

## Canonization of Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, S.J.

2005/12

### TO ALL MAJOR SUPERIORS

Dear Father,

The Peace of Christ!

When Alberto Hurtado was in Louvain and his priestly ordination was approaching, a predecessor of mine, Father John Baptist Janssens, who was Rector of the theologate in Louvain during Hurtado's stay, wrote about him to the Provincial of Chile as follows: "... Allow me at this time to testify what great edification Father Hurtado has given us all, with his piety, regularity, enthusiasm and his example to his companions. He is well liked by all. I judge that the Lord has destined a truly eminent man to your Province, at least this is what appears to us " (letter of 22 February 1933).

In fact, he had always been this way, so much so that with the distance of years, I have personally been able to closely follow up the work concerning the Cause of his Beatification, to witness his Beatification, and now to write a letter to the whole Society on the occasion of his Canonization.

Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, born in Viña del Mar, Chile, on 22 January 1901, lost his father at the age of four. His mother was forced to sell their modest property under unfavorable conditions to pay the family debts. As a result, Alberto and his brother were forced to live with relatives and often had to transfer from one relatives' house to another. Only at the age of twenty was Alberto able to live with his mother and his younger brother Miguel in their own home.

Since childhood, therefore, Alberto experienced the condition of one who is poor, without a home and at the mercy of others. This probably exercised an unconscious but real influence on what will be his ministry as an apostle of the Lord. At the same time the closeness and affection of his mother had a weighty positive effect in the development of his personality and spirit. In fact it was she who taught her son Alberto that "*it is good to keep the hands together in order to pray, but it is better still to open them in order to give.*"

A scholarship enabled him to attend the Jesuit High School in Santiago. It was there that he became a member of the Sodality of Our Lady and as such, took an active interest for the poor, visiting them in their most miserable places every Sunday afternoon.

After secondary studies in 1917, he would have wanted to join the Jesuits, but he was advised to postpone his plan in order to take care of his mother and younger brother. He worked in the afternoon and evening and was able to support his mother and brother, and at the same time attend school at the Law Faculty of the Catholic University. During that period, too, his concern was for the poor whom he continued to visit on Sundays.

This concern, as also the topics he chose for his research, are the key to understanding the characteristic notes of priestly activity that Father Hurtado would later engage in: "Regulation of Child Labor" was the topic he developed for his Bachelor's degree; "Work in the Home" was his topic for his Master's Thesis.

Obligatory military service forced him to interrupt his studies, but once dismissed he completed his degree and graduated at the beginning of August 1923.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of that same month he entered the Novitiate of the Society at Chillán. In April 1925 he was sent to Córdoba, in Argentina, to complete his noviceship. After two years of Novitiate and first vows, he stayed for two more years in Córdoba to complete his formation in the Humanities. In 1927 he was sent to Barcelona, Spain, for studies in philosophy and theology, but due to the suppression of the Jesuits in Spain in 1931, he had to go to Belgium to complete his four years of theology in Louvain.

Contemporaneously, because of his gifts and extraordinary interest in studies, he succeeded in taking courses in Pedagogy and Psychology in the State University, obtaining first a licenciante, followed by a doctorate. After completing his third year of Theology in Louvain, he was ordained a priest on 24 August 1933. As soon as he completed his theological studies, he made his Tertianship at Drongen, still in Belgium: it was for him a period of intense spirituality in which, on the basis on what he had learned during his biblico-theological studies, he grew deeper in his closeness to the Lord, conforming himself increasingly with the way of thinking and acting of Jesus Christ.

After completing the formation cycle typical of the Society, Hurtado returned to his country, Chile, in January 1936, where he made his solemn profession on 2 February 1941.

Once inserted in the reality of Santiago, he began to develop an intense formation activity. He taught religion in St. Ignatius High School and pedagogy in the Catholic University. As in-charge of the Sodality of Our Lady for the students, he got them involved in catechesis for the poor. In directing the Spiritual Exercises for young people, he accompanied many young men in their response to the priestly vocation, and fostered in laypersons the demand of conscience for the duty that impels every baptized to live their Christianity coherently, according to the state of life proper to each one, calling for the duty to seriously take the commitment to look after one's neighbor, and live a life of effective charity. In dealing with the rich, entrepreneurs and employers, Father Hurtado tried to form responsible Christians and hence collaborators with Christ in a manner that makes society function according to Christian principles. In working with laborers he gave himself over completely to the development and spread of the idea of labor that is authentically Christian, thus abolishing the division between Christian life and working life. *"It is in his work that the worker is sanctified,"* he said. It was precisely from this vision that he derived his commitment which gave birth to the Christian labor union that is deeply inspired by the social doctrine of the Church.

In 1941 he was made Assistant for Catholic Action, first at the Archdiocesan level of Santiago, and later at the national level, a commitment which he fulfilled until 1944. Always attentive as he was to persons in dire need of help – the marginalized and the lonely – and always docile to the to the inspirations of God, in October 1944, while he was giving the Spiritual Exercises, Father Hurtado made an appeal to his retreatants to consider the many who are poor in the city. His appeal received immediate generous response and constituted

the beginning of an initiative which made him especially famous: a kind of charitable activity that provides not only a home for the homeless but also a warm family environment of love, which became known as the "*Hogar de Cristo*", the "Hearth of Christ".

Through contributions of benefactors and with the active collaboration of committed lay people, Father Hurtado first opened a welcome house for young people, then for women, and later for children. The poor were finally able to find a domestic hearth, that of Christ. Houses conceived and directed according to such scope rapidly multiplied and also took on new dimensions. In some instances they became rehabilitation centers, in others, for vocational training. All these houses were always inspired and permeated by Christian values. In the mind and words of Father Hurtado, the purpose of the "*Hogar de Cristo*" is such that the persons who are received in them gradually develop "*the knowledge of values which each one has as a person, of his dignity as a citizen, and more so, as a child of God*".

While carrying out his intense charitable and formation apostolate as a priest, Father Hurtado continued to develop a notable intellectual activity as a writer through which he promoted the knowledge and spread of Christian social doctrine. Between 1947 and 1950 he wrote three important works on labor unions, on Christian humanism and on Christian social order.

In 1951 he started the newsmagazine "*Mensaje*", devoted precisely to explaining the doctrine of the Church. Through this periodical and the articles published in it, he desired that a Catholic publication exercised influence in the world of thought and served to orient Catholics' way of acting in contemporary reality, in conformity, as he himself wrote, "*with the message that the Son of God has brought from heaven to earth.*"

Cancer of the pancreas cut short his life within a few months. In the midst of the atrocious pain he endured, he could often be heard repeating, "*I am content, Lord*". After having completed his existence manifesting the love of Christ for the poor, he went home to the Lord on 18 August 1952.

These are the principal data of the life of Father Alberto Hurtado, a man of God whom John Paul II beatified on 16 October 1994, and who will be canonized on 23 October by Benedict XVI.

From all the sources related to the life and works of Father Hurtado, it is quite evident that from the beginning he was docile to the movements of the Spirit of God, and with the passing of time, had always allowed himself to be drawn and conquered by Christ and had thus made a true self-oblation to the Eternal Lord as presented in the Spiritual Exercises (*Ex. Sp.*, n. 98). Those who knew him, as well as those who made an in-depth study of his life, have not hesitated to say that he was truly "in love with Christ". This undoubtedly constitutes the core of his life as a young student, as a Jesuit and as a priest. From this love of Christ springs the distinctive manner of his behavior and way of dealing with people.

What predominates therefore is his capacity to love: a gift lavished upon him by God which he knew how to develop thus establishing, in the light of the Gospel, an intensely growing personal friendship the Lord. His ever-increasing familiarity with the Lord which, in the mind of Saint Ignatius, Hurtado acquired by contemplating the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ, is at the root of the attitudes characteristic of him. Precisely because he was truly in love with Christ, he fixed his gaze on the Lord Jesus and His way of life while He

was still on earth. He passed long hours contemplating the manner in which Jesus acted in various situations in which He found Himself. With the eyes of his heart, Father Hurtado specially admired the way by which Jesus paid attention to persons, how He made His the sufferings of those who were in pain. He was fascinated by Jesus, and thus Jesus' way of thinking and living increasingly became in a way part of Hurtado's being. He conformed himself to Christ and thus was authentically His disciple.

Hurtado's relationship with the Lord, therefore, did not have anything to do with with a spiritualist intimacy divorced from reality. It was a real and effective sharing in Jesus' way of living and dealing with people, seen and loved in the social context in which they were, seen and loved truly and effectively in the measure of their need for authentic human warmth, altruistic love, formation and justice.

The sense of maturity that characterized him and the seriousness with which he prepared himself to assume his commitments both as Jesuit and as priest helped Father Hurtado maintain through the years the healthy balance in virtue by which he weighed the tension between the need to respond to other people's necessities and the exigency of always keeping a lively personal contact with the Lord. This he faithfully sought after because he was convinced that only in living united to Christ could he be an instrument in God's hands, and receive from Him the light and goodness to spread among the people.

And so it was that despite the manifold commitments and the demands of the apostolate, Alberto Hurtado always found long spaces of time to spend together with the Lord. He knew well in fact that it was not what he could do that would favor the good of his country, but on the contrary only that which God communicated to him. Hence the intense need to spend long hours in prayer so that the people of his beloved country might open to the light that only God can give.

Such intimacy with God was for him an absolute priority and at the same time the source of his great love for Chileans. He wanted to communicate and transmit to them the true benefit of progress and development according to God's criteria and the wisdom which He revealed to us.

One must moreover take into account that precisely from Father Hurtado's constant contact with the Lord comes his singular ability to be aware of the true needs of people and adapt his response to satisfy them with the thoughtful delicacy and great solicitude that reflects the way Jesus attended to those in need of help and comfort. It is still this lively contact with the Lord that allowed him to have the unusual interior capacity of balance, peace and confident serenity even in the midst of difficulties and sufferings that he often had to face.

The concern he had for others was characterized by a note that is completely special in warmth and closeness that is not always found in those who engage in the apostolate. In Hurtado's case they were very much present and this is to be attributed to the fact that Jesus, present in the Eucharist, was for him the center of attraction. In the daily celebration of the Eucharist, he united his heart to that of the Lord, who said, "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him*" (Jn. 6, 56). Because of this he could say, "*My Mass is my life, and my life is a prolonged Mass!*" In the hours spent in silent adoration before the tabernacle, he allowed the risen Lord to communicate His Spirit to him and

transfuse his soul with the living flame of goodness and love, which were the characteristic way by which he, in union with Jesus Christ, approached people.

It is from this bond with the Lord, living and present among us, that Hurtado drew the strength and delicacy that distinguished his apostolate and made it become an authentic continuation of the Lord's mission.

He was then a *priest* according to the Heart of Christ who, in celebrating the Eucharist, associated himself to the sacrifice of the Redeemer and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, received from the Lord the strength to give himself to the people and realize the command of the Lord: "*Do this in memory of me.*" Thus did Alberto Hurtado completely give without keeping anything for himself, and consumed himself in the service of others.

Father Hurtado was truly a *contemplative in action*, to whom the hours spent in conversing with the Lord gave strength and the ability to find God in the world around him, to be His instrument, to do His will, working and operating as if everything depended on him, but deeply aware that in fact everything depended on God. Some words of the Lord were particularly dear to him and he repeated them often: "*Remain in me as I remain in you... whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*" (Jn. 15, 4 and 5). These words were the lamplight that guided his entire priestly life.

It is therefore quite significant that Father Hurtado's canonization will take place on 23 October 2005, the last day of the Synod on the Eucharist. Following the example of the new Saint of the Society of Jesus and thanks to the daily celebration of the Eucharist, may this "greatest proof of His love" (*Sp. Ex.* 289) grow in the Society and for the mission of the Society.

Fraternally yours in the Lord,



**Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.**  
Superior General

Rome, 21 June 2005