

MY LIFE: ANOTHER STORY THAT WASN'T WORTH IT EITHER (Complete series)

Not_worth_it, 15 June 2011

Hello everyone! I've finally decided to write my story. It's recent, and the only reason I haven't done it before is fear. However, I feel strong now and I think the time has come to tell it. It's only fair that it should be known. I just hope it helps. I've decided to leave out names and details because I only want to help. I'm not the one to judge the people who have hurt me. I forgive them and wish them the best, but since I don't want others to go through what I did, I've decided to write it down. If I saw that, as a result of what I write here, there's any kind of "attack" or "pressure" on me or anything related to me, I will have no problem defending myself by adding the names and details I consider appropriate (this is actually "the children's version"). But let's hope nothing else needs to be done, that this is the real end of my case, which, like many others', was that of a story that wasn't worth it.

I'm from Spain. I studied in a Work school and from a young age I already went to a club. Some members of my family are or have been in the Work. I was always the typical club kid, nice, well-integrated, in a good way, etc. Before I was 14, my club director (a numerary) had already put the idea of a numerary vocation to me. And I ask you: can you make lifelong decisions at that age? I leave that to your judgment.

After two conversations with that numerary (over an hour each!) about why he was convinced that I had a numerary vocation, I went off to pray and said: yes, I have a vocation. I give my life to God from now on. And that same day I told him: decided! I'm going to be a numerary. I remember I wasn't even 14, so I had to wait more than seven months before I could write the letter asking to be an aspirant numerary.

I was an adjunct for four years, following the normal formation plan. I finished my A-levels and went to live at the study centre. I finished the study centre (two years) and was appointed to a role at the study centre, so I was there another two years. At the same time, I was named director of a "halting place" – I was only 19, but I was 100% Opus, 100% faithful to whatever the Work needed. To be honest, I didn't care too much about my degree, only insofar as it served the Work, so my grades were okay but nothing more. In fact, in my second year of university I started studying two degrees at once, but in the third year, when they gave me those roles, I dropped one of them. There was no time for MY things – I had to give everything and spend the day with people from the Work and possible future faithful of the Work from that halting place, which I went to every afternoon and at weekends. And I did it gladly, mind you – I had been formed for that, and that's what I did. I thought that was God's plan for me and that my happiness depended solely on fulfilling it.

I finished my degree without delays. I studied a degree related to education, partly because I'd always wanted to be a teacher in one of the Work's schools in the region where I lived. But when I finished my degree, they asked me if I would mind working in the regional delegation and helping the director in charge of the numeraries. I said go ahead.

(Incidentally, I found it curious that many of those who taught in those schools didn't have a degree related to education, because they weren't really interested in education – in fact, many of them worked there to help the apostolate, to look for numerary vocations – and I, who was interested in education, couldn't do it.) But anyway, I didn't object – I adapt to everything – so I said yes. And I said “yes” because in the Work I'd always said yes to everything I'd been asked. What's more, I would volunteer for other things that others should probably be doing.

In this regard, I remember that the regional vicar attended a get-together at my annual course (I'd just finished my degree that summer) and said in front of everyone that the region needed all-round numeraries, ready for anything... like me, he said (I went bright red). Later I understood that “ready for anything” because that summer they told me:

- In June: you're going to work in the delegation and you're going to live in such-and-such a city and you're going to be the director of a centre of supernumeraries in another city (I was 21, by the way);
- In July: you're going to live in another city, but you'll carry on with the other things we told you in June;
- In October: you're no longer director of that supernumerary centre; you're director of that other numerary centre and you'll carry on working in the delegation.

And I didn't complain. Why? Because in everything that came from the directors, I saw the will of God.

Well then, I was director for three years, as planned (appointments to local councils are for three years), and at the same time I worked in that delegation for those three years. But a few months before finishing my three-year term, they asked me (because I'd offered myself a few months earlier, in that desire to help the Work in whatever way was best) if I would mind going to the Roman College. I said no, that was fine.

For those who don't know, as soon as you say you're willing to go to Cavabianca/Aralar, they tell you that going to the Roman College doesn't mean you'll be ordained, but that it's good for you to remain available to be ordained (sic!). In other words, for those who don't know how ordinations work: the Work covers itself. They ask you to be ready to say “yes” when they need you as a priest, but at the same time you have to be ready for them never to call you because they don't need you as a priest, or simply because they think you're not up to it... even if you want it and have spent several years in Rome in formation. They'll tell you it doesn't matter, because the vocation is the same and so on. But in reality, they simply do whatever suits them best. Even though they say that for someone to be ordained, three wills need to align (God's, the Father's and the person's), your opinion only counts once they've already decided whether you can be ordained or not. And what they think will be God's will for you. Unbelievable, but true! Why do they do it? Because they're the ones who will decide whether or not you have a vocation to be a priest in the Work.

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CHAPTER 2

I arrived at the Roman College. I spent two years in Cavabianca. Before finishing the two years, I asked not to be transferred to Villa Tevere. I said it explicitly because I could see it coming – I had the typical profile of a Villa Tevere numerary: young (27, so I could still work a few years before ordination), Spanish (most of the officials – numeraries who help the directors in their work – at Villa Tevere are from Spain because it's the region that can supply the most people, I suppose), with experience working in a delegation, with experience as a director and, most importantly... READY FOR ANYTHING. So, since I could already see myself on the list of candidates for Villa Tevere, and thinking about how hard I'd found it to adapt to life and the peculiarities of Cavabianca (I can tell you another day why I say this, but if I had to sum it up in one sentence, I'd say it resembles everything except a family :-), I explicitly asked not to go and live at the headquarters.

I'll get straight to the point: a month after I asked not to be transferred to Villa Tevere, they told me that the Father had appointed me an official of the general council to work in the department that deals with numeraries (St Michael's) and that I would live at Villa Tevere. Just like that. Without a: "How would you feel about...?" "Would you mind...?" "Would you have any objection...?" And I ask you: is that how decisions are made in a normal family? I won't even get into the "spending themselves for each other", "the strongest command is a please", "being a carpet for others to tread softly on", "the best place to live and to die"... I think if only out of respect (not to mention charity), things could be done differently.

And off I went, with my best smile, convinced that this was the best place for me, because God had made it known to the Father and the directors. The truly incredible thing is that I went happily – I mean it: imagine how much I'd been preparing myself over the years to welcome whatever came from the directors as the best plan for me.

I lived and worked in that department at Villa Tevere for four years, so between the three years in the delegation and the four at Villa Tevere, I dare say I know quite a lot about how numeraries are looked after, because I always worked in that department. But don't worry, "dear directors", I know how to live the professional secrecy. No wonder you worry about making everyone who takes on a role commit to living the professional secrecy for life and to not being able to talk about what they read, see or hear... for obvious reasons...

By the way, for anyone who thinks my case isn't recent, let me say that my time at Villa Tevere was from summer 2003 to summer 2007. And I left the Work last year, in 2010. Not long ago, really...

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Anyway, as I was saying, at Villa Tevere I was given more and more responsibilities, so in addition to my work in the department that looks after numeraries and my classes for the Licentiate in Moral Theology (with a view to a thesis and future ordination), I was named sub-director of one of the Villa Tevere groups (there are four groups in the Vicolo house – that's the name of the centre for numeraries who are officials of the general council, at least most of them), a role equivalent to that of a centre director, because in reality each group is independent and functions like any other centre. Also, since I like educational activities with young people, I was named director of a club with activities for children.

I was in the middle of all that when, in the summer of 2006, I went to India for three weeks for an annual course (a retreat for numeraries). I was excited to get out of Rome, to see other things. And I had a really good time. So when I got back, I volunteered to go wherever I was needed, India included, although India didn't strike me as my favourite destination.

A few months later, they asked if I wanted to move to a very faraway place. I said yes, that I didn't know exactly where it was (I really mean that), but that I'd go gladly. I didn't have much idea what I'd do there, but in my head that didn't matter, because God knew best and the directors would pass on to me what God wanted for me at each moment. In my mind there was only the idea of serving the Work in the best way possible.

They said: "You'll have to spend a huge amount of time learning the language" (at first, practically all day). And I said: "Well, I'll do it, I'll learn." They told me to think it over carefully and to write to the Father if I wanted to move there. I wrote that same night and handed over the letter the next morning. A few hours later, the Father phoned my room to say he'd read the letter and that he was grateful and commended me to God.

I started studying the language and organising everything related to my move. And when I got my visa, I left.

CHAPTER 3

I arrived in my new country in summer 2007. I went there with great enthusiasm, with a desire to learn, to be just one more, to adapt to a new culture, to love the people there as if I'd been born and lived always in that land. To be just another citizen.

The first few months I "locked myself away" to study the language as well and as quickly as possible. It was hard, but my eagerness to learn could overcome anything. I had three hours of class in the morning and spent another three studying in the afternoon. I also worked as an official on the regional commission and lived in that centre. A few months after arriving, I was named director of a numerary centre, so I moved to another house and stopped working as an official, because I was still immersed in learning the language and no longer had time.

A while later, a friend offered me the chance to start teaching Spanish at a university, part-time (3–6 hours a week), and after

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consulting about it, I said yes. Finally, I said to myself, ten years after finishing your degree, you start teaching (even if it's only a few hours a week). I, who had given myself to work in the middle of the world, sanctifying myself there like everyone else, took ten years to start working "a little bit" in the middle of the world.

Time passed and I finished my intensive language course. It was more than two years of classes, exams, struggles. It was a very hard course. But I learned quite a lot because I wanted to integrate 100% and thus be a better Opus Dei. To give you an idea of how hard it was, we started with 20 people and only 3 finished.

As soon as I finished my intensive language schedule, I was told that I had been named defender of the regional commission (the defender of the regional commission, for those who don't know, is like the sub-director of a delegation; in a nutshell, the lay member – not a priest – who holds the highest position in the governance of the men in that region). On top of that, I was still director of a numerary centre and had to teach some classes at the university. My centre was more than a 30-minute drive from the commission, but I went there every day, because the defender, for those who don't know, is supposed to read with the regional vicar all the writings (reports, notices, consultations, etc.) that come in and go out of the commission.

CHAPTER 4

With that role on the regional commission, I began to understand better how things really worked in the Work, because until then I'd only worked as an official (assistant to a director) and for a single department (the numeraries' department). Until that moment, I only saw what they wanted me to see, what they passed on to me. But now I read everything, I had to sign papers from all the departments. I was, or should have been, up to date with everything that was happening in the region. And that's where the crisis began.

It's hard to sum up in a few words how and why a crisis can arrive, and how mine arrived. I have to say, first of all, that in the nearly twenty years I'd been in the Work, I'd never had even the slightest doubt about my vocation (perhaps that's why, and because of my – I believe – good disposition, I was always given government roles). And I had difficult moments, like everyone else. But the vocation was something fundamental and untouchable in my life. In fact, as I'll try to explain later, I didn't leave because I had a doubt about my vocation or a crisis in the sense of not being sure whether this was the path God wanted for me. My crisis wasn't personal, it wasn't my own – it was institutional: I was willing to give my life to God... but could I really go on thinking that God was there?

As time went on, the things I didn't like – and that my conscience (in principle, well-formed: nearly 20 years in the Work, more than 10 years with roles, a biennium in philosophy, a quadrennium in theology, almost finished licentiate in moral theology, 2 years at the Roman College, 4 years at Villa Tevere) told me were wrong – became more and more numerous. I saw them in my own house and also in the other centres, I heard them when people spoke to me or

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consulted me. But I denied them, I was convinced that the Work was perfect, and so I repeated to myself: you're young, you have no experience, you're in another region. Wait. Listen. Learn. The problem is yours – you must be mistaken, because the Work is from God and therefore perfect, and your brother directors are holier than you and know more than you. The Father and the directors in Rome know all the regions well. Listen. Learn. BE HUMBLE!!

I was like that for several months. But things got worse, and after a period of "humility", of continuing to silence my conscience and, deep down, deceive myself, I decided I couldn't go

on denying the obvious. And I said to myself: you've already waited six months – more than enough time to assess the facts objectively.

And since I'm a sincere person, or at least I try to be, I said to myself: you have to let it out, you have to say it – tell what you see, say what's happening. Say what you think: say that sometimes you doubt whether what we say the Work is and what you see are the same thing. Say that this place doesn't seem, by a long shot, to be the best place to live and to die. Say that when you see the St Raphael boys, you'd like to tell them: go away, don't join the Work – here we always smile at you, but in reality, in many cases, we don't truly love each other, nor are we as happy as we seem. Say that you're already ashamed to keep saying that we're the best family in the world or the ones who love each other most (with bonds stronger than blood, they add). Say that here you often don't find charity, or not as you understand it, or at least you don't see it, and therefore, for you, it's very hard to think that God is here.

And so, I wrote a letter to the Father saying what I saw and what I thought, with the idea that someone would help me, that someone would explain what I didn't understand, that someone would tell me this or that. I said everything very clearly but in a good way, with upright intention (I think). I only wanted to be Opus Dei, to be a better Opus Dei. I never thought this would lead to a personal crisis, because as I said, the possibility of leaving the Work had never crossed my mind.

I wrote it, and before sending it to Rome I gave it to the regional vicar. I didn't want to bypass him. I didn't want to go it alone – I wanted to be united with him, I wanted him to know that I was suffering, that I needed to tell someone and that I needed someone to tell me what was happening. My conscience was rebelling and demanding an explanation.

I gave him the letter, told him I'd like him to read it, and we talked for a while, though not for long. The letter was faxed that same day.

No news came from Rome.

CHAPTER 5

Before I continue my story, I'd like to clarify a couple of things.

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First: I have made and continue to make mistakes – many, like everyone else. Far be it from me to try to show that I act well and others (in this case, the directors of the Work or some of its members) act badly. In the Work there are many – I repeat, many – holy people. Very good people whom I admire and will always admire. And that's precisely what's most confusing. Realising that in the same reality there can coexist very, very good people with others who are also good – or at least struggle to be – but who, in their eagerness to defend the Work at all costs, or what their founder said, are capable of committing all kinds of outrages, thinking they're doing what God asks of them. They've been formed to defend that at any price, and unfortunately, they do; and I was one of the many who suffered the consequences. I know I'm not the first victim, but I wish I were the last.

Second: precisely because I make mistakes, I may make some errors in describing the events I narrate. The truth is, I've always been told I have a very good memory. And there are things that stay etched in your memory for life. That's normal – the things that affect us most are harder to forget. In any case, if I ever confuse some detail or date, I'll be happy to correct it. But let it be clear that the essence of the events and most of the details I include (I dare say at least 90%) are as I tell them. So I take this opportunity to apologise in advance if any date or detail is not exact.

That said, I'll continue with my story.

The letter was sent, and the answer was delayed. I was surprised they didn't reply soon because my letter was a harsh letter (though written in a good manner, I'll grant) due to the topics it dealt with, and coming from someone they knew well in Rome, who had never in his life raised his voice, who held the post of defender of the regional commission, etc. – I honestly expected them to say something quickly (I know that when they want to be quick to reply to something, they can be... the number of papers I worked on at weekends at Villa Tevere ;-).

But that's not how it went. Between ten days and two weeks passed (I could look up the exact dates because I've kept those letters, but it doesn't matter for our story), and since no news came, I thought perhaps I hadn't been clear enough. So I wrote again, because I needed an answer. My life depended on it!

In this second letter, I spoke very, very clearly, in detail, with many more examples. I said, among other things, that my conscience could no longer bear the weight of signing some papers. Deep down, I could see that any day God might ask me to account for what I was approving with my signature. And I thought the best thing, until things became clear, was to hold no government posts. So besides what I said, I explicitly asked to be relieved of all the posts I had at the time. I formally declared myself in crisis, but willing to fight to see where God's will for me lay. At the same time, I prayed and prayed to be able to see what God was asking of me.

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I gave the letter to the regional vicar again, and we talked for a good while. He didn't say much to me. He only made some comment like: "What you can't say is that we don't do our utmost to do things as well as possible." And he was probably right, but it didn't seem enough to me. I was hoping for something like: "We need to be better." Or: "Forgive us if we're doing some things wrong." Or: "Perhaps you're right on some points – let's talk more deeply about these issues" (I won't go into the questions and examples I raised when I talked with him, out of respect for professional secrecy). Anyway, I was expecting an answer or at least an interest in dialogue. I was acting with upright intention, wanting to help, and perhaps naïvely I thought we could talk about how to face these issues, which for me were very, very important. But no – those deep issues are not touched.

That same day, they replied by fax from Rome, telling me to go to Rome on the first flight I could find, "today or tomorrow". I left the following day.

In fact, I found out later (someone told me by mistake – I'd prefer to omit their name/role) that from Rome they had said: "Let him come, and we'll see if he returns." Yes, you heard that right. "We'll see if he returns." Is this how a family operates? Is this charity? Trust in people? Love of freedom?

Even though I'd suspected that for a long time, this kind of behaviour only confirmed what I was already intuiting: there, important decisions about your life will often be made without you. They won't ask you – they'll inform you. And what you'll know, what you'll be told, will probably be a very small part of what there is. Anyway, I'll stop – I'd rather not go down this road.

The next day I packed my suitcase and went to the airport.

CHAPTER 6

I packed my suitcase and went to the airport the next day.

Before I continue, I'd like to clarify something important. All of us who have been through a crisis know that there are moments of light and moments of darkness. And I had them too.

For example, after my second letter, in which I declared myself in crisis, I went through a period when I thought I shouldn't have said what I was saying. That I should have rejected it as a temptation. That I shouldn't raise any fundamental issues relating to the Work. And in a way I said that – I said I felt better, that the crisis had passed (even though in some way it remained inside me), that I was struggling to reject that temptation. So when I arrived in Rome, they already knew that, although I'd written what I'd written, I'd come wanting to persevere no matter what. My vocation was still there, untouchable, as always.

I think it's interesting to clarify this because when you're in a crisis, there are moments of everything – sometimes you think you're making progress, but you're not, or vice versa. A crisis is usually a non-linear process. And that disconcerts the person involved even more.

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Anyway, I got on the plane. And something changed on that flight.

I was going to Rome with great eagerness. Partly, of course, to clear up everything that was happening with my life. I needed an explanation. I needed to know whether the problem, to put it briefly, was my region or the Work (I don't think it was mine, personal, as I said earlier). That's why I was going there – to talk and to see how to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. On the other hand, I was going with great excitement, because I was going to see the Father and so many beloved people from Villa Tevere and Rome. It was going to be – it had to be – a wonderful few days.

Also, since my last few weeks hadn't been easy, I was a bit tired. Normal. Anyway, I prayed and prayed but... there were so many things I didn't understand!

I was in that state, crossing half the world, when listening to some song or other, I started to cry (luckily I had one of those sleep masks, so no one noticed :-). And you'll ask me: what's so important about that? It's normal. Well, no. That was very important to me. I truly mean it – it was a before and after.

Those who know the Work's formation well, especially the men's section, will know that what you feel isn't important. The most important thing is to do what needs to be done. The little duty of each moment. What God expects each one to do: now the spiritual reading, then put on the cilice, give a fraternal correction, etc. And I, who (like everyone, I suppose) had always tried to do God's will in everything, to always fulfil what was laid down (out of love, but to fulfil it nonetheless), had exchanged my heart for perfect compliance with the rules. And this after years and years of struggling not to be willful, to love with my whole heart, to be a carpet for others to tread softly on, to love God with all my soul.

Did I love people? Yes, of course I did (that's precisely why I suffered when I saw lack of charity, and why my crisis came). But my heart had rusted a great deal – it had got used to putting up with whatever was necessary because that was where God's will for me lay at that moment.

So, note this: that day was the first time I'd cried in about 20 years (at least since I'd been in the Work). In those years, I'd had two operations, friends and close family members had died, friends of mine had been ordained, my siblings had got married, I'd had problems and very, very hard times... but I never cried. Why? Because something inside me told me that a person with a supernatural outlook would see everything with God's eyes and would have the necessary strength to bear whatever God sent.

Yet, unexpectedly, on that flight I cried. I cried because I was saying to God inside myself: What's happened to me? How have I failed you? How? I've always done what you've asked of me in prayer or what you've indicated through the directors. I've always stayed away from anything or

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anyone that could affect in the slightest my total giving of myself to you. Why am I going to Rome to talk about these issues? Why?

Those tears, in a way, broke a shell inside me. My heart was loose again, as it probably was before I threw myself fully into the spirit of the Work.

And I'll jump forward in time so you understand what I mean. A few days after that flight (I'll tell you about it later), I went to see my parents. At one point, my mother and I went into a café for a snack, and she told me something that was worrying her. I remember putting my arm around her shoulder, hugging her and saying: don't worry, everything will be fine. Do you know what she said? You've left me speechless. You've never given me a hug like that in your life. Yes, I said, I suppose I'm changing. My heart was waking up again.

Do all people in the Work behave like that with their parents? No, obviously not. I'm simply explaining what happened to me, because it was a very significant moment in my life.

Well, finally, my flight arrived in Rome.

I already told the story of my arrival in another writing from 30 March.

CHAPTER 7

I arrived in Rome. My plan was to live at Villa Tevere for about ten days and then spend a weekend in Spain to visit my parents, before returning to my region. If everything went well, of course... since they replied to my letter with a: "Let him come as soon as possible and we'll see if he returns" (but they didn't tell me that last bit – I found out by mistake :-).

You already know my first day in Rome: rushing to go to Mass at the Vatican in the morning and ordinations in the afternoon. They treated me marvellously: sit in the front row, come in this car, hugs, encouragement, fond memories, etc. The external, as always, perfect. The internal...

The second day, they asked me (when I say "they asked me", "they suggested", "they said", etc., I usually mean the same person: a director of the general council with years of experience who was aware of what I'd written and had known me well for many years; during those days I spoke to him almost daily, sometimes for more than an hour): "Did you bring your football boots?" "Yes, of course," I answered. And he said: "Great! Why don't you go and play football at Cavabianca? Would you like to? They have a new artificial grass pitch." "Of course I'd like to," I replied. And off I went.

In the afternoon, he encouraged me to take a walk around Rome: "Have you seen what a beautiful 'tramonto' (sunset) we have now? You don't get this in your country! Why don't you go for a stroll around the city with someone from Villa Tevere?" (for those who don't know, these kinds of walks are always with someone from the centre, so that the person in question

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"breathes Opus Dei" 24 hours a day and thus "recharges"; and incidentally, avoids the risk that someone, being alone, "might start thinking too much"). And he added: "That way you can walk for a while, get some fresh air, because of the jet lag, you know..." "Yes, of course," I replied, "I'd be delighted."

On the third day, I started to realise that there wasn't much interest in talking. Everything was related to football, walking, going out, resting, getting fresh air... And look, leaving everything you have at the other end of the world to come immediately to Rome, only to be told to go for a walk because the Roman sunset is beautiful these days – that seems very romantic to me, but also a bit of a joke. So after dropping several hints to see when we'd have a little time to talk, and getting little interest in reply, I asked him directly: "Are we going to talk about the issues I wrote about in my letters?" And he said: "No – we're not going to talk about what you wrote in those letters."

Well, my first reaction was surprise. First, because I thought that if they'd called me, it would be to talk. From my point of view, I wasn't in a bad frame of mind – my attitude wasn't one of attack. It was more one of dialogue, of wanting to learn and, deep down, to know. Something totally normal. They'd named me defender of the commission without consulting me, and I understood that if there was something that didn't seem right to me or that I couldn't understand, I had to say it or ask about it – discreetly, and to the people directly above me (the regional vicar and the directors of the council with the Father), but to say it nonetheless. The alternative would be to assume they'd appointed me to sign (approve) everything they passed to me, whether I agreed or not.

On the other hand – I said to myself – in the Work, as in any normal family (back then I thought the Work was a real family), when there are problems, you should be able to talk about them to try to solve them. Saying there are subjects you can't talk about seems very, very strange to me. Why can't you talk about them? Would talking about those subjects mean admitting that on some points I'm right? Would it mean acknowledging that the Work does bad things? Would it mean acknowledging that the Work isn't what it claims to be? I don't know. What I know is that I sat down in front of that director and expected something like: "How are you? Are you having a hard time? We're here to help you. What can we do for you? Tell us, let us know – we're here for whatever's needed..." But no, it was the exact opposite: "We're not going to talk about these subjects."

I insist that I was in a good frame of mind: I did all the norms, I lived unity of life, I put on the cilice, I did apostolate, I prayed for the Father, I lived the spiritual talk and confession sincerely and punctually, I gave fraternal corrections, I wanted to persevere until the day I died, etc. And perhaps because I was in a good frame of mind, despite being surprised that they didn't want to talk to me about these important matters, I listened to them and believed them. I still thought that God's will would reach me through the directors, and so I continued doing what they asked me to do.

What did they ask me to do?

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First, as I've already said, not to talk about those subjects. So later, when I made a move to bring them up again, to raise one of those issues, do you know what that director TEXTUALLY said to me? TEXTUALLY he said: "You're obsessed." And he added that I turned things over too much, that I was stubborn, that I was tired, and that I should take advantage of those days to have a medical check-up at Villa Tevere. I told him very well, that I would do it. He told me to speak to so-and-so, a priest from Cavabianca, an official of the council and doctor at the Roman College – who, I might add, probably handles "this type of medical check-up" (since the "normal" medical check-ups for those at Villa Tevere are done by another doctor, a layman with an external job as a doctor who is not an official of the council but lives at Villa Tevere, precisely to serve as a doctor if the Father or someone needs him).

We agreed that I would call that priest to have the medical check-up the following day. And before our first long conversation ended, he said to me: "Well, the most important thing from today's conversation is this: the subject of the vocation is not to be touched. This must be

clear. The vocation is something that is not to be touched. Is that clear?" "Yes," I answered; and we went off to supper.

The next day I had the medical check-up.

CHAPTER 8

Before I tell you about my medical check-up at Villa Tevere, I'd like to relate something that seemed very important to me.

A few hours before leaving my country to fly to Rome, someone told me (he probably shouldn't have, but... you can't control everything :-)) that a priest from Rome was going to visit our region in the coming days. He told me the name – because I knew him very well: we lived together for four years at Villa Tevere, on the same floor – and also that I wouldn't coincide with him there, because he would arrive when I was already in Rome and would return to Rome before I got back. What a coincidence! Right?

In fact, in my naivety, I was glad he was going to visit our region. I thought: great! It makes sense. They want to hear both sides, both bells: mine and everyone else's (especially the regional vicar's, I suppose). It seemed a very fair approach to me. Also, because as I said, I was open to talking and correcting whatever needed correcting, so the more objective the study, the better.

However, something caught my attention. When I arrived at Villa Tevere, I bumped into that priest a couple of times and he didn't say anything to me about going to visit my region the next day. I thought it strange. We knew each other very well, and the logical thing would have been to say: well, I'm going there tomorrow – do you need anything? Any advice on how to get to the commission headquarters? I don't know, something. Even if just a comment.

So, not shy about it, I decided to go and ask him. I went to his room and said directly: "Well, I've found out that you're going to my region tomorrow." He was a bit surprised and answered: "Well, the truth is

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I didn't tell you because I didn't know if you knew – I didn't know if that director (the one talking to me) had told you." I said: no, that director didn't tell me, but I already knew ;-)) (sometimes the handling of information in that crowd falls light-years behind KGB movies... as innocent as doves...). So, since he didn't seem very willing to give anything away, I asked him again: so, what are you going to do there? He answered: "I'm going to cheer up the atmosphere a bit."

That answer killed me. I thought he was going there to talk about the issues I'd written about, to hear the other side of the story, and instead he was simply going "to cheer up". There I understood better what was going on.

I said to him: I don't think it's as simple as "going to cheer up". Have you read my letters? He answered: I've read one letter. Clearly he'd only read the first one (I'll add another piece of evidence that confirms this), which was the "lighter" one. I know that some of you, dear readers, might think it's bad that he read my letter (if it was addressed to the Father), but to be honest I didn't mind. First, because I know how things work in there, so it's better to deliver it open and give it straight to the regional vicar to read (as I did), and second, because I'm not sorry for anything I wrote – that's why I was happy for whoever needed to read it to read it. However, I have to say that I think it's very wrong to give them only half the information, because that's unfair: if you read it, you read all of it. If not, don't read it.

Anyway, I commented to him that it wasn't as simple as "going to cheer up". And he answered, pointing to the clouds visible from his window: "e pure li dietro c'è il sole" (and even behind there – behind those grey clouds – there's the sun too). He was telling me, obviously, that I was too pessimistic and that I wasn't seeing things from the right perspective.

In short, I encouraged him to read my second letter – something I'm sure he didn't do – wished him a very good trip, and went back to my room.

At that moment, I realised that his mission was simply to cheer up, to calm the regional vicar and the rest of the directors. To go there and tell everyone that things were being done well, that vocations would come, that the Father greatly supported them, and that I was a bit tired, that I would give up the posts I had, that I would be better, not to worry, to forget what I might have said... In short, to make sure that neither the regional vicar nor the others were affected (perhaps they might start thinking too much) by what I had written.

That said, I'll continue with the medical check-up.

The doctor, as I said, is a priest. He's the doctor at the Roman College and also an official of the general council. Before he was ordained, he worked as a doctor. I know him very, very well and I consider him a good person.

I arrived there and before starting the usual examination, he asked me quite a few questions. Curiously, things like: are you tired? Do you sleep well? Do you turn things over in your mind a lot? Of course, you'd have to be very, very naïve – even more naïve than me (which is saying a lot) – not to realise

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that PERHAPS the director who told me to go and see him had transmitted a POSSIBLE diagnosis (it just so happens that the direct superior of that priest-doctor is the director who asked me to go and see him ;-). So after several questions along the same lines, I said to him directly: So-and-so (the person you work for) says I'm obsessed. He answered: well, then, this is something we have to treat.

And he started a very nice little speech about "you have to learn to distance yourself from problems", "you have to know how to rest", "give things relative importance". He said: it's normal for things to affect us, especially things in the Work and concerning our brothers,

because they are our life, but you have to learn to distance yourself from them as well. I told him yes, not to worry – I'd already said I didn't want any posts and we'd agreed that they would be taken away from me.

So, after his little speech, he told me that it would do me good to take something to help me. "Take these pills, one in the morning and one at night." "Start taking them today, and we'll see how you get on, so that when you go back to your region, we can make sure they're working." "Don't pay much attention to the leaflet – just take one in the morning and one at night, that's it."

He gave me several more examinations, and I went back to my room. I left the pills on the table and before going to the dining room, I opened the first box and swallowed the first pill without reading the leaflet ("he who obeys is never wrong", I said to myself, repeating something I'd heard hundreds of times).

CHAPTER 9

Two days after starting to take the pills, I told the doctor that I was feeling nauseous in the mornings. He answered: no problem, I'll give you others. And he changed my morning pills.

During those days, I had many conversations with the director I've already mentioned. We talked about many things, but in 90% of the conversations the subject was me – not my region, and certainly not the Work. We touched very superficially on the issues from my letter, and only once – you could tell he wanted to tick the box "we've discussed this matter" and that was it. There was no alternative. I had gone from "we have a problem" (me and the Work, identified as one and the same) to "I have a problem" (I'm obsessed, I'm ill).

However, as the days went by, I didn't much mind talking about those fundamental issues either. Why? Because I was also changing: the pills, obviously, were doing their work (with good reason the doctor and that director kept asking me if I was taking them, to make sure they were doing their job), and besides, so many conversations along the lines of "don't be stubborn", "listen", "distance yourself from problems", "make rest plans" were gradually convincing me that the problem was me, not the Work or some people in the Work.

On the other hand, the little gestures of affection they showed me could only be compared to those shown to a really good guy who's about to ask for admission in a very difficult country: smiles, kind gestures, the

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best seats, eating with the council directors, being at the get-together with the Father, going to the oratory of the council centre, going on an excursion, walking, having an ice cream, etc. The council directors, who know Latin and Greek, were aware that I'd come to Rome for a few days "to rest" – and in their language that meant "shower him with a thousand little details of affection". And that's what they did.

So during those ten days the plan was very clear:

1. Don't talk about anything related to the Work (or as little as possible if there's no alternative).
2. Convey to those in his region that the problem is his – nothing to do with the region or the Work.
3. Convince him that he is the one who needs to change. Since he seems to struggle and does everything that's laid down and is faithful, then it must be that he needs to rest, distance himself from governance matters, THINK LESS. To help him, he'll need medication – that way we'll make sure he really "rests" and "thinks less".
4. We have to give him affection: make him feel that the Work really is his family, so that he never again considers the possibility of leaving if things aren't as they should be. We have to pour ourselves out for him these days.

For me, this plan – which now seems very obvious – I couldn't see at the time. I had too many contradictory feelings. With how well they look after me... how could I think that we don't truly love each other? With so many people I know who have fallen ill, why should I think that I'm fine? They're telling me – a doctor and a council director with many years of experience!

Anyway, this isn't all. An important part of the plan was the conversations that director was going to have with me. He had a lot of experience on how to face this type of conversation; I didn't. But I didn't need it either. My conscience was my best weapon :-). If my conscience was well formed (or at least seemed to be) and I wanted to do God's will, I had nothing to fear. No fear of life and no fear of death, right? ;-)

I'll give some examples of things that were said to me in those conversations. Obviously, the speaker let a few days pass, waiting for the pills and the external affection to take effect, before bringing out all the heavy artillery. He was leading me down a slippery slope. And sometimes, from my point of view, he went too far. I believe that, willing to do whatever it took not to lose me, he sometimes "played dirty".

Well, here are some examples of what he said to me, to give you an idea.

A few days after arriving, in the middle of a conversation, he comes out with: "Have you accused yourself of these things in confession?" My face was totally poker. "Of these things???" (my eyes said, wide as saucers). "Yes," he continued, "of having tampered with the vocation" (remember that the first day we ended with his

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lapidary phrase: "the most important thing from this conversation is that the subject of the vocation is not to be touched"). I remained silent. I remained silent because my conscience at no point told me I was doing anything wrong. I wanted to do God's will, and I thought God was asking me to say that there were things that were wrong, and if there was no interest in changing them, because they were sufficiently important, I had to consider whether I could continue finding God there, whether I could continue thinking that God was there.

As there was no response from me (I was still bewildered), he concluded that it would be good for me to confess that. Logically, to confess that would mean, in the future, associating

any doubt – however logical – about the Work with a sin. And he would make sure I never did it again.

I believed him, once more (how naïve of me, for God's sake), and went to confess. I looked for a priest who could understand me. He was from my own land, which would make things easier. He'd been working in spiritual direction for years (he would have read hundreds of cases of conscience, I imagine) and knew me very well from having confessed to him many times. I went to his room, asked if I could confess, and said: "Well, talking with so-and-so, he told me I should confess to having tampered with my vocation, but truly, I don't think I've done anything wrong. I don't know what to say. Ask whatever you want. I can tell you a bit about why I'm in Rome." Do you know what the priest asked me? Ha, ha, ha... When I think about it, I find it both funny and sad, but I know he did it with the best of intentions, so I'd rather laugh. He said: "Is there a girl?" I was about to say: (excuse me) bloody hell, that's all I needed! (I should say that the director who was talking to me never asked me about any girl, because he knew me well: he knew that if I ever started falling in love with someone, I'd immediately ask to be transferred to another country). Anyway, I answered the priest: no, there's no girl. And I added: "I don't think there is." Why did I say "I don't think" when I knew there wasn't one? Because at that moment, I no longer knew whether things really were as I saw them or as others saw them. I heard so many times the thing about listening and not being stubborn, etc., that I was even starting to doubt the most obvious things. Anyway, I confessed, we talked for a while, and that was that.

Another example: suddenly, while chatting about various things related to fidelity to the vocation, in a tone somewhere between humiliating and dismissive, he came out with: "What are you going to do out there?" He was telling me that without "them" I was nobody. With them, I was someone important. And he was taking advantage of that. He knew I'd only worked in internal tasks, that my formation had all been "in the Work and for the Work", that I was no longer twenty (though I'm still young ;-), that I was in another country, that my family and almost all my friends had connections with the Work, and that leaving would mean going as a traitor, starting from scratch, and probably having a very, very hard time. So he played with that, and to me it seemed very dirty. If I was in the Work, it wasn't because of what the Work could "provide" (image, power, prestige, friends, position, etc.). That, thank God, I had very clear. "External" things mattered very little to me. And on the other hand: did that director really trust me? In my abilities, my talent? How could he trust me if deep down he thought "what could you do out there" if I wasn't in the Work?

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Another: one of the first times – I don't recall what brought it up – I said something he didn't like, and he came out with: "Well, if you're like this, you'd better not go back to your region." The message was very clear: if you want to go back, do what we tell you. If not, you'll stay in Rome or we'll send you back to Spain. Always in the line of freedom and trust in people, of course. I kept quiet. And I still didn't understand what my crisis had to do with being in Rome or elsewhere. I suppose in his mind, being in Rome would mean keeping me much more controlled – they'd know how to handle me.

The last one. At another point, he said to me: "Only the Father and I have read your second letter." And he added a gesture like "you've gone too far with what you say". But the most

important thing is the context in which he said it. The context was that of letting myself be helped, of going to see my thesis director (it was a nod towards my possible future ordination, because to be ordained I needed to advance in my studies, and those days he wanted me to go and see him and dedicate more time to my thesis when I returned to my country). The message, again, was very clear to me (perhaps some of you won't guess it because I've omitted some things): you forget what you said, you take the pills, you do what we tell you, and we'll forget your letter. Your file won't be "stained" by this episode. Only the Father and I know about it. You trust me, and I'll trust you. You go back to being the obedient boy who doesn't ask questions, you study for your thesis, then you're ordained, and surely later you'll be back on the commission. Yes, that's what I understood, and to be honest, I cared very little about posts. I never asked for them, and in fact I was the one who insisted on being relieved of them. I hadn't come to the Work to be awarded medals, so as far as I was concerned, the letter could be shown or given to whoever he wanted. And the medals and prizes too. I entered for supernatural reasons, and if I left, I would leave for the same reasons.

But anyway, let's be positive – there was one thing we did agree on: "We made a mistake" (he said once, referring to having appointed me to that role on the commission). Yes, I thought, if you thought I'd close my eyes to things that are wrong, you chose the wrong person.

Those days I also had the chance to speak a little with the Father.

CHAPTER 10

Those days I spoke three times alone with the Father.

The first, I've already told: it was brief, just after I arrived, in the room next to where he normally works.

The second was in the same place, a few days later. We spoke little. He told me, among other things, that there was no problem with me going to visit my parents in Spain before returning to my country. He didn't mention my letters – the topics were ascetical... praying, at heart.

The third was special. It was at the end of my trip. I think it was the evening before returning to my country. I'd already been to Spain and was back with renewed

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energy. Eager to learn, to listen, to start over. To take the pills, to rest, to do what they told me. To serve the Work as it wished to be served, now probably more in the shadows, but equally or more effective than before. And that's what I conveyed to him.

That conversation was special because the Father was in a "private" room of his. Those who know Villa Tevere know there are different rooms: some for everyone, others for those who live there, others for directors, others for the Father, etc. And this was one of those "top secret" rooms that you don't normally enter. I think in the four years I spent in that house, I

went in once, for 60 seconds. And I dare say at least 70% of those who live there have never entered.

Anyway, I mention this only to show that they and I knew this was another sign of trust in me, another way of “winning me over”.

The Father was very kind and affectionate, as always. I told him what I’ve just written, and surprisingly he spoke to me basically about two topics: the first, patience. It was along the same lines as what I’d been told those days, but from a different point of view: the idea was that sometimes you have to let some things go, not try to resolve or change them in a short time, everything has its meaning, etc. Same old, same old, but in other words: don’t engage with the problems.

And the second thing he said surprised me even more, because it seemed to have little to do with me: he told me that I was living in a very different culture, not even a Christian one, and that this surely meant understanding that the historical-cultural coordinates were very different and that approaches should also be different, in keeping with that new culture... and so on and so forth. In short, that honestly sounded more like something for someone who was about to go to that country and had to have an open, flexible mind. But that wasn’t my case: I loved that land, most of my friends were from there, I’d learned their language, I was already one of them! In fact, with all due respect to his words (and advice) and his person, after two years studying the language, eating their food, making friends there and throwing myself into their way of thinking, and loving those people (I didn’t want to go back to Rome or Spain), I think I could say I knew them a little better than he did, since he had never spent more than a couple of weeks there. And I repeat, I say this with all due respect.

So, I thanked him very much for his words, noted them in my diary, and went back to my room.

A few days before that conversation, as I said, I spent a weekend with my parents in Spain. All my siblings, as always, came to be with me. Some had to travel several hundred kilometres, but they were delighted. However, the first day they were very surprised because just before our first meal together (we were only going to have two), I told them I was very tired and wanted to sleep. “Now?!” they said. “It’s two o’clock. What’s wrong with you? Are you okay?” “Yes,” I said, “I just feel very tired and need to sleep.” And there I stayed, dead to the world, sleeping in bed until nearly

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6 in the evening. Later I understood what had happened to me: the “dear” pills had left me completely flattened.

They asked me about my sudden trip to Rome, and without going into details, I said: well, there are things I think are wrong and should be done differently. So I wrote down what I thought, and they told me to go and talk to them. I didn’t say much more – only that the Work had to change in some things. And some of them agreed: yes, it has to change in this or that. I didn’t talk about my posts or my pills or anything.

One of my brothers, who knows the Work well, simply said: “Truly, to go to Rome and say that kind of thing to them takes some balls.” To which I answered: I simply do what in conscience I think I have to do.

The weekend passed, I returned to Rome and spoke with the Father, as I said, and on that last day they called me to go to the evening get-together with the Father and the council directors. It was the icing on the cake. A lovely detail. The final nut. They and I knew that only those who live in the council centre attend the evening get-together with the Father (at midday they usually invite some people – I myself went two or three times during those days; but to the evening one, no). There were jokes, some comments, and at the end they invited me to do the examination of conscience with the Father and the council directors in the oratory of Pentecost, the one in the council centre. Always in the same line of great affection. I thanked them and said goodbye, as it was late and I had to leave early the next day. Big hugs. I went back to my room, took my night-time pill and went to bed.

The next morning I went to the airport, heading home.

CHAPTER 11

I got on the plane.

Many times I’ve thanked God for living in such a distant country. Because many hours of flight – nearly a whole day in total – give you a lot of time. And if the outward flight was important, the return flight was even more so.

I don’t know exactly how or when, but at some point, my conscience awoke and a ray of light shone in my mind. A little light bulb went on. Something there, inside me, said: they’ve deceived you.

On the plane, far from the barrage of little details and affection of Villa Tevere, alone with God again, I couldn’t deny something that would be obvious to anyone’s eyes: they didn’t let you talk, you didn’t talk about the issues that worried you, and on top of that they told you you were obsessed and even medicated you for it.

Why can’t you talk about those issues? Why? Why? (as a certain famous football coach would say). Didn’t they appoint you themselves? So if they gave you that post, why won’t they even listen to what you ask? Isn’t it your family? Isn’t obedience there

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supposed to be intelligent? You’re not refusing to obey whatever answer they give you. The problem is that they don’t even answer you.

On the other hand... are you really ill? Do you really need medication? Fine, very well, you’re tired and sometimes you haven’t slept well, but that’s normal: who could go to sleep as if nothing were wrong, knowing that they’re giving their life for something that isn’t what it seems? Losing sleep over important things isn’t only normal – it shows that you truly love. But does that mean you’re ill? Of course not. You have a perfectly normal life. You have

many friends, you play sport two days a week, you go out, you meet up with people, you study, you work, you follow the plan of life without any problem... you're fine!

At that moment, I made my decision: I'm leaving. I don't know when, or how, or where... but I have a why, and that's enough for me.

Leaving was going to be very complicated – I knew that. First, because leaving meant starting a new life from scratch, and I said to God: why are you doing this to me? Why are you asking me to leave now? You asked me to give you everything for the Work, and now that I've done it, you take that away – my fidelity, the only thing I had. Well, you know best – I suppose your plans are the best. At least, give me a hand so that everything goes well. And everything did go well, though it wasn't easy.

I had to be quick and cunning. And I had to be prepared for the worst. In the Work they say the doors are always open for leaving, but... I had enough reasons to think that "open" was far from the truth. So I was ready to push, because now, yes, I saw more clearly than ever that I had to leave, no matter what.

I don't like lying, and I don't know how to lie. I knew that at the very latest, a week later, I'd have to have the spiritual talk with the regional vicar, as every week. And I wasn't willing to tell him face to face why I was leaving. I knew it would be like talking to a wall – whatever I said, he wouldn't understand me. And besides, I had nothing left to say: I'd spoken to him several times before going to Rome, and I'd spoken many times in Rome, also with the Father. Who else did I have to talk to? I had nothing more to say or hear. So I gave myself a week to write the letter to the Father asking for dispensation from the commitments I had made with the fidelity.

What I'm about to say will surprise you, but it may help those who are in crisis. Crises, as I said, are non-linear processes. And I, for example, despite having made my decision to leave, continued to follow the whole plan of life – and what's more incredible: I continued taking the pills! Why? Because I still wasn't totally free... a part of me, a small part, still thought that perhaps they were right.

So, I said to myself: even though you've made your decision, you have to talk to someone who is impartial and who can advise you well. That will help you see things from a more objective point of view.

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I had only seven days. So I started talking. I spoke with my siblings and my parents, asking them not to mention it. I told them what had happened in Rome and... of course, with the pills they were stunned – not without reason. I told them that in conscience I thought I had to leave, and they understood very well. They were a great help because they supported me from the very first moment. I told them the truth: that I didn't know what I'd do, where I'd live or anything, but that I was fine and would leave in a few days.

I spoke with a very, very good friend. I owe him a great deal – I've told him many times. He listened to what I said, and when I asked his opinion, he answered: "I think you know. Take

your time, think it over carefully, but I think you know what you have to do.” And so, listening and supporting, he helped me enormously. Once again: thank you. My parents and siblings were fundamental, but they were thousands of kilometres away. I needed someone close, and for me he was another brother.

Besides talking to them, I decided I had to talk to a priest. I thought he would help me. He would have more experience and would know whether I was doing what God asked of me or not. I went to see him. Obviously, he wasn’t a priest of the Work, because a priest of the Work could never have been impartial. He was a good friend of mine and, moreover, knew the Work a little.

I told him a bit about what had happened and my trip to Rome, and I asked him what he thought. He said that in all the Church’s institutions there are problems, that it’s normal for there to be misunderstandings, that sometimes things are done badly but without bad intention, that you always have to forgive. I said: yes, I know that, and I would have said the same as you, but the problem is I haven’t explained myself very well – let me tell you more clearly what I mean. And after talking for a good while, I said: that’s why I came to talk to you – because in the Work it’s considered bad spirit to go to a priest who isn’t from the Work (his eyes wide as saucers... “bad spirit? Why can’t you talk about interior life with a Catholic priest who isn’t from the Work? I too am a Catholic priest...” he said). I need your advice. What do you think? I was expecting something like: think it over carefully – it’s many years, there’s no hurry, we can talk more times... However, he said three things, all of which, I think, were very accurate:

1. “Never take those pills again. What are those pills for?” “I don’t know,” I answered – “they told me not to pay much attention to the leaflet.” He answered: “Read it, but don’t take them any more. Have you taken them today?” “Yes,” I said. “No wonder I thought you seemed strange,” he answered. “Never take them again. You are healthy.”

2. “Leave.”

3. “Don’t lose your faith.”

Yes, I said to him, if I leave, it’s precisely because if I stay there, I’ll either go truly mad (spending my life denying what’s obvious, and needing real medication to bear such a lie) or I’ll lose my faith

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(after what’s happened to me... will I be able to go on thinking that God is in the Church or in any human institution?).

I thanked him for his advice and asked him to pray for me. He said God would help me. I said: yes, I know, but I have to start a completely new life. I don’t have a visa to stay in this country (my visa depended on them), I don’t have a job, I have almost no professional experience (part-time Spanish teacher for just over a year), I don’t have a house or a place to stay, I have no money, almost all my friends are connected to the Work...

“Why do you say you have no money? After all those years there, they’re going to help you, aren’t they?” “No,” I said, “when you leave, you leave with nothing. Everything you earned is no longer yours, and if you worked for them, no matter how many years, you don’t receive anything either.” And he said: “How is that possible? In my congregation, if a priest leaves for any reason, he’s given a salary, an amount each month. It’s normal – it’s a way of thanking him for his work over so many years.” “Forget it,” I said, “things aren’t like that there.”

We said goodbye with a warm hug, and I left with great peace.

CHAPTER 12

I went back to the centre and, after greeting people, went straight to my room to read what it said on the leaflet for those pills. Here’s what it said (I’ve kept them, just in case someone ever thinks of saying I invented it ;-)

Morning pills (translated from Italian): therapeutic indications: treatment of depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and bulimia nervosa.

Night-time pills: indications: most clinical forms of epilepsy in infants and children. Also indicated for epilepsy in adults...

Good God, what I was taking! Depression? Thank God, I’ve never had any kind of depression. Obsessive-compulsive disorder? Bulimia nervosa? Epileptic seizures? I’ve never had any of that in my life. What game are we playing? This is very, very serious, ladies and gentlemen. These pills aren’t sweets. How can they go to such extremes?

I remember that a few days later, once I was out, I spoke with a good friend who is a nun, and she was scandalised, saying to me: “How could they give you those pills? And why did you take them?” I said: “I believed them.” “How long did you take them?” “I don’t know – a couple of weeks.” “Good God,” she said, “do you know the harm this does? Do you know the effects it can and could have had?” “Yes,” I said, “they always remind us there that ‘he who obeys is never wrong’...”

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And here a logical question arises: wouldn’t everything be easier if you went to any ordinary doctor in the street? Why do members of the Work have to go to Work doctors for medical check-ups? Why do they have to go to Work psychiatrists? Could it be that they’re afraid that ordinary doctors – the ones in the street – might say something that doesn’t suit them? I leave it to your opinion... and I’ll continue with my story.

I started looking for a job. It had to be full-time, to allow me to get a visa. And I needed somewhere to live – not easy at all, because I had no money. My siblings had already offered to put some money together among themselves to help me. But before that, I had to write my resignation letter.

I knew how these letters worked, so I played with a certain advantage. I knew what I had to say and what I didn't have to say if I wanted everything to end as quickly as possible. And of course, I knew I had to push – hard – if I wanted them to leave me alone. And I did.

First, I had to write two different letters. If I put everything I thought in the same resignation letter, I knew that several weeks later they'd ask me to do it over again. That would mean talking to them again, more pressure, more attempts to get me to reconsider things, and more hassle all over again. And I, after everything I'd been through, had had enough. So I decided to be practical. I didn't mind writing two separate letters – I wanted to leave because I couldn't take it any more, and I wanted it to end in the least bad way possible.

Why couldn't I write everything in one letter? Because they wouldn't accept it. They take great care to ensure that the letters of those who leave are "clean" (there are many examples on this website). Why? I don't know. Perhaps so that if one day they're asked about those who leave, they can say that people leave freely, without more, and some of them (and there are some) even grateful. Once again, it's about touching up or even changing history so that in the future another version of events is known.

Anyway, I'm in favour of everyone writing in one letter what they think, but honestly, I couldn't take any more, and I only wanted to leave. To start a new life and overcome that trauma as soon as possible.

So I set about writing my two letters. One very formal, like: I, so-and-so, in full exercise of my freedom, request dispensation from such and such. Date, place, signature.

The second letter I used to say everything I wanted to say. I knew that letter would be read by the director who spoke with me and the Father (and Don Fernando, of course). (By the way: are there still people who think the Father isn't informed? Remember what that director told me? He said: "Only the Father and I have read your second letter" ;-). Probably this third letter wouldn't be shown to anyone else, but I didn't care. As long as they two/three read it, that was enough. So I went in hard. I said that the way they'd treated me – "not being able to talk, the pills, you're obsessed, etc." – was worthy of a night court. And I said that my earlier complaints about how badly

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people were treated and how charity was lived had been confirmed during my trip to Rome.

I gave examples of things that, in my opinion, showed how badly people were treated, and I also spoke about myself (here I feel more comfortable telling you whatever I want, since I don't have to keep any professional secrecy about myself, so here goes): I told them they took advantage of good-natured people like me. And I said: one thing is being willing to do anything to serve the Work, and another – very different – is taking advantage of that – of those good dispositions – to always do only what suits you. You've played with me like a chess piece, never caring about my life. Examples? Here they are:

1. I explicitly ask not to go and live at Villa Tevere and... you send me to Villa Tevere without even a: "Would you mind?" Or a... "We know you're not keen, but..."

2. Before I left for my new region, you told me that my plan was to go there, learn the language with the idea of settling in, and then, 3 or 4 years later, return to Rome to be ordained. And you repeated to me (the director who said this is, curiously, the same one who said I was obsessed) that the plan was for me to be ordained; that it shouldn't happen that a few years later I changed my mind. You even told me that you'd thought of ordaining me that same year, but that (thank God) you thought it better for me to go there to learn the language before being ordained. And what happened? Two years later, you decide to change that plan and appoint me defender of the commission – a role that is for a layman and is not easy at all, nor obviously short-term. And I ask: do you really care about my life? Because I think that if you cared even a little, before putting me in that role, you'd say to me: "Does it seem right to you? Do you feel up to it? We've thought about postponing your ordination." Or... "Perhaps you'll be ordained later." Or... "Perhaps you'll never be ordained." But at least say... SOMETHING! Is this a family? Is this the way to treat those who leave their skin for the Work? Is this Opus Dei?

I'll open a bracket: I never left the Work because I wasn't ordained – I want to make that clear so there's no misunderstanding. I never made a final decision about my possible ordination – it was only ever a possibility. What I'm complaining about is that they don't care whether a person is ordained or not. In fact, if I had wanted to be ordained, I could have waited a few more years and I would have ended up being ordained – I could even have been ordained afterwards, once outside the Work, and yet I haven't done it and I won't. As an anecdote, I'll say that once outside the Work, the first two times I confessed to diocesan priests I didn't know at all, both ended the confession with the same question: "Have you thought about becoming a priest? We need priests." I said: no, sorry – I'd like to start a family (how could I have the strength to trust a director again?).

3. More examples. You ask me to learn the language – and to learn it well (actually it was two languages, but that doesn't matter now). I kill myself studying six hours a day so that, after nearly three years of trying to settle into the

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country and the people, when I say that there are things that are wrong, the regional vicar says to me: "Since the most important thing is the vocation, why don't you go to Rome until you get yourself sorted out?" To which I answered: my problem goes with me – if I go to another country, I'm the same person. Don't you see? And I added: you see, deep down, my three years of effort mean nothing to you – because if they did, you would never have said such a thing. You don't care about my problems or my happiness. The only thing you care about is that I don't leave. And you said the same to me in Rome: "If you're like this, you'd better not go back to your region." Do you realise that my life – like probably that of many others – doesn't matter to you? You only care that we are in the Work.

Anyway, I'll conclude. I also said that I was asking for dispensation from living in a centre because I wanted to stop living in the centre as soon as possible. I told them I didn't know what I'd do, where I'd live or anything, but that I didn't care – I had God, and that was enough for me. The vocation was the most important thing, but after faith, so I was leaving because if I stayed there I would lose my faith or end up with a bad head. Would God want

me to end up with a bad head by staying in the Work? Obviously not. The Work was, or had to be, a path to reach God, and I was very clear that at the moment when that path, instead of bringing me closer to Him, took me away from Him, I had to abandon it.

And that the Work had to change in many things, but that no longer mattered to me – I left that to them. And I told them (because to leave you have to push): if you delay my dispensation from living in a centre and tell me to continue living in a centre, I will obey, to the last day. However, when people from the Work or St Raphael ask me why I'm sad, I will say: I went to Rome because they called me to talk about things that in conscience I believe are done badly, and there they didn't let me talk, they told me I was obsessed and gave me pills for obsessive-compulsive disorder and epileptic seizures.

I signed the letters, and the next morning I went to the commission headquarters and left them on a piece of furniture with the rest of the post, so that the regional vicar would get them. And I returned to my centre.

The next day I had the dispensation not to live in a centre.

CHAPTER 13

I left, as I said, the two letters at the commission headquarters and returned to the centre.

In the afternoon, the new director of my centre (until a few days before, it had been me) came to see me. He was tense, like me. He said: "Can we talk?" "Yes, of course."

"It's about the letter you left at the commission," he said. He was tense and I think angry, but we were going to understand each other well because he was from my same land, young like me, and a practical man. Moreover, he'd worked for many years in the Aop, so he knew how to handle this kind of case. I was even more tense and angry than he was – I was burnt out – so he realised that the best thing was to speak clearly and briefly.

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I reminded him that I was leaving because if I stayed there I'd go mad or lose my faith. He said that in the end the most important thing was for me to get to heaven (that I shouldn't lose my faith). And also that people – all people, even in Rome – can make mistakes, but not the Work, which was from God. I told him I'd already seen enough to think that God wasn't there, and what they'd done to me in Rome was the best example. He asked about my letters and whether I minded if he read them. "No, of course not," I said, "read them – you'll probably understand me."

After that, he behaved very well towards me. He wanted to help. He said: "I'll do what I can so that you get the dispensation from living in a centre as soon as possible" (in fact, I got it the next day, as I said) – "and I'll call you as soon as I know something. Do you know what you're going to do?" "No," I answered, "I only know that I want to leave."

Then he said: "What do you need? Money? A visa?" "Nothing," I said, "I'll manage on my own." He insisted that he would help me in everything he could – "even if the directors tell me not to, know that I'll help you in everything I can." I thanked him.

Not content with that, he insisted again: "How much money do you need? Ask me for whatever you want." "I don't want money, thank you," I answered. "You'll need to rent a flat – money will come in handy." "No, thank you, but no."

I truly appreciated what he was doing for me, because at last I saw someone who wanted to help disinterestedly. And of course I needed money – he knew that too. However, I didn't feel it was right to take it. First, because money is either given to everyone who leaves or to no one. Giving it to me because I held such-and-such a post doesn't seem fair to me, though I can understand it. Second, because taking that money might mean that in the future I would be somehow indebted to them, and I didn't want to be. I wanted to be free to say what I wanted – at that moment and later: always.

I have to say that more than one friend encouraged me to ask for some money, but at no time, as I say, did I consider it.

Everything was going very well in the conversation, and I know he didn't say it maliciously, but one comment disappointed me profoundly. He was insisting that I ask for money or anything I needed, and he said: "So that they don't say later that we didn't help you." Good God, I thought – I hope you haven't been offering me things just so that later I can't say that. But no – I know he didn't mean it badly; it was just an unfortunate comment.

We finished talking, and I started packing my suitcases. I still didn't know where I'd live. I only knew I wanted to leave the next day. And I left. Thank God, a friend who had two apartments – one of them in not very good condition – offered to let me move there until I found something. For a few days, it wasn't bad. And I thanked him profoundly.

Meanwhile, I kept talking to my parents and siblings, who supported and encouraged me from afar. One of my brothers

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surprised me with what he said when I told him I was leaving: "That's the best news you could have given me in your life."

My great friend also poured out a thousand little details. We talked and talked, and he always said: "Everything will be fine – don't worry."

Finally the day of my departure arrived. The director offered to drive me, but I said no (the last thing I needed was for them to know where I lived!). He also said I could take a car and use it as long as I needed, but I said I didn't need it. "Do you want help with your bags or anything?" "No, thank you, but no." Because at that moment, I didn't trust them at all.

I told him I would leave at night. I didn't want to give explanations to the others in the centre. I know I wasn't doing anything wrong, but they didn't know anything about what had

happened either, and I wasn't up for new fronts. I already had enough problems. So, around midnight, in the darkness, trying not to make noise so that no one would come out to see what was happening – like a thief in the night – I sneaked away, like many of those who have written here. What a pathetic ending, right? Well, it is what it is. That many of us have to leave alone and at night shows you a little how things are inside there.

I finally managed to load all my bags into the taxi that was waiting for me and I left. I remember the emotion of closing the centre door after leaving the keys on the director's table and breathing a sigh of relief: "At last, it's over."

Even though it was past midnight, my friend was waiting for me in the street. What a great guy. I found it quite hard to communicate with him, because the languages we spoke weren't the same, but he's such a good person that there was no problem. He helped me with all the boxes, and since it was almost one o'clock, he stayed to sleep in that same apartment. The next morning he left, with a: "Call me for anything you need, and stay as long as suits you – no hurry." There are good people in the world!

The regional vicar wrote me an email along the expected lines. I would have been satisfied if he'd said something like: "I'm sorry." Or: "Sorry if we did something wrong." Or: "I pray for you." Or: "If I can do anything for you, tell me." Of course, something like: "I know you're having a hard time – cheer up" would have been even better, but that was asking too much. What he said, once again, was that I shouldn't close the door entirely on the subject of the vocation. "You see?" I answered the centre director. "They only care about the vocation – the vocation, the vocation, the vocation. Where I'm going to sleep tomorrow, what I'm going to eat, and why after twenty years I have to leave like this – none of that matters."

Legally, I was still in the Work, until Rome approved my request for dispensation from the commitments of the fidelity.

CHAPTER 14 and last

My first days in that little apartment I spent sleeping and resting. It had been several weeks of great tension and not sleeping

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well and eating badly. But now, I slept like never before. I finally felt unburdened, liberated. My nightmare was over.

On the other hand, I started to get moving, and little by little I got a job, a visa, some money from my siblings, etc. A few days later, I received a call on my mobile – it was the regional delegate. I didn't answer. I had nothing to talk about. If they wanted to tell me something, they could write a text or an email. The delegate left me a voice message: he would like to meet me for a beer and a chat, and to ask my forgiveness for what had happened.

I appreciated it. I answered the centre director – who was the one I kept in contact with – saying thank you, but I had nothing to talk about. I always thought it was a nice gesture, but why send the delegate – a 70-year-old man who hasn't done anything wrong and who in this

story, with all due respect, has no part? If anyone has to ask forgiveness, it would be those in Rome or the vicar, but... the delegate? But of course, let's not be naïve, please – how could those in Rome ask forgiveness?

I was still waiting for news from Rome: legally, I was still a numerary. I played with a slight advantage: I knew how the procedures worked, and I also knew that they had no alternative but to grant me the dispensation from the commitments of the fidelity. I also knew that they would do everything possible to make me change my mind. To start with, they would make me wait. I was sure that the same day I wrote asking for the dispensation, a fax would have been sent to Rome, and they would be perfectly informed. I could even imagine Rome's reply: make amends, etc. The premise is always the same: the Work is never wrong. And I knew that sending the delegate was another excuse to try to reconnect with me (although I'm grateful that he asked for forgiveness, as I've said). I was very clear that the best and fastest way to leave was precisely not to "dialogue". And that's what I did.

During those weeks of waiting, some of the friends who were part of the centre told me that they'd been told I no longer lived there, that I needed to rest and so on. That I was resting somewhere. "Did I need to rest? I didn't leave for that reason. I'm very well," I said. "I left because I wanted to, and I did it in perfect health." And I wrote to the director of that centre asking for an explanation of why they were giving that version of events. He told me that in no way did they intend to say that I was in poor health, ill or anything like that, and that he was sorry if there had been any misunderstanding with anyone.

In those weeks, I also wrote to a good friend. I told him what had happened, and he said: "Look, I mentioned it to my grandfather (a supernumerary), who knows you well, and he asked me to pass on just one word: fidelity." "Thank you," I said, "that's exactly why I'm leaving – out of fidelity to God. Otherwise, I'd still be there."

But the weeks passed and the answer didn't come. I set myself a deadline. I knew very well that they always hurry for what suits them. So I said to myself: I'll give them two months – which is a very long time – to answer me.

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If they haven't answered in two months, I'll push again (because there's no other way to get out of there).

After two months, nothing. So I wrote an email to the director of that centre, saying something like: well, two months have passed and there's no news. I know how long replies take, and I also know that some papers urgently need answering and others urgently need stopping. I find it shameful that after everything I've had to go through, you now don't deign to answer me. So I'm not going to let you play with me again. From now on, I'm going to be very busy – don't bother looking for me because I won't have time for you. I wish you the best, goodbye.

Yes, it's sad, but I knew this was the only way to make them react. They were obliged to answer me, and if they didn't, they'd be in serious trouble. For example, I could go around saying or doing crazy things while still being in the Work. Or, I could write telling them what

they'd done to me and that they didn't deign to grant me an exit to which I was entitled. Anyway, I knew how to defend myself.

Curiously, a few hours after writing that email, that same day, the answer arrived: they told me that they had just received Rome's reply and that the following Monday they were going to write to me to pass it on. How curious, right? Pure coincidence ;-)

He told me it wasn't worth ending badly and that it was better to finish as good friends – that we could meet that same day if I had time. Or the next day.

By that point in the game, I felt such pity for them that I said: yes, sure, let's meet today and get this over with once and for all. For those who don't know, this kind of dispensation is transmitted verbally. I suppose for fear that people might later claim or prove with a document that they were in the Work.

The meeting was at a McDonald's. As soon as we saw each other, he made a gesture – where do you want to talk? “We can have supper, if you like,” I said (here I have to say that I threw him off balance, because he expected to meet someone very angry, wanting to close the matter quickly and leave; but instead, I invited him to supper ;-). “Yes, yes, of course,” he answered. And so, we had supper, he told me I was no longer in the Work, and asked me if I thought I'd stay or go back to Spain, etc. I said I didn't know, but that I'd try to stay. Surprisingly, he didn't ask me if I wanted to be a cooperator – it's laid down that you have to ask – so I deduced that at last they'd understood that I was already a little bit burnt out ;-). We said goodbye, he asked if he could write to me from time to time, I said yes, and I finally began my new life.

When you leave – when you're outside – you realise that you begin to be truly in the middle of the world. And you understand, little by little, that you were living on another planet.

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Since then, I lead a perfectly normal life – with a lot of work, many friends, and many reasons to be happy and give thanks to God. Luckily, I've had many people – especially my family, of course – who have always supported me. And I've also been fortunate to leave while still young and with the strength to overcome it without too many problems. Everyone – and I'm the first – says that you can tell I'm much happier. Thank God.

And I'll end with a couple of things.

First, an email I received last Christmas. It was from the “famous” director from Rome. It was a long email in which he talked about the affection he had for me – adding that what he said was not just fine words but the truth (sic!). That he commended me to God so that I would have a year full of joy. He mentioned my parents, my homeland, my football team... Good God, I said to myself. After all the harm he has done me... how can he write me an email pretending nothing happened? How is that possible? Are they so blind? Was I like that before? I felt like telling him that I thought it pathetic to try to ignore what had happened, but I thought it wasn't worth it. I answered with a simple: thank you, Merry Christmas and 2011. Because in the end... they're just pitiful.

Second, a brief reflection out loud for all of you who have been reading my story.

Do you have to go to such extremes – trampling on so many people's lives – to defend your own ideas? How far do you have to keep denying what is wrong and obvious to everyone's eyes?

After learning a little about how things are done inside there... do you think God is there? A God who is truly a Father, who wants what is best for his children and above all WANTS THEM TO BE HAPPY?

I leave that to your judgment. I only know that although I probably did many good things while I was there, in the end, it was a life that, like that of many others, wasn't worth it. But don't worry – because now the best part begins ;-)

Not_worth_it