people felt that level by its inhabitants.

In reality, a world with social classes so far apart was new to me, and if already it seemed horrible, even more it was to the extent that I realized that classist and disparaging mentality also existed within the Church. It took a lot of work Entender how people born and raised in the Church, supposedly educated in the Gospel, could so naturally considered as different and superior, felt not only that some were "something else" but that they were all "above rights included."

Fortunately, Almorchones was di-versa experience in that regard. Raul somehow managed to get the spirit of what he said was imposed naturally. In a few days, we were a group of monitors attached and stuck squarely among boys. But that was not immediately because those guys were not easy. Once formed teams each "tribe" had to choose a name. Still call themselves a tribe propose "The ca-morristas" I understand, but to propose "Violators of the Metro" was already something that exceeded what I could expect.

The first day was simply traumatic. Each proposal the answer was 'no'. No pool, not to play football, not what you said. I snuck into one of the most experienced monitors and said, "What's going on? Everything is NO". "You are trying, 'he said to see how far they can go. Imponte moment and lue-go and will give them more freedom. "

The calm. It is difficult to describe the sensation of a sunrise after a storm. It is not just a sense of peace but of strength, dominio, serene omnipotence. It is as if all around is suddenly back on and manageable: the problems, difficulties, new challenges, concerns. All lost, for now, its ability to frighten or overwhelm. There is a

psalm in the Bible that "God sits above the rain", and that is what is experienced, be above the downpour, beyond where the storm can hurt you.

Eight years of storms. Since that first sensation ambiguous sitting on the hard bench of a church to a man lost in the mountains of Madrid camp. Eight years of searching, uncertainty, continuous struggle between heart and mind reluctant to coalesce. It was the end of a stage with a God both present and if-lencioso, indicating the way but does not travel for you, you ask yourself answers you seek.

The change may seem sudden, but it was not at all. It was the fruit of years of road, it was the time when the fruit ripens, it was the outbreak of the spring after the long, dry winter months.

I finished tired but with quiet soul for the first time in years camp. We left Los Almorchones afternoon and monitors that night we went to enjoy Madrid. Later I returned to where I was staying and went to Rome early the next day. When I arrived at the seminary Father Dueñas he received asking me where he had left the light of my eyes and I was commanding me to sleep immediately. I have never obeyed a president with such goodwill.

I felt at peace but recognized that harbored a fear, fear that all this was nothing but the result of emotion for a well-lived strong experience. He reminded John of God when we said that the confirmation of the reality that is experienced through the emotions is when that experience remains in time, settles and takes root and becomes an inseparable part of oneself. Would that my case?

I was afraid that the weeks pass and my resistance vol-saw to resurface. But it was not like that. He finished the summer and we enter the new course. I felt more alive every time. My sky had cleared.



# The good weather

## Dealing with peace

The states of war can not be permanent. There are moments, sometimes very long, that put us in a state of tension that compels us to seek answers. But those periods under pressure can not be sustained over a lifetime. At some point it is necessary to reach peace. Peace is beneficial because it serene and relaxing, and per-mite, with lights have come, take life with a healthy routine by which we can calmly plan the next step and move towards it at the pace prefer.

However, peacetime can also lead to accommodation and neglect. By not feel under pressure, nothing is urgent, nothing is life and death and everything can be or not to be, without too many con-sequences, at least in the short term. Peace is necessary but to be fruitful requires a lot of self-discipline and honesty. Otherwise, we relaxed so much that we end up being drawn into everyday life and the environment in which we find ourselves.

In my new state, the conviction of being called to the priesthood remained intact and my inner adherence to that vocation grew. However, I realized that my "I said yes" could not remain a mere attitude surface such as a simple and ethereal background, or those christianities that one is out there where the person you describe a relationship with God looks like a fairy tale but where there is no life committed to the need-dos and spirit of sacrifice for anyone, not, of course, Christian community life; a moral life as each choice and a sacramental life without demands, guided by how the person feels that day. To be a disciple of Christ and is formidable. Actually, a formi-assembly possible.

I still felt a calm but urgently demanding God. I had to study, because I needed answers in my field, for me and for those who accompany one day I would play. I had to pray, because older lights are in direct relationship with the One who make way. And I had to let God make way inside. In my mind was the image of the priest as a soldier available to his chief and Lord ordered, when and how it is ordered. And although my basic attitude had turned to: "What you ask me," he knew he was being stubborn and difficult to tame.

## Saluzzo

One of the times when the demands of continued growth became evident was the week I spent in the community of recov-ery of drug abusers Cenacolo in Saluzzo, northern Italy.

The first time I heard of that community was one of the retreats we did every year and lasted a week. The sacer-dowry that gave us the meditations, Fr. Hernán, introduced sometimes comments on the work of Sister Elvira, a nun who had devoted himself to the recovery of young people stuck in the world of drugs. Sister Elvira came from a family where I was the only girl of seven children, and had the stubborn and strong character of the person who has had to deal with predominantly masculine environments. When I heard of his work, he had already founded several shelters, in Italy and beyond, basically attended by former drug addicts come out of their communities. The Motherhouse, was to Saluzzo, in Piedmont.

Thanks to Father Hernán, I got to let me spend a few days with them. I arrived in good plan explaining Catholic child who knew nothing of the world of drugs, he was interested in the work of the community and bla, bla, bla. There is not much time to lose and tone of the answer struck me as blunt: "Live with them." And all of a sudden I found myself putting my stuff in a bunk in the middle of a room full of "junkies". I could write so much about those guys! Sister Elvira system was simple: manual and cristoterapia work. A community

He entered voluntarily and before entering was a conversation between the candidate and former drug users working in the center. In the interview, he explained all the rules of the house with the advantage of being able to talk in their language. To begin with, in this house not smoke, no long hair and piercing, no TV, no magazines, no press. You had to Levan-Tarse very early and the day was spent between work and prayer. In the early days spent in the community, the boys were not allowed to take pictures of your family or receive letters, nothing that could connect them with his previous world. It was a cut, stop completely, a turning inward to discover why his life had become an uncontrollable hell.

Of course, many of the newcomers could neither pray and knew even less about the sacraments and Christian life. A ve-ces had a slight religious cultural veneer, but nothing more. So community prayer is privileged, very group participation, no personal meditation in silence because they would not know how. They asked a lot for their families, especially their children, their old companions square, and those who were in prison.

One evening, being in the room, I asked one of my new colleagues, who had already been some time in the community, if there is not fashionable to do personal prayer in silence. Face brightened and said, "Yes, yes, of course, but as we do that only those who took more time here, we got up at dawn. You sure you want to come with us tonight, right? I call at three o'clock in the morning. " Earth swallow me! What rays I thought I will have been doing the saint? I hate to wake up early even to pray. However, obviously with the best of my happy faces, I accepted the invitation. At three quarter -¡¡¡hora that was made for dor-mir !!! - they raised me as if it were a party and went to the chapel.

How many people would be there at that time? I would be difficult to say, but the chapel was not empty. Young rough, marked for life, their backs laden with lies, theft, prison, even murder ... there, kneeling in the cold silence of the night. God and them, God and his past, God and present.

On the wall of the chapel there was a huge painting of an icon of Christ Pantocrator in blessing. They had painted so that the door of the tabernacle, where the hosts were preserved, coincided with the heart. However, that was not the most striking but the eyes. They were eyes that scanned you, you wrapped. He had already noticed me about it the first time I walked into the chapel and when co-Mente I explained that the community had a guy who painted icons and always, when it came time to paint the eyes arrived, he spent the previous day in fast and prayer. When he went to paint the eyes of the Christ of the chapel, the whole community fasted and prayed with him. I do not remember the time we were praying, they nailed to his knees and putting in a ten minu-tos different position. And in all that time, leaving young, young entering, each time he preferred, away from the hustle of the hour, to be quiet with God they had discovered.

During the day we worked in the garden, or chopping wood, or in the kitchen. I listened, as I discovered in those young people much better than me, good, noble

people, who for many reasons was over in the dark and slavish drug world. And I realized that I was not superior to them, that if my life had trans-currido in their same coordinates perhaps also have been part of that world. One of them told me: "The day I got high for the first time, my fears disappeared, my loneliness and angustant."

Those who have been able to save certain experiences, cures and not cures, sometimes we are tempted to think that we are made of a different pasta, which are different in some way, but that is a delusion. All that has made another human being can do us both good and bad.

Those guys in Saluzzo simply were discovering the life led inside. I remember one of them who told him "Cucarachón". Short, sturdy to coarseness. Was joy personified. One day I said, "Cucarachón, sorry, but I do not think you drogaras you." I pointed a dull spot on his neck and said, "I could not hold my veins in his arms, and I injected directly here. "

Some guys were more dramatic stories, such as those with AIDS, or as one who was awaiting trial. Sister Elvira had an agreement with the prison and, following certain conditions, some guys imprisoned drug addicts could ask to be transferred-two to the community. This young in particular, had sold drugs to another who had died of an overdose and had been charged with murder by the brother of the dead, but the story was a bit more complicated. He had been time in the community and when I met him was waiting-do the judgment. They asked him for thirteen years in prison. I found it hard to see a grown man crying as he said: "I can not go back to jail. When I did not know this was hard, the "rock", but everything was a lie, it was just a way to survive. I can not return to ride me a false life, I do not want to keep lying. " Yes, when you've lived in darkness and light touch, it is difficult to go back, and if one does, you can not avoid nostalgia that brings remem-do of light.

The truth was one of the things we most insisted Sor El-tacks: to live in truth, cleanly, without hiding anything. They learned to say the truth and to accept them, and also learned to show their weaknesses without further objection. Jando ever lock-in the field began to tell their past experiences, mu-chas times because I asked them. However, when someone asked not to speak more than one subject (and whys over-understood), automatically changing the conversation.

This happened one night over dinner, when someone empe-it Zo talk at the table where I was, about nightclubs, and then one of the boys asked: "No, please do not talk about discote-cas". The subject changed instantly. It was not a simple avoidance of reminders of his former life connected with the drug, but a way of expressing their weakness, to understand that certain memories were too hard to revive nostalgia for a false but dazzling world.

The night before my arrival was the birthday of one of them. Before entering the community he had been pizzaiolo in a luxury pizzeria and one of its abilities, to the delight of customers, knead the pizza was turning it with your hands and throwing it into the air. The drug was his parallel world, carefully hidden. In fact, one of the things I discovered in those days was that idea junkie lying in the street is only part of the reality, the need to maintain a perfect image that allows them, among other things, steal without being suspected of respectability. This boy had entered the community and never had amassed pizza like I used to, until that night he had asked. He did and apparently was spec-tacular. When he finished he waited for the thunderous applause jet finish to say serenely: "Thank you, but do not ask me anymore."

A morning was washing some socks and passed me one of the guys with the best smile and exquisite kindness said, "That can not be done at this time, it touches is common work." From the depths of my guts and automatic, like the eruption of a volcano unannounced, I climbed an explosion of anger and pride do not know how I could mask with a great smile as he picked up my socks dripping.

The bottom of my anger was terrible. How dare he, he, a dro-gadicto, to say to me, an almost-cure, which had to do! I horro-Rice myself, embarrassed me to infinity, and for the umpteenth time I realized that the habit does not make the monk and being a cure, much vocation you have, is not magic that changes your life . Being seminarian, or deacon, or priest, does not mean that the mise-rias human become exclusively of others.

"Grace builds on nature," said St. Augustine, and the lock-jo God presupposes one open to the transforming, if not, as I said another priest, we become only "showcase and jewelry."

Saluzzo day I made short but intense. The day he returned to Rome, accompanied me to the train station a boy former drug addict who lived in the community, helping full-time, and his wife, a lovely Italian. The relationship had arisen while he was recovering. She had gone there as a volunteer to help Sister Elvira and back then he struggled to get off drugs. Being on the footboard of the train he told me, "You are a seminarian and I may have no right to tell you this but me "sento di dirtelo ", never embarrass you to present Jesus Christ as the solution, for-that I left the drug because I found Jesus Christ. " ('My sento di dirtelo' is an idiomatic phrase that expresses the desire, need or urge to tell someone else something that feels, but for Italians is a kind of unquestioned justification. After a 'me sento di dirtelo' may come a warm and beautiful message or can come this most atrocious criticism in the crudest way but the most natural thing because it is something that 'feels' to be expressed.)

That phrase, and the image of this couple saying goodbye on the platform of the station are the last memories of the first time I was in Saluzzo: "Do not be ashamed ... do not be ashamed ..."

Meet that world hitherto unknown helped me understand the need for priests to keep us close to the people, contact your particular life world, to be able to touch the whys that determine what is and is not always understood . But also showed me the path of maturation and growth out of all that makes us human is less common ground.

### Do not give me answers cure

Back to Rome I went to the Gemelli hospital. Interested in the world of drugs had been seeing a doctor who would give me a book on drug addiction. When I arrived, the doctor was busy and I started talking to the secretary, after being unwitting witness to a telephone conversation with her husband in a language that seemed rather just love teenagers. Simpa-tica forward, after hanging up the phone and start talking to me said, "So you're seminarian? then I will take to make a consultation but, please, do not give me answers of cure ".

I do not remember at all what you asked me, I do not know if I gave a "response cure" and that has made to erase the entire tape, or equal what happened was that the phrase I found so shocking and yet so lights-dora that was what that encounter privilege.

"Do not give me answers of cure".

It is true that many times there are people who seek the priest strengthen them their "convenient own ideas" and satisfactions shown if the priest renounces his duty to truth and avoid saying what you do not want to hear. But it is also true that sometimes our responses are empty or are out of context.

One of the fables of Anthony de Mello that a for-caidista a strong wind grabbed him and left him hanging on a tree with no possibility of escape and down. After a while he passed by a man who asked the parachutist:

- Hey, where am I?
- In A tree was the answer.
- You are a priest? He asked the paratrooper.
- Yes, how do you know?
- Because what you say is true, but not useless.

Everyone needs answers in this life, but I think priests are the group that most have to look for them. Part of our job is to help people on the way to their answers. So a priest must have worked and clarified their own, must have wondered, responded and convinced. Repeat what they hear not work if you have not customized-do, if not integrated as their own. Not enough to say that Christ is the truth and that the Gospel is source of life, you must have seen and have lived in the midst of his daily life. This does not mean that the priest has all the answers. Nobody does. But the priest does have to have some clear answers from the existential and not only from the doctrinal, and must have especially search training.

Every Christian, but even more so the priest must incorporate the Gospel to their own experience, make a fusion of Christian truth with personal synthesis itself, translate the Gospel so vital to enlighten their specific coordinates. It is this that gives the strength to preach convincingly. It is this sense of "come and see" 26 Jesus Christ when those two were disciples of John the Baptist, John and Andrew, asked where he lives, that is, who he is. The Gospel says that they "were and saw" and his conclusion was 'we found. "

Moreover, living the gospel and insert it into the histo-ria everyday itself has a very hard time for everyone who accepts the Christian proposal. We all have frailties and miseries, each has its own rhythm and its stages, and the ideal will slowly coming as can be. If we do not recognize our own misery and APREN-demos to fight despite it, we have no battle experience to share, thus, the most common is that cling to the princi-ples, to what "should be" the pure and simple doctrine that deep well and people will recognize as valid, but indigestible present mode when not indigestible.

## Framework

He lived times of stability, and I feel strong enough to do new things. Speaking one day with two Colombian seminarians, we came up with the idea of spending part of Thursday, which was the day, to expe-rience pastoral did not know and could help for our future priestly life. There were two places where most stu-saw: the work Don Guanella, right next to the Ateneo Regina Apos-tolorum, where we studied, and a "family home" where congre-gation of Don Orione cared for AIDS patients.

The clinic of the work Don Guanella took care of elderly and mentally ill. Working with the latter has always cost me a lot. I like to talk, share experiences, begin and end, come up with something concrete. The mentally ill pose absolutely free, love because. Not because they are not able to understand who loves you and who is not, on the contrary, from its apparent mental absence, can be extremely intuitive. But

being with them, accompanying simply alejándoles loneliness and clean-doles intervals drool was something that required me all the goodness that was capable of. I thought the meeting with AIDS patients would be more grati-nificant, but in the end it was a very sore experience. In Italy there are so-called "family home", arising from the idea of expanding the family and accommodate within it a certain type of people, for exam- ple-guys with Down syndrome or single mothers.

The house served by the congregation Don Orione followed the same concept, although it was attended by nuns and volunteers took turns to care for AIDS patients. The sick were only men, but most of those men were full of rancor and resentment. They cursed of God, his family, his children, the nuns who took care of everything that exists beyond their blood poisoned. It was a challenge to talk to them, because as seminarians and future priests had to pass the test of its ironies, his jokes and questions. I think we stayed there more for the pride of achieving something from them that outright authority ca-Christian.

Marco, however, was different. It was south. His father, a man linked to the mafia, never recognized him as a son and his mother died when he was a child. He was in an orphanage until his maternal grandparents decided to pick it up a few years later, but both died before Marco would be fifteen years. Eva-diendo back to an orphanage, he escaped and began a life of wandering, malviviendo as he could, sleeping under bridges and parks.

Soon it began in the world of drugs and became addicted, dragging a chain of erratic life, theft and prisons. At some point in his "non-life" -as he himself definía-, met the recovery community Don Gelmini, where he was welcomed and cared for. Much received Marco in the community: ices medi-humane treatment, skilled care, honey, but, above all, that community meant his encounter with the Christian faith, with Jesus who knew only by name and that until then had no meaning nothing for him. When he arrived at the community health was already broken, not only by AIDS but by liver cirrhosis progressed slowly but relentlessly.

Marco had suffered a paralysis of the left side of his body. I remember sitting laboriously in his bed, ACOMO-giving with his right hand that left him dead. "Come - I was saying let's talk." He loved to talk, he told me his story and I answered everything I, grown in the hot gift of a protective family, wanted to know. And I wondered about my faith, my vocation, my family, about life in sunny Cuba that "my piacerebbe both conoscere ". (I would both know)

We talked and talked amidst the interruptions of one of the nuns, always aware of his many medications. Marco was all tenderness. There was no hatred, no resentment. It was all thanks. Never cursed his past, he never complained about his situation. When his companions began to blaspheme and Malde-cir told me, "They have no faith Alberto, they can not understand."

The end of the course and the time came closer examination. I buried all my trips, my pastoral work and my experiences of pre-cure. I immersed myself in studies prom and my Exa-regimes that were bound to be brilliant. In those weeks there were only books and more books. Marco came many times to my memory but I had no time even for phone calls.

I finished my last exam at the end of a morning. Happy, clear and pleased with myself first thing I did was lock-me in the phone booth and call the Ateneo house Don Orione. Hi, I'm Alberto, Marco put me, please?  
Marcus died two days ago came the reply.

God forgives and forgets all, God is a continuous "rise up and walk" eternal invitation to start again. However, there are mistakes in this life I do not know if we will ever be able to forgive, not reversible decisions with which we, from a dull ache, to learn to live.

## End of Theology

At the end of the third year I finished theology and, with this, completed the necessary studies for ordination. He could return to Cuba, but the seminar offered the possibility of a two-year degree in what the seminarian and bishop decided. That was, in principle, the plan with me. My bishop had given me do free to choose the subject and I had chosen spirituality. I had always done well is sit and listen and made it clear that my priestly style would go the way of spending time accompany people in the most personalized way.

In fact, do something deeper than psychology who had taught at the seminary was for me ideal, but consider doing psychology at that time was a utopia. For starters, they do not accept if you were not already a priest and some time experience and, on the other hand, needed more than two years of study. Deci-we figured that would spirituality, which is inserted into a broader context of the person, and I kept psychology as a golden dream.

Shortly after starting the course, I was surprised to receive a letter from my bishop who said to me: "Make a year of undergraduate and returns to command you. After a reasonable time should assess the con-desirability of your return to Rome, whether to finish, either to make another type of study. "

I did not understand. It was true that my bishop had asked me repeatedly if the study time in Rome were four years and I alw-pre had answered three or five, but when it was decided that I would bachelor, evidently imagined that the end. My puzzlement also reached those around me, not expli-caban why could not wait another year and return to Cuba with full degree. Even Father Duenas, who had always been a model of discretion and scrupulously respectful of the decisions of the bishops who were sent there his seminarians, he said he did not understand and was the one who encouraged me to write to my bishop reconsidering his decision.

To me I really wanted to finish, but what was clear was that he would accept without question what my bishop decided. My voca-tion involved a vow of obedience that I was not going to question. Karl Ranner says in words the silence that he does not share the idea that when the bishop asks you something is as if God whispered in her ear. Ranner admits that a bishop can make wrong decisions, but what can not be doubted is that God is weaving our history and you can take it wherever he wants even through such decisions, to the naked human eye may seem or maybe they are wrong.

What was in my hands was writing to my bishop expli-Candole my judgment and my reasons. I did, asking him to rethink his decision 'in present and future'. It is further said that if he kept his decision, allow me to travel to the United States before finally returning to Cuba.

Monsignor Adolfo was a wise and holy man and also an excellent diplomat. I'm not only less holy and less wise, but also much less diplomatic, and perhaps he preferred things "to the hard and ungloved," as they say in Cuba using a baseball metaphor.

But for Monsignor Adolfo that was not the style. He responded to my letter thanking consultation and saying literally: "... of course, I imagine you feel like the one between the sword and the wall, what they tell you all there and what we tell you from here but that we'll talk when you return from the United States. "

## Deacon

The summer before that would be my last year in Rome, I went to Manresa, in the province of Barcelona, to make them particular spirituality exercises of St. Ignatius. It is a route that is over one month. It has been, by far, the greatest experience of my life of prayer. The Jesuit who directed them, Father Rambla, was one of those fascinating people you transmit a spirituality to touch the sky but it landed in a common sense and a connection to the impenetrable reality. That course would be ordained a deacon, the step prior to priesthood and entry into the sacrament of holy orders in what is defined as "third degree". I wanted both the diaconate and the priesthood were in celebrations of the Virgin, and mediate about one year between the two. (The priesthood is a sacrament only three degrees: Deacons (third grade), which may be permanent and in this case, open to married men, or may be transient, as part of the path to the priesthood; presbyterate (second degree), which is what is commonly known as a priest; and episcopate (first degree), that is by choice of the Church, when it needs a new bishop.)

Despite all my process, I could not help but feel fear. The diaconate is already a final decision and involves assuming a lifelong condition. The priesthood is as baptism or confirmation, which is not erased. Once received are definitive. If a deacon or priest decides to leave his ministry, Pope (can not do anyone else) can authorize him to not exercise their commitments and even obtained what is called the "dispensation", you may receive the sacrament of marriage, but the priestly sacrament remains forever. It's not like the Eucharist, reconciliation or anointing of the sick, whose effects are transient, or marriage, in which the sacrament remains until the death of one of the conjugues. (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders are the only three sacraments 'printed character', ie once received remain in the person forever, give a definite identity.)

I told him of my fears to one of the boys of the seminar was a deacon. He smiled and shrugged as he said: "What do you want, a consecration without humanity, without the uncertainty of what might happen tomorrow?".

I came to mind the end of my third year of medical school, when I was so afraid to leave everything and enter the seminary. However, he had made the leap and was already at the gates of the diaconate. And I also came to mind that that "life is to push it."

He had studied, prayed, he worked in pastoral; It had taken years of frank and open spiritual direction; I was questioned and had found answers, and harbored no doubt that the priesthood was my way. However, I was afraid.

Perhaps one of the keys to the advancement of human life is that the moments of total suitability not exist. There is a certain preparation, there is a workout, like the bird that nests on the cliffs and has to jump into the void for the first time. You can not do before throwing feathers, but even develop strong wings, you can never guess the winds those who have to deal, and the worst option would be to stay in the nest forever.

On December 8, 1995, day of the Immaculate Conception, finished the morning prayers and went to breakfast. The seminar room was surrounded by huge glass



windows that overlooked an infinite green. Through them, he appeared a cloudless blue sky and a dazzling sun. I sat with Father Duenas, that pointing light flooding everything, said, "If everything starts well ...".

At noon, he was a deacon, consecrated forever. Mr. deacon

I understand that the Church is hierarchical, and this has never been a pro-problem for me, maybe because at all times I have been clear to the Gospel passage that states that in Christian key, all power in-finds its sense insofar when it used as a service tool.

It is said that "all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely co-". I think so. However, the power necessary it is important and helps regulate social life. In every human group, from the family to the country, must have a head, a reference point, and the Church is no exception. These humanisms and / or cheap spiritualism that we are all equal and no one is above the other is pure and bad idealism, naivety sophisticated, if not subtle to control from another perspective mechanism. Therefore, the only possible antidote to power is the layer-ity to understand and live it as a service, in addition to, if possible, a good alter ego, someone in confidence who can say to your face truths more raw. The solution is not thus to suppress power, but to do so source common good. And more power, more responsibility for service.

It is common that one chooses a motto for the diaconate, and mine was one of the phrases of Jesus: "I am among you as one who serves" 30. However, once deacon, my status among many of my classmates seemed to change the overnight. To rejoice that I had reached the diaconate understood that assuming it was no longer simply a seminarian more, also fell within the logical, but that would serve until the water in the dining room, that it was overstepping the stripe.

Suddenly I found myself treated by some as a whole "sir" when it was assumed that I had reached a state from which it had to be more available and more attentive to the needs of others. Deacon means precisely server.

The Cubans we are easy joke about everything and relativize naturally the most serious things. It was not difficult to deal with that situation, was enough to laugh and say, "See, here I am deacon is not ?; Am I not the one who has to serve? You are robbing me work. " With this was sufficient, the atmosphere relaxed and I was again part of them.

What really worried me was that if some consider that I should be treated with such obeisance, I imagined that they would be considered worthy of equal treatment when they reached the diaconate, let alone to be ordained as priests. And if anyone came to Bishop You go to how far we should honor him!

## The return

My airport outings tend to be a disaster, because things I do make-up to the last moment and arrived at the airport, hopefully, the penultimate. The last days in Rome did not escape the rat race and when I sat on the plane was more dead than alive. I had the time to need to look out the window and sunk remember what he had come. I wrapped a sense of comfort, calm happiness, accompanied by a very gratifying feeling of having grown to be more person, maybe not be different as of "being more" rather done in my deepest identity. He wanted to keep in my memory the panoramic view of the airport, but could not, when the plane took off, and slept.

I spent just over two months in the United States, hosted by "Uncle Guzman" and rediscovering many known and loved people. After these months, in mid-September, I landed at Jose Marti airport in Havana, amid green, light, heat and palm trees, merry host of mine, expectations of my diocese and suffering crippling my people. A few weeks later I returned to Havana to make a one-week retreat, it would be the last long and deep experience of re-bending before the priesthood. The retreat directed him John of God for me and Luis Carlos, who would be ordained later. Before starting the retreat I went to see the boys of the iglesia La Santa Cruz, where he had worked as a seminarian. As public transport was "Shakespearean" by that which could "be or not to be" lent me an attempted bicycle which I was under a blazing sun and returned under a tropical downpour that was an injustice. Trying to take things calmly and, above all, philosophically, I said, "Well, this is the reality of your people," but I could not avoid another sudden thought: "And the reality of your people is whack."

The retreat was great and had had a happy ending if the Ul-thymus day I had not declared an amebiasis that made me go to the bathroom every ten minutes and ended up sending me to deshidratándome

urgencies. My body used to the aseptic Roman waters, had lost training to fight all intestinal bugs that Cubans ended up making us immune. Being in bed and chained to a serum received a note from a friend who said, "I prayed a lot for you to go die now, and if you die, that is not something so vulgar."

As a rule, priestly ordinations are made siem-pre in the cathedral of the diocese, which is the mother church of the place. However, the priest of my people, who would eventually be the substitute bishop Monsignor Adolfo, looked good that my ordination was in my native Florida, which I also preferred. My reasons for this were basically two. On the one hand, the bad transportation involved would have to travel to Camagüey truck, and that would practically impossible assistance of very old people in my community, who had seen me born and raised and had remained close during all my years of seminary. On the other hand, retains-ba many friends of my people, especially college years, they were, at least officially, Communist Youth. If the ordination was in my village it would be easier to be there.

Archbishop Adolfo had no objection to the proposal and began preparations for ordination set for Thursday December 12, day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

While in Rome, one of my teammates did once the co-commentary that so many things have to prepare for ordination in the end one is so tired that he does not even know at that time than it receives. Knowing that this was true, I left everything in the hands of the parish and went to Camagüey recent days, the convent of La Merced, to be alone and to pray in peace. I behoove me and me working for other ordinations. Wednesday night was in the garden of La Merced, in that state where you know within a few hours everything will be different, when I was told that someone was looking for me. It was Sara. He'd played that kind of lottery is in Cuba to immigrate to the United Uni-two was on the eve of leaving the country with her husband. He came to say goodbye because, in fact, could not be at my ordination. It was good to see her, and thanked him that he had come because he had not seen since my return and did not know he was leaving.

Cubans are always aware of everything, and when Sara went some friends who were there that night came and told me, "The devil tempts until the last moment!". I made a gesture with his hand as "scold bad guys." It was simply another Sara, my friend Sara. Forever

When I arrived in Florida everything was ready. The ordination was going to celebrate in the church courtyard of the temple because the space was insufficient. Everything was decorated and had placed at one end a huge fabric with priestly motto he had chosen: "For I am with you".

As for the diaconate, it is customary to choose a biblical phrase that serves as a priestly motto and that somehow summarize the key personnel in which everyone wants to live his priesthood. For a long time I felt very identified with the vocation of Jeremiah. God tells him that he has chosen from the womb of his mother, and he has established himself as a prophet to the nations, God's voice for the people. Jeremiah resists terror as alleged disability. The Bible then describes a God who apparently imposed, it devastates, which will not let him escape, "Where I send you go; what I command you say ". And then comes the security of always, the only security that God in all Scripture when given a mission: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." I preferred to stay only with the second part: "I am with you" by-that could well put forward every situation, every moment: do not be afraid, but also, do not be discouraged, do not stop trusting, splash,

Dare, look, you risk not give up ... because everything, every day, every second, I am with you. It was time to start the ceremony and from the bishop to the last of the acolytes went to the temple, empty and banks. It was the place where I had been baptized, the ground I had crawled and ran, and where I had taught the difficult task of being quiet at Mass. The temple where I learned to be an altar boy under the rigid liturgical requirements "Uncle Guzman", where I lost the fear of reading in public. The site of the first communion, confirmation, so many different moments of prayer before the same tabernacle. From there he had gone full of courage to tell the world about Jesus Christ and I had taken refuge there when the world had me persecuted or humiliated. My life was there, between those walls. Both me he had started there and now it would be the scene of a full and final step after which and should never myself. Like a wave, my old acquaintance fear returned, making me feel clumsy, inadequate and unsafe. When he began the entrance procession I struggled to stay calm, but trembled.

There was my gathered community, my family, my friends, Raul, who had come from Madrid, Italian friends, priests of the diocese, the nuns, people coming from other communities ...

My best friend, who had come from Havana, began to read the first reading: "From the womb of your mother ..." and I felt my tears came, they were out, but continuous calm many. It was not anguish, was rather the sense of receiving it undeserved, as when someone lets you know that you want, or hugs from the free and infinite tenderness. Readings were resonating, one by one, inside me, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"; "Christ, despite being Son, he learned to obey suffering"; Jesus, after being in prayer, called "those he wanted".

That is the vocation, the call to which he wants. I was never the best of my generation, nor the noblest, even the most religious. Moreover, not even want to be called, never said like Isaiah: "Here I am, send me."

But He calls, to whom he wants.

When the rite of ordination came, I knelt in front of my bishop, to impose my hands and pray over me. Thereupon would one by one all the priests present imponiéndome hands. It had been a long time since Hector told me: "You are not worthy, nor will be, nor when you will be laying hands".

Knees, crying incorrigible, I felt invaded by two intertwined forces melted. On the one hand, my unworthiness, my misery, my fragility. It was as if I enfold my disability, my mistakes, my sins, my nothingness. And simultaneously, as in a hug, tenderness, peace, trust, the voice of God one day and I ignored my plans changed course. So I love you and I consecrate myself, so I accept you, and I tell you, just so. Quiet, I am. Then I got up, and after wear the priestly garments, embraced all the priests present, my new teammates. Des-after I embraced my family and those closest, and I did a site next to the bishop. I felt the same and everything had changed, I looked the same but everything was different, and it would be more and more. The things of God are that simple. Only humans complicate things. While preparing the altar for the Eucharistic liturgy I took my place by the bishop, who was exultant.

Well I said Monsignor At your service!

Yes, yes she answered with a laugh do not know where I'll be able to send after you have formed Iloradera.

Yes, somewhere it would be my first destination, somewhere still not revealed within the confines of my diocese. I leaned back in my chair and made to myself one of my many awkward sentences: "Good Lord, send me to wherever you want, except for Guáimaro and Esmeralda."

Ordination over between greetings and thanks. At the end, people were coming to wish all good things for the future. Some people told me: "May you succeed." This was no time to ask them what they meant by "success", but that phrase: "May you succeed" I knew that in a Christian meant nothing but holiness, be capable of total offering to God and people, to donate life until the end, or at least try it, assuming all the risks and, even more, all prices. Nor was this the time to start thinking. I kept shaking hands and giving hugs, while I listened, at intervals, "you succeed ... you succeed."

When it was over we went home for the nuns to conver-sar quietly and to eat something. As I could, I went to my bishop.

Monseigneur I said you already have decided to where I am going to send?

He looked at me smiling and answered me with a word.

-Guáimaro.

-

In early January 1997, for the Feast of the Mayos Reyes, he entered the area Guáimaro, the site of my first experience as a priest. I was there ten months, while the details for the establishment of a foundation of priests cla-retianos were completed. When I left Guáimaro, the bishop asked me to spend a few months helping another priest in the city of Camagüey, before assigning me my final destination, an area in northwestern my diocese, near the sea: Esmeralda.

### Fourteen years later

Time goes fast. At least, we perceive it, so it seems. Work, fight, love, and one day anyone say, "Already ?, but if it seems like yesterday."

However, we know it was not yesterday. Perhaps what happens is that we still feel the strength to look to the future. Espe-ramos much of life and know that life expects a lot of non-SOther. From our experience reevaluate the past and we balance: we have fallen and risen, won and lost, agreed and rebelled against our covenants. We have been wise and ignorant, I-mos right and we were wrong. It may seem like yesterday, but we know that we have grown and matured, that our eyes look in a

different way and our heart beats to a different rhythm. No, in reality, it was not yesterday.

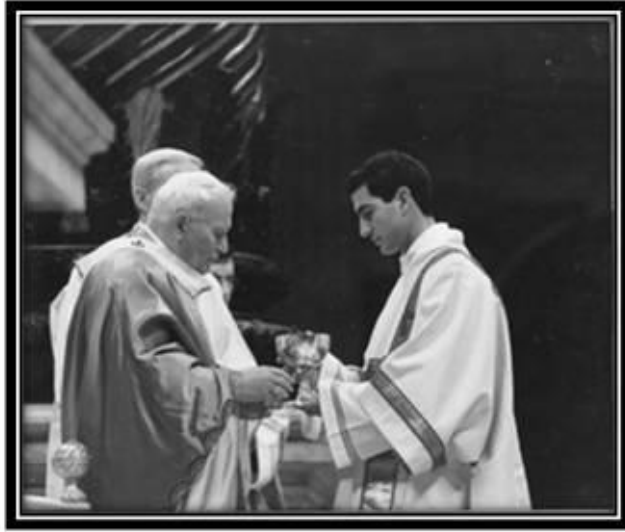
A word that describes all these years? Perhaps "desbor-commandment" in the best of its meanings. It has not been a bed of roses. In all this time there have been several 'crisis realism', those moments when, reluctantly, tap accept that reality is not that earthly paradise we would like. But beyond the hardships and struggles, the priesthood has far exceeded all my expectations. The priestly life has asked me more than I expected, but has given me more, much more, has filled my soul hath made my spirit has kept me alive and, above all, has reinforced the certainty of belonging, and he has given a meaning to each step.

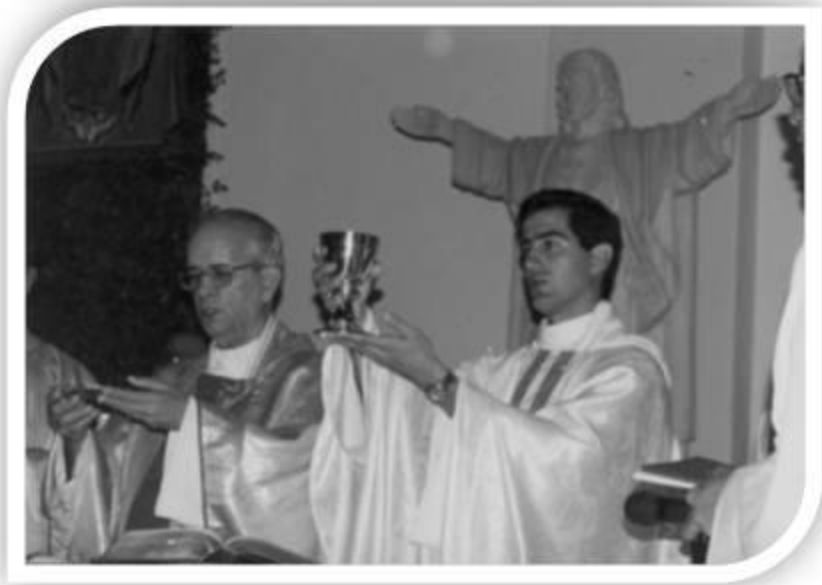
God has not left me alone. Sometimes I wake up and I find in my room, with their hiking boots and backpack on his back, bent over my desk studying the map of the pro-Xima route and commenting: "I like, I like" while I try burying his head under the pillow. Sometimes leaves only a quick note: "Parachute jump ... necessary risk ... tomorrow ... do not ever miss" or agile appears, with his cap coach when I least I hope as a greeting and saying: "Surprise! ".

But he knows also appear, silent, in moments of calm, and sit without speaking or asking me to speak. Alone, wrapped in peace. And at a time as in others, the hardest part of the Trin-chera and most peaceful sunset, I realize that in the midst of my haze, I found my place, where I feel full, where I want to live, where I want to die.

**Graphics moments of this story ...**











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## **Some of the titles Between the Lines**

*The word in my silence* of Pedro Pablo Pérez Santiesteban. Story and poetry.  
*Delusions* of Pedro Pablo Pérez Santiesteban. Poetry.  
*You love with love ... paid?* Margaret Pole. Story.  
*Relentless pursuit* of Lorenzo Reina. Novel.  
*Why I cut the veins?* Maria de los Angeles Morejon. Novel.  
*Anthology of silence or Cuban Chronicles* of Carmenluisa Pinto. Poetry  
*Poems and letters.* Carralero Gioconda rituals Dominicis. Poetry.  
*The Passion According to Gregor Samsa* Manuel Garcia Verdecia. Poetry.  
*Two feelings Housewife* Lissette Alea Alea and Lydia. Poetry.  
*Rumor wings* Bazan Arelys García. Poetry.  
*The guardian and society Ravens* Esteban de la Fuente. Novel.  
*Beatrice Recasens just me.* Poetry.  
*Constantino holguineros Patriots* Pupo Aguilera. History.  
*My buddy* Polo Margarita. Narrative.  
*Travel through mirrors* Alexis Perez Garabito. Poetry  
*Love is not defined ... is made of* Pedro Jose Rojas González. Poetry  
*Nelson Jimenez moths* Vivero. Poetry  
*Curiosities of marine organisms* Maria Elena Miravet Regalado. Technical Scientific.  
*Claudio and solitude* of Raul Garcia Vicente Huerta. Novel.  
*Evil puppet* Esteban de la Fuente. Novel.  
*Night Wolves* Bazan Arelys García. Novel.  
*Ramón Pérez dreams.* Poetry.  
*PS: there is still time* Dago Sásiga. Poetry.  
*Back in the pawnshop* Mauricio Fernandez. Poetry.  
*Manuel González Beceña ephemeris.* Compilation.  
*Notes of Pedro Pablo Pérez Santiesteban.* Poetry.  
*These Cyranos who walk* Crosby Mallorca Dany Baez. Poetry.  
*Sacred Passions* Aristides Vega Chapu. Poetry.  
*Alma, pen and Ordoñez Azucena* verse Rhodes. Poetry.  
*Vision noon* Ernesto Ravelo. Poetry.  
*I'll live air* of Manuel Salinas. Poetry.  
*Felix Anésio harvest.* Poetry.  
*The Discreet Charm* of Aristides Vega Chapu trades. Poetry.  
*Become my will* to Alberto Reyes Pious. Testimony.