

## FROM THE BACK COVER

...This book takes us on a meditative journey through the friars' correspondence with Church authorities, resulting from their request for the freedom to follow the will of God without mediation and without qualification.

Later, Professor Guillent Pérez, a Venezuelan philosopher, read the documents, published privately by the three Franciscans, and recognizing their universal importance decided to prepare this book....

*A Case of Conscience* is an invitation to an unprecedented evolutionary era in human consciousness. But most of all it is a challenge to plunge into the living waters of a higher reason, discovered in a heart-centered conscience, beyond the clichés, legalisms, manipulations, and superficialities of modern life. It is a call to a surrender, a denial of self, to a renewed life, to a simple life – a life of simply being. This book opens the door to a new world, and to a group of fellow humans, faithful pilgrims of conscience on a journey into the heart of God.

## TO THE READER

Herein is being offered to the public a *Documentation* that appeared in Jerusalem in May of 1982 under the Italian title *Un Caso di Coscienza* concerning the incompatibility of two states of consciousness that had arisen, over a number of years, between three Catholic Franciscan priests of the Custody of the Holy Land and said institution, and which culminated in the decision of the three friars to leave the institution to which they belonged. This

publication of the *Documentation* is accompanied by an *Essay*, a focusing on “the awakening of consciousness in the man of today”, which I have made with the purpose of pointing out the universal and transcendent reach of this event and of the principles that brought it about. As an *Introduction* to the documentation I have written a brief description of some of the outstanding aspects in relation to the protagonists of this “case of conscience”. I have also added *Personal Reflections* on certain points of some of the documents. The *Final Considerations* constitute a synthesis of what I have affirmed throughout the book.

This book originally appeared in Spanish with the title *Un Caso de Conciencia en Jerusalem 1982*. In this present English edition, unlike the first Spanish edition, the documents have been kept in their original chronological order in accordance with the publication made in Jerusalem. In order to facilitate its reading, the *Documentation* has been subdivided into nine parts, and each part has been given a title that highlights its principal content.

*Un Caso di Coscienza* is a compilation of documents, photostatically reproduced, that covers the period from June 27, 1969, to April 9, 1982, dates that mark the beginning and the end of the drama enacted. The documents, made public by the three friars, are prefaced by a *Presentation* written by them, and are interlaced by a *Chronicle* that serves as a guiding thread in the sequence of events. The *Documentation*, which appeared originally in Italian with the exception of a few documents in Spanish, is here translated for the first time into English.

The purpose of *Un Caso di Coscienza* was to make known with total objectivity – in the setting where the events had unfolded, and especially in the milieu of the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land – the circumstances, motives, and significance of the decision made by the three friars out of fidelity to conscience.

Through the *Documentation* one can become aware of the fact that the break between the three friars and the Institution deepens as both sides come to an ever clearer consciousness of the conflict between the principles that separate them. We find ourselves facing two incompatible states of consciousness: on the one side, the coming-to-consciousness of the three friars, according to which living the Gospel – the essence of the Franciscan ideal – consists in a total, unconditional, and direct surrender to the Will of God through the denial of self, which necessarily implies transcending the Institution as such; on the other side, the state of consciousness of those who, identifying with the interests of the Institution, reaffirm the necessity of its mediation in man's relations with God.

It is well to point out, at the outset, that this coming-to-consciousness in the three friars was brought about by their encounter with a reality of a higher order, a “word” that presents itself as a *message* of the Being to the men of today so that they may come to the full consciousness of what their absolute Reality is. It was precisely their coming-to-consciousness through this Message that produced such a radical change in the lives of the three friars. Through this Message and their frequent contacts with the person who receives it – making it her life – the three friars were gradually becoming aware of the real necessity to take up completely what is proposed by the word of Jesus Christ. That is to say, the friars make the most unusual discovery: the only way to preach the Gospel was, and is, to live the Gospel, renouncing all compromises with the interests of the world. This is the crux of their difference with the Institution, which depends instead on the interests of the world.

The friars, before coming to understand the Message, saw no conflict between *living* the Gospel and remaining in the Institution. As for the ecclesiastical authorities, they

were no doubt taken by surprise, since it must have seemed incomprehensible to them that they were actually being presented with a petition for “freedom” in order to live the Gospel. This initial surprise would gradually turn into frank hostility. The friars wanted to act as they had been doing all along, that is, within the established canons of respect and submission to the authority; but in the end, they realized that what they were requesting was incompatible with the aims and purposes of the Institution. They finally decided to leave the Custody of the Holy Land, and they sought outside of it the fulfillment of the ideal that was captivating them, that of being faithful to the Gospel, unconditionally submitting their liberty to the Will of the Father.

As subjects obedient to the authorities of the Order, it can be said that they exhausted all the possible means for reconciling their *coming-to-consciousness* with the established order within which they had lived until that moment. They knock on every door through personal conversations and through an exchange of letters with all the ecclesiastical hierarchy; they address themselves to their immediate authorities, the Father Custos and the Discretorium of the Holy Land, to the Visitor and President of the Custodial Chapter, to the Minister General of the Order, and to the Pope. They wanted all their brothers in the faith to share this *gift* which the Being was sending to them through the Message and its bearer.

The reasons adduced by the three Franciscans not only serve as a point of reference for us to discover the absurdity of the institutionalization of the authentic messages of the Being, but they also offer us a lucid answer to the historical-spiritual crisis that the man of our day suffers.

The Message that awakened the consciousness of the three Franciscans speaks to the man of today, to the entire species, so that man may decide to acknowledge the

preeminence of the Being, making it his life.

J. R. GUILLENT PÉREZ

Caracas, November, 1982

## COMMENTARY

The purpose of *A Case of Conscience* is to launch a call of crucial importance for present-day humanity – the urgent need for man to recognize that his conscience must become the absolute guide for his drifting and un-oriented liberty. Irrefutable evidence for such a need is found in the crisis that is reigning today in every kind of institution, be it civil or religious, and especially in those who up to now have been considered the primary source of justice and truth.

This appealing call, which the author of the Essay – a professor of Philosophy and until recently an avowed atheist – feels obliged to direct to the man of today, is the fruit of a maturing process that has taken place in him as a consequence of his encounter with what he designates as a “Message of the Being.” By this expression he describes a special and profound vision of the whole of reality that manifested itself in an extraordinary inner experience of a woman who is referred to as the *slave of the Lord*.

To launch his call, the author takes as his basis a real, dramatic event that occurred recently in Jerusalem. It is the experience of three Franciscan priests belonging to the Custody of the Holy Land who are led by life and by the same “Message of the Being” to a clear understanding of man’s need to go beyond the narrow limits of every

institution if he wants to run the last lap toward the goal of his Realization. Owing to this new consciousness, they leave the institution of which they were members, taking what they describe as a “leap into the void.” It is called a “leap into the void” to indicate the radical opposition between the human insecurity created by living in the freedom of pure faith and the security offered by the power and solid structures of the institution at the price of one’s personal liberty.

Their experience is narrated with the captivating liveliness and indisputable authenticity of a rich and varied Documentation which is reproduced in its entirety in the volume.

The author of the Essay brings into the limelight the importance and universal significance of this event. He sees it as part of man’s coming-to-consciousness of the fact that institutionalism – brain child of human reason – will only lead to an Orwellian depersonalization and that man will only attain his Realization by entrusting the reins of his destiny to the Being who manifests Himself in his own conscience and who is ultimately his true Essence.

GIOVANNI GALASSI