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Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality

REFLECTIONS ON SOME TRADITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PASSIONIST CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

AND PRAYER AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR CONGREGATION

Prayer is a very central theme in our life as a Congregation and can also be seen as a very unifying theme, bringing together much of our material. I have taken three rather familiar headings and used them in a general way to catch some of the riches involved (cf. outline, end of article).

- 1) Paul of the Cross as a mystic and we Passionists as prayers, apostolic contemplatives. Any implications here would be around the area of our personal prayer lives and our response to God in the secret of our hearts.
- 2) Paul as the Founder and we ourselves as his family, and the “family-structuring” in the Rules of 1721-1982. The implications here are the ways in which we encourage one another in this area of prayer.
- 3) Paul as an apostle and we Passionists as apostolic workmen, contemplative apostles. Here the implications would concern our teaching others to pray the Passion.

1. Mystic

It's a truism to call Paul Danei a man of prayer. It's one of the first things that spring to our minds in describing him. We think of his conversion, his hermit years, his retreat of forty days at Castellazzo, his mystic gifts and mystical marriage, his fifty years of desolation in prayer. All comes easily to mind. But it's also clear that Paul was a great *communicator* of prayer, *out* of his mysticism.

Paul was one with God and was so eager that others should be one with God as well. We can see that desire characterizing his whole life: his missionary campaigns, his retreats, his correspondence, and his life as founder. All were geared to unioning men with God. That may be too general a way of putting it, but in Paul's case it is eminently true: “that our dear God might be loved, praised, revered and glorified through all generations.” And he wanted this so much for everyone. His missionary campaigns covered a whole area and everyone within it, the faithful of every condition: nobles, clergy, soldiers, officers, bandits, officials, rich and poor. He wanted to join men and women to God by inculcating prayer. There weren't injections in those days. But if it was possible he would have wanted to give everyone a quick injection of a magnificent love of God. Since he couldn't do that he had to settle for “planting a seed of prayer” and letting it grow.

St. Vincent Strambi gives a summary of Paul's gift of prayer thus: “It would seem that almighty God raised up Father Paul in a special manner to teach men how to seek Him in the interior of their hearts.” This is said in the immediate context of Paul's eagerness to teach the practice of the presence of God, but I feel it applies to Paul's gift of prayer for the Church: to lead all to a contemplative stance before God. Apparently the 18th century was one of Rationalism and Paul was counter-cultural here, leading people away from a sterile intellectualism and not into emotionalism, but into mysticism. He wanted to bring mysticism into popular life – mysticism in the sense that men and women would come to an experience of the person of God and of Jesus in their lives in an ever-deepening union and growth. In this sense he was convinced that mysticism was available to all. Paul was very much a “heart” person, leading people into their hearts and to the Crucified Jesus present there, who is the door opening onto the immensity of God.

A few words on Paul's way of approaching prayer. He didn't have any method of prayer as such, particular to himself. He was a man of his time and he used what was there, though he did have a definite teaching on the higher states of prayer, mystical death and birth. He wanted to start people off meditating, meditating especially on the Passion, and he encouraged them rather quickly to come to an affective prayer, to speak with the Lord about his sufferings, to enter into them with the heart. He expected that dryness and desolation would come, that warm affections and a tender repose in God wouldn't simply continue, but would be removed by God so that he could bring us forward along the way, bring us from self-love and sensible consolation. Here Paul would encourage people to persevere with prayer, not to make too much of their trials, encouraging them to a prayer of pure faith. On difficulties in prayer he says: "He who is in the arms of Jesus cannot fall; if you do not feel sweetness and consolation, it is a sign that God wants to despoil you of all satisfaction that with the exercise of resignation to his divine will you will become an entirely new spiritual man. God holds you in his arms although you do not feel or taste the divine presence." He helped people also through the transition from discursive meditation into a simpler way, a transition of which most of the spiritual writers speak, and in this he followed them, especially St. John of the Cross.

He encouraged people into a prayer of pure faith, seeing in it a more perfect form of prayer with less dependence on imagination and feeling and a more permanent basis of attentiveness to God: "Would that your prayer were more in faith and less in imagination. It suffices; when God wills it, he will make it cease; advance to treat with God in pure faith, engulf yourself entirely in his divine bosom, often arouse yourself to think of God with holy affections. God himself will teach you." Then he spoke of the more complete self-emptying leading to mystical death and the mystical birth of the Divine Word in an entirely new way. We've recently come across the document on mystical death written to a religious (though some doubts have been raised about its authenticity). But from the letters we can see that some lay people whom Paul was directing also arrived at this high state of mystic death and birth. All this he would claim is the work of God, and we must let *Him* teach us in prayer. All that Paul was doing at that level was discerning where people were and then because he'd been there too, he was able to say: it's alright, don't be afraid of the darkness; He's there, continue to be generous, despoil yourself so as to enter into the self-emptying of Christ and to deepen within the image of the Crucified.

In doing all this Paul wouldn't have seen himself as doing anything more than deepening the life of grace given in baptism and confirmation. He was fond of quoting those texts of the Scriptures that invite us to find God within: "Recall that it's a truth of faith that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. It is of faith that our souls are temples of the living God... It is of faith that God dwells in us... Faith teaches us that our interior is also a sanctuary, it is the living temple of God and the indwelling of the most holy Trinity." Paul wanted people to be more and more aware of that, coming even to an experiential knowledge of it in a deepening life and a deepening prayer life. So he wouldn't see himself as doing any more than proclaiming the riches of the Gospel and making the experience of them available to the people, helping them be more and more aware in prayer and life of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

He sought opportunities everywhere to teach people to pray. In quarantine for ten days he spent the time catechizing and teaching prayer. He was sent to convalesce once and wasn't there long before he had all the staff organized and was teaching them to pray. At the time this was revolutionary, teaching lay people to pray. In No. 65 of the 1741 Rule Paul hits out at the "deceit of those who say that meditation is only for religious and other ecclesiastics" and encourages us

to do the same. In the 1959 Rule (and 1769, 1775) his recommendation has survived in No. 122: “To uneducated men who are not able to meditate, let them suggest brief reflections which may enable them *to gain the same end* by pious extemporaneous aspirations or what are called ejaculatory prayers.” Note: “to gain the same end,” namely, that contemplative stance before God experienced as a person.

Paul measured his advice to each person depending on their condition in life. Strambi remarks that “he suited the food to the stomach” of those receiving it. To a young man who is perhaps overeager he writes: “Relax...do not always keep the bow bent, for it cannot stand it.” To the husband with the family who is complaining he hasn’t more time for prayer: “If you cannot give so much time for prayer, never mind. Attend to your occupations and remain attentive to God, often plunging yourself in the immense ocean of his divinity... He who has a wife should not live like a Capuchin.”

Paul’s mysticism centers on the Passion of our Lord. On the very first day of his retreat in Castellazzo he writes: “My sole desire is to be crucified with Jesus,” He is already in possession of his passion-mysticism. Fr. Costante pointed out that Paul uses the Passion in different ways, speaking of it as an ‘apostolic weapon’ and also as an end in itself, as an identification with Christ Crucified; that if we enter into the inner sanctuary we find not only God’s presence but the presence of God crucified in his Son; that with a deepening prayer and a deepening generosity with God and neighbor in life we would be identifying more and more with the virtues of Jesus Christ; becoming ‘portraits of Jesus crucified’ and so coming to the fulness of life, to mystical death and to the mystical birth of the Divine Word, Jesus, in our hearts. And Paul greatly desired such a life for all.

In one sense he isn’t speaking any differently from Vatican II’s “Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” when years later it stated (after describing the struggle that is part of Christian life; the struggle with sin and death in union with Christ and in the power of his Spirit): “All this holds true not only for Christians but for all men of goodwill in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers *to all* the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery... Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of man as enlightened by Christian revelation” (22). Paul was helping the men and women of his time to become aware of that, and to come to the full maturity of their life in this paschal mystery of Jesus.

Paul worked with the whole person and would never have been happy merely to deal with prayer in isolation from the rest of a person’s life. He constantly encourages “the practice of virtue,” and another key phrase of his is “according to your state in life.” So he expected prayer and life to flow into one another and he offered timely help so that deceits and illusions would be uncovered and anxieties removed. The whole endeavor was rooted in the peace of Christ and in the power of his Passion. So he encouraged people to live “in the side of Jesus,” that is, in his heart and under the protection of the glorious wounds of Him Who is Risen.

2. Founder

Looking at Paul’s life and inspiration as Founder, again we’re aware of a deepening and an expansion. He wasn’t content merely to be doing all this himself but wanted to gather companions who would share the work, thinking of the Congregation as universal and as

perduring in the Church over the generations. He'd have said, of course, that this wasn't so much what he wanted but was the "work of God" and that the true founder of the Congregation is Jesus Christ. So the whole "family" aspect was there from the start and he wanted to institutionalize his charism for the sake of the Church, to institutionalize, therefore, also this gift of his for communicating, teaching prayer and prayer on the Passion of Christ.

One of the things Fr. Fabiano mentioned was Paul's intention that our communities would be places where there would be an experiential communion with Jesus Crucified; he wanted first of all to develop men. of prayer before having them teach prayer, and so he structured the environment accordingly. Paul had already been living in this way for some time, and from his own experience he knew what helped, what kind of environment would be a mutual support and growthful so that there would be *such* apostolic workers. They would be capable of going out and teaching others out of their own experience and of creating a similar environment for others (both by teaching them prayer and by inviting them to come to our retreats to share our solitude). Are our communities environments where prayer is encouraged? Fr. Tom Berry spoke of the necessity of a respect for the delicate balance of the environment, each element influenced by and influencing the others. Paul tried to structure an environment for us in which prayer could thrive, and men could thrive in God. He desired us to be *free* men so as to freely go and preach the Gospel generously without sparing ourselves.

The 1741 Rule gives some indication of the *quality* of man Paul had in mind: "Let him see if he is resolved to suffer much, to be despised and ridiculed, to endure calumnies and other hardships for the Love of our Savior" (9). Talking about behavior on the mission: "During the entire course of the mission, let them be concerned only with what is useful and necessary, have regard to their own good and the smooth running of the mission" (69). "Let them not wish to know, either from priests or laity, whether the mission was pleasing to them or not, but let them be content to work with a will to please God and help souls. When they meet with opposition in the towns they shall not on that account cease to work in peace; and they will say nothing about those who oppose or despise them" (71). "Let them endure all things with the greatest patience and tranquillity *of* spirit, realizing that souls belong to God and not to us" (73). So Paul was trying to form men who would be capable of letting go their fears and selfishness and entering into very difficult apostolic situations, doing so for the sake of the Gospel, and who all the while would be contemplatives-in-action. "Our goal is to obtain the deepest gift of genuine interior recollection for this purpose – that we may always live a genuine apostolic life which consists in working for souls in continuous contemplation." Not continuously on our knees, but continually sufficiently recollected to be intimately aware of God.

Numbers six and seven of the 1741 Rule show Paul's early thinking about the structuring of time and space for apostolate and prayer: the in/out system, whereby if there were twelve brethren, half would be out at a time and the others "remain at home in prayer and fasting and necessary study." "When the first group are tired from their labors, they shall withdraw into holy solitude, and the other group shall go out. They shall continue to alternate like this." It didn't work for long but it does indicate Paul's thinking on the question, even given the conditions of the time and the distances that had to be covered and so slowly. Was he a fool to develop such a structure involving so much "wastage" in terms of time and apostolic manpower, or was he on to something? Nowadays when we have doubled and trebled our apostolic availability to God's people, perhaps we need to reflect on that.

In Paul's time, journeys were so long and there was plenty of time to think and pray along the way (together with the hardships). We can fly, train, or drive in a few hours and so our apostolic capability has multiplied, physically at least. Maybe we can teach people something less frenetic about the use of time by modeling this also (as well as modeling Passion prayer). In these days when we're so aware of "burnout" and the stress and strain of the apostolate, maybe we could look again at Paul's 'ecology' of the human person as having something special to say to our fevered times. There is no need to rush about looking for prayer but to look within, slow down and find God.

3. Apostle

Paul saw himself as an apostle and our lives as modeled on the apostolic life. And the teaching of prayer was a vital element in the apostolate. In passing Fr. Fabiano this morning, I mentioned to him about the teaching of prayer as one of our characteristic apostolates and he saw this as true, even more so than our preaching of missions and retreats (merely as missions and retreats unless they included this element). It was also one of the main reasons why Paul let our brethren go into neighboring towns and villages to teach prayer to the people. And he also encouraged this, as far as practicable, in the confessional.

No one was more aware than Paul of the hazard that missions would be just an enthusiastic few weeks in the life of an area and then nothing, back to life as usual, forgetful of God. So he wanted to reach people with something that could grow and mean something in their actual daily lives, something effective. And this is what prayer does. Prayer personalizes. It takes the mysteries of the faith and interiorizes them, brings them within. I can be told that God loves me a hundred times a day but unless I experience it for myself in prayer, it will mean nothing to me. Prayer reaches the biblical place of the 'heart' and so is effective.

The 1741 Rule on the teaching of prayer and the Passion on our missions is this: "During holy missions, the priests who are recognized as capable preachers should meditate aloud for the people on the Most Holy Passion of Jesus Christ." They're to meditate aloud. So in our terminology, they're to model what Passion meditation is, to do the meditation themselves, to address the Crucified. The people listen, and in that way learn what meditation is. That's one thing. "They shall also instruct them how to meditate and encourage them to do so, assuring them that if they are faithful in meditating on the Passion of Jesus, they will reach great perfection in a short time, in accordance with their state in life" (47). So there's the meditating aloud on the Passion and there's the catechesis, the instruction on how to go about it themselves. Two different parts of the mission. And the meditation was to be on the Passion. Even the rudest bandit could understand the graphic scenes of the Passion and so come to grips, in some way, with the love of God, and then begin to be able to make meditation himself. Paul encouraged people to meditate for a quarter-hour for a start. He often set up groups at the end of a mission to meditate in common, and some of these groups were still going strong thirty and forty years later when the Processes were being readied for Paul's beatification. He encouraged either priests or lay leaders to keep the importance of meditation before the people after the mission.

In putting before people the Passion of our Lord, he is presenting them with the strongest signs of God's love for them, signs inviting a response. The love of God incarnate entered our human situation and suffers from it – a clear evidence to us that love and the gift of self entail suffering, given the world that we live in, given the human condition as touched by sin, the only human condition that we know. In that way meditation on the Passion helped people to be able and

willing to suffer, or better, to love even if it involved suffering. Our Love is Crucified and he sends his Spirit into our hearts, helping us to go the same way, to live in the same way, and to love in the same way and to work through our fear and selfishness with him. It means to know from our own experience that there is that in us and in others that resists the love of God and calls for struggle, real struggle and pain, so as to come to joy. So the Passion is a symbol of love without illusion, of a costly love. In this way we can realistically prepare our hearts for true growth which is so difficult for flesh and blood but is the gift of the Spirit. Our real context for Paul is “in the side of Jesus.” That is, we are in Jesus and are protected by his glorious wounds, finding in them already all the strength we need and every blessing along the way.

My own impression is that those aspects of teaching prayer and of teaching Passion-prayer have been considerably weakened in the course of our history. It is not easy to derive from our parish missions today the impression that they are intended to teach people to pray the Passion for a lifetime afterward.

In the Chapter Document we have a mention or two that we are to be schools of prayer but nowhere is this fleshed out in a way that would have one suspect that it was a very particular interest of our Founder. The chapter on prayer tends to recommend and speak of prayer in a devotional context only, unconnected with the apostolate, and the chapter on the apostolate is weak on teaching prayer.

Our privilege in the Church is to discover for ourselves the depth and tenderness of God’s love as revealed in the Passion of Jesus and then to communicate it by life and by proclamation, so that others may come to that experience themselves and live it out in their circumstances.

Bernard Lowe, C.P.

THE CULTURAL SETTING OF PRAYER: PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL

Outline:

St. Paul of the Cross and Prayer as a Characteristic of our Congregation

PAUL of the CROSS	PASSIONISTS	CRITERIA
1. Mystic	Apostolic Contemplative	re prayer itself, our heart responding to God's call as C.P.
2. Founder	A Family: Rules - 1721-1982	To do with encouraging, joining one another in prayer
3. Apostle	Contemplative Apostles	to do with teaching Passion-prayer to others

Some References from our Sources:

1. MYSTIC:

- examples of Paul's own Passion-prayer: WH *18-19; 28-30
- teaching about Passion-prayer: WH 88-89, note 3, 1741: 48, 60
- teaching on prayer: WH 20 21, 85 & note 1, 91, 98, 105 (bottom)-106, 120-121, 149.
- discernment: WH 97-98, 102-103.

2. FOUNDER:

- visions, 40 day retreat and Rule "infused" in prayer: WH 11-15
- visions of founder: WH 19-20
- quality of men: 1741: 9, 14, 50, 61, 69, 71-74; AC 1747; 3, 21-22

3. APOSTLE:

- teachers of prayer: 1st Rule - Poor of Jesus to instill meditation on suffering Jesus ; WH 14; retreat house planned for Mt. Argentario WH 79 & note 8; cf. also AC 1768: 27; encourages T. Fossi to teach prayer: WH 124-25.
- Passionists as teachers of prayer: 1741: 3, 47, 49, 65, 98 and parallels in 1959 Rule, 122; AC 1768: 23-25.

* Abbreviations:

WH *Words from the Heart, a Selection from the Personal Letters of St. Paul of the Cross*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin 1976.

1741 *Rule of St. Paul of the Cross*, Inspiration Text, 40th General Chapter, English-speaking Assistancy, Rome 1978.

1959 *Rules and Constitutions*, C.P. English vers., Rome 1961.

AC *Accounts* sent by Paul of the Cross to friends to make the Congregation known. Ed. Fabiano Giorgini. English manuscript translation, Rome 1981.

The Cultural Setting of Prayer: Personal and Communal

The cultural setting of prayer is the title I have given to this paper. In any discussion that takes place about prayer and its role in the life of people, recognition should be given to the various things that influence the ways in which people pray. The ways in which people express their prayer. Some of these are cultural in origin, while others originate from personal life experience. By using the prayer of Jesus as an illustration, I hope to open the way by which our Christian prayer may be perceived as an activity, as a commitment to the Lord, which goes beyond the limitations of culture, custom, tradition and piety. In other words Christian prayer is universal, for we pray to the one true God. The manner of our prayer will vary, but the object of our prayer, God, remains constant.

The Personal and Communal Direction of Prayer

Within the context of the universal Church and more specifically within the context of our universal Passionist Congregation, this has consequences when we talk of common prayer, common acts of piety and devotion. How far do we allow our personal stance before God to help or hinder the stance of the Christian community before God, the Passionist community before God? Does a desire to hold on to specific prayer forms, both personal and communal, hold us back from joining the prayer forms and customs of others, to discover our God anew?

Prayer is mystery. It is the mystery of a personal relationship with God. Because it is mystery it is also sacred and holy. Our prayer touches us at the centre of our being, at our heart. It touches us at the source of our life and being. We would not be here today, if we were not first called by God, and on hearing that call respond to it. Because prayer is personal, because it is mystery, the risk of revealing one's prayer, one's inner mystery, one's communion with God is great indeed. Yet the nature of our prayer invites us to take that risk and share. This is what Jesus did with his disciples when he talked to them on prayer. I will say more on this later.

In our life as a religious, prayer is important. It is the source of our life and strength. It keeps us in communion with the God who calls us into community. A God who has already called us into communion with himself calls us into communion with others. This communion is a sharing of faith, a sharing of the mystery in one's life.

Our first risk is entering into communion with God in prayer, for here we enter into the mystery of God and the mystery of ourselves. Then we enter into the mystery which is the shared faith, prayer of a community, our local community. To enter into this community we lay aside some personal faith expressions and take up some which express the collective prayer of that community. Similarly the community does this as it realizes its membership within a larger community, which takes it beyond the limits of a local faith and vision, and gives it universal character and nature. For ourselves our prayer is given a universal Passionist flavor. We are called upon to be open to the collective prayer customs that are ours. We find them even amongst ourselves, a gathering of English-speakers.

Prayer in the Life of Jesus

If we look at the life of Jesus, we realize that he was born into a praying community. Over the centuries and subsequent generations of people, priests, prophets, kings and inspired leaders, the Jewish people had developed a sophisticated prayer custom. By the time of Jesus it would have been expected of the pious Jew that he pray the creed twice a day, morning and evening, and also the blessings three times each day, morning, afternoon and evening. In addition to these,

he also prayed before and after meals, and so on. It was through these prayer forms that the people acknowledged a communion, a relationship with God. They were His people through the Exodus event.

It can be assumed that Jesus in his own life would have been taught to use these and other Jewish prayer customs because of the prayerful disposition of his family, which is attested to by the Church. Also the Gospels mention Jesus' custom of prayer on the Sabbath (Luke 4.16): "He came down from Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did." Throughout his life Jesus followed very much the prayer customs of his people, the Jews, while not hesitating to criticize the abuses that they suffered. In Matthew (6.5) we read: "When you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites; they love to say their prayer standing up in the synagogue and at the street corners for people to see them." It would appear that some of the Jews would deliberately be outside at prayer times, so that they would have to pray in public. Jesus tells his disciples to pray in quiet and alone. The object of one's prayer is God, not the admiration of others.

Yet while Jesus did follow the prayer customs of his people, he also developed some of his own, which are the distinctive notes of his prayer. We know for a fact that Jesus had his own personal prayer habits. We know that he had his own personal places of prayer. It is attested to in the Gospels that he prayed alone and at night and often in the hills and mountains. Luke 6.12: "He went up into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." In Mark we read: "In the morning long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely spot and prayed there" (1.35).

In Luke's Gospel we have the mountain as the place of Jesus' prayer. It was to the mountains that Jesus went before he appointed the twelve disciples (Lk 6.12). It was to the mountain that he took the disciples, Peter, James and John at the time of the Transfiguration (Lk 9.28). Finally, it was to the Mount of Olives that Jesus went to pray prior to his passion and death (Lk 22.39). It can be said that the important moments and movements in the life of Jesus were preceded by prayer – and that this prayer took place on a mountain, in solitude. In Luke's Gospel the mountain, the hill, is the place where one meets with God and is reserved for prayer. It is on the plains beside the shore that Jesus teaches and works miracles.

Jesus's prayer is always heard, is always answered. At his baptism the Holy Spirit comes to him while he is at prayer. "Now when all the people had been baptized and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the bodily shape of a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son the Beloved; my favour rests on you'" (Lk 3.21). The Holy Spirit comes in response to Jesus's prayer. At the prayer of Jesus on the Mount of Olives prior to his passion an angel ministers to him to give him strength to carry out to the full his mission of the redemption of the world: "An angel appeared to him, coming from heaven to give him strength" (Lk 22.43).

Jesus's prayer is always other-centered, not self-centered. He says to Peter at the Last Supper: "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn may strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22.32). While the prayer of Jesus is always efficacious, the Acts of the Apostles also given many examples of prayer made in the name of Jesus being heard and answered: Acts 3.1, cure of the lame man; Acts 6.4, election of deacons.

“Now when he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples to pray’. He said to them, ‘Say this when you pray: Father, may your name be held holy’” (Lk 11.1). The prayer of Jesus has its own distinctive note, such that his disciples wished to pray as he prayed. This distinctive note to the prayer of Jesus was his filial relationship with his Father: “Abba, Father may your name be held holy.” “Yes Father, for that is what it pleased you to do... Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Lk 10.21-22). To know God as Father is vital to entering into a prayerful relationship with him. Hence the disciples request of Jesus is not just a request for a prayer method, but a request to know God as Jesus knows him. The examples Jesus gives about prayer are about the relationship of Father and Child, for this is the attitude the disciples must adopt if they are to pray as Jesus prays.

Through the filial title ‘Abba’ Jesus breaks with religious custom and places God within the reach of common man. Because of Jesus, God becomes personal, touchable, knowable. ‘Abba’ makes God a household commodity, a God who is not to be feared but rather a God whose name can be invoked as spontaneously as the name of one’s father. Even on the Cross the name ‘Abba’ Father came spontaneously to the lips of Jesus as he prayed: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk 23.34); “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23.46). Jesus introduces the name of God into the market place and also carries it with him to the place of execution, where he dies with the childlike faith of a Son in his Father.

The prayer of Jesus has its personal and communal aspects. It is influenced by the custom and culture of the Jewish people and it is also influenced by the relationship he has with God, a relationship which enables him to call God Father. Jesus accepts the prayer customs of his time but does not hesitate to correct obvious abuses. For Jesus, prayer is God-centered. Customs, method, place and time of prayer are aids to centering one’s heart and mind and life upon God.

Conclusion

Our prayer has both its personal and communal aspects. It is influenced by the culture and customs of the people into which we were born, by the education we have received, and the personal experiences of our life.

The object of our prayer is God as Jesus knows him, as Father. From our personal prayer comes the desire to share our God, our experience of him with others; through this we enter into community. From the local community there comes the desire to share with the wider community, the Church.

At each stage along the way the individual person, house, province and Congregation must risk, must be able to put aside something of self in order to share in the prayer experience of others which is universal in its direction, which is to God.

The challenge to us religious is the finding of ways of opening to others in community the God who is ever present within us; of freeing the mystery of God that dwells within each of us, and within our Congregation.

- Peter Addicoat, C.P.

PASSIONIST COMMUNITY: A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

Outline

Introduction.

1. The Evangelical Counsels.
2. A Community under the Cross.
3. An International Community.

Conclusion.

Introduction

Tradition is a fire to which each generation brings its own wood. This may apply in a special way to the dimension of “community” within the history of our Congregation.

“Community” is a key word in any interpretation of religious life in our days, the wood that our generation brings to the fire of tradition. Is it not striking, however, that when examining the indexes to the historical surveys of our Rules, the General Chapter decrees, or the Customs books (1), not a single explicit reference to community is to be found in those sources? This does not mean that the reality of community was altogether absent, but that it was not reflected upon for itself. This very fact denotes a certain vision of religious life which was conceived more in terms of individual sanctification than of a communal life project.

The prevailing theology of the Church had a strong influence in this respect. When we think of the then current sacramental practice and theology - for example, with regard to the Eucharist - we discover the same stress on the individual and an almost complete lack of the community dimension. All that the Rule of 1769 has to say about the celebration of the Eucharist is the following: “Then they will have one hour of meditation during which they are allowed to celebrate and to hear Masses.” And whatever is said in the Chapter decrees as far as the Eucharist is concerned has to do with the time of celebration and the different categories of Mass intentions.

It was not until the 1968-70 General Chapter that the community theme was given due attention and was integrated into the texture of Passionist life. The renewed Church theology, the contributions from the behavioral sciences to the process of truly human growth, and the idea of democratization on all levels of society and church life were among the factors influencing an evolution which made our Congregation, as indeed all religious institutes, move from a static uniformity to a dynamic pluriformity.

Community thus came to be regarded less as a “given” reality, than as a project to be realized by the involvement of all its members in whatever situation they might be living. The refrain that recurs ever so often in the documents of our Congregation, “*Affinche fiorisca l’uniformita...*” (“So that uniformity may flourish...”), came to be replaced by the challenge: “*Affinche fiorisca la comunita*” (“So that community may flourish”).

Innumerable texts could be quoted to illustrate this passage from uniformity to pluriformity, from a static to a dynamic approach. I just want to juxtapose two texts to show the difference of approach. In a long address to the 1878 Chapter, the Superior General Bernard Silvestrelli stated: “The Rule given to us by St. Paul of the Cross is made for all of his sons whether they live in

Italy or elsewhere, whether they are in England or any other country. And therefore no Passionist, of whatever country, enjoys the ridiculous privilege of treading it under foot in order to live in his own way and according to the worldly ideas of the country he is in” (2). But in the Chapter Document of 1970 we read: “Legitimate differences in life-styles, as demanded by different cultures and tasks, will be an enrichment of community life, provided the fundamental character of Passionist life remain intact” (n. 31).

It seems to me that this last text clearly marks the distance that separates us from a concept of community that is ready-made and demands only absolute conformity to what is preestablished. There seems to be a complete reversal of approach; what is asked for now is creativity, and not conformity to any given pattern, The community to be shaped is presented as lying ahead of us. The ideal Passionist community is not described in its many material and structural details, as it once used to be. Rather, as is said in CD n. 38, “the responsibility for creating a satisfactory community life rests primarily with the local community.”

The traditional form of community life, with its rigid uniformity, may have had its own difficulties and hardships, as indeed also its inconsistencies. As late as 1952, for example, the Province of St. Paul of the Cross (USA) made a formal proposal to the General Chapter to request that it be allowed permission to replace the by then expensive wooden spoons and forks with cheaper metal ones (3). But it seems to me that what is being asked of us now is in some ways much more demanding. Not being able, or obliged, to rely upon precise and detailed prescriptions, we are challenged to keep “intact the fundamental character of Passionist life” in a type of community that we ourselves are invited to shape within the varying social and cultural situations in which we live.

Speaking on “community” to an international audience such as this is meaningful only insofar as an effort is made to offer some insights into “the fundamental character of Passionist life,” leaving it to the creativity and the responsibility of provincial and local communities to give it a form that is adapted to the ever varying local circumstances. I’d like therefore to treat three aspects of Passionist community life under the headings:

- The evangelical counsels ;
- A community under the Cross; and
- An international community.

1. The Evangelical Counsels

Essential to the Passionist community is that it is a form of religious life based on the three traditional evangelical counsels. This may sound as a truism, but it appears to me that a discussion of community could not possibly neglect the implications of this broader context. More than anything else it is the religious vows that shape the public image of a religious community. It is important, therefore, that we try to disclose what really is their basic meaning and orientation.

Religious life should be viewed as a way – certainly not the only one, nor the best or the most safe – to an authentic being-human. The three traditional vows are not aimed at renouncing human values, but rather as leading us to understand and live these values as created and so as not absolute, as not definitive, but precisely as values that refer to the Creator, to Him who is the last ground of all life.

To mark the beginning of Jesus' public life the Gospel tells us the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. It may seem strange to relate this scene to the theme of the evangelical counsels, but a reflection in one of Dostoevski's works made me aware of a profound link: "If there has ever been on earth a real stupendous miracle," he writes, "it took place on that day, on the day of the three temptations. The statement of those three questions was itself the miracle. If it were possible to imagine simply for the sake of argument that those three questions of the dread spirit had perished utterly from the books and that we had to restore them and to invent them anew, and to do so had gathered together all the wise men of the earth - rulers, chief priests, learned men, philosophers, poets - and had set them the task to invent three questions, such as would not only fit the occasion but express in three words, three human phrases, the whole future of the world and of humanity - dost Thee believe that all the wisdom of the earth united could have invented anything in depth and force equal to the three questions which were actually put to Thee then by the wise and mighty spirit in the wilderness? (The three questions referred to are: Command this stone to become bread; If you worship me, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be yours; If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple).

In those three questions the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, brought together into one whole and in them are united all the unresolved historical contradictions of human nature" (4).

The point in the temptation narrative is that Jesus does not want to by-pass or to force the limitations of the human condition. On the contrary, he sees it as his task to bring the God-given life to fulfilment by deliberately accepting these limitations in view of a truly human growth in responsible freedom.

The religious vows are meant to consolidate the dikes precisely at those points where man is tempted to make absolute claims on what is only of relative value.

Obedience thus orientates human freedom directly towards others. By this vow the religious are prevented from using their freedom in a dominating or manipulating way. It makes them look for self-fulfilment while listening to others, while being at their service. They are thus freed from the enslaving competition prevailing in the Church as well in society, which almost compels people to strive for higher ranks on the social and hierarchical ladder.

In a comment on St. Paul's text: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ," D. Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is, first of all, the freedom of the other person that is a burden to the Christian... He could get rid of this burden by refusing the other person his freedom, by constraining him and thus doing violence to this personality, by stamping his own image on him. But if he lets God create his image in the man, he by this token gives him his freedom and himself bears the burden of the freedom of another creature of God. The freedom of another person includes all that we mean by a person's nature, individuality, endowment. It also includes his weakness and oddities, which are such a trial to our patience - everything that produces frictions, conflicts, and collisions among us. To bear the burden of the other person means involvement with the created reality of the other, to accept and affirm it, and in bearing with it to break through to the point where we take joy in it"(5).

In the same way the celibate form of life for the Kingdom of God expresses a reserve that is necessary to any human love, preserving it to be experienced as absolute and infinite.

Evangelical celibacy is the expression of an uncompromising concentration of longing for the day of the Lord, a concentration that is not afraid of any temptation of loneliness. What it has to do with is a state of being radically seized by and unreservedly engaged on behalf of the dominion of God that is at hand (6). Communities of celibate people may fulfill an important task in today's society, even apart from any specific social function, by being reminders of the relative value of even the highest potentialities in creation.

Poverty as an evangelical attitude is a protest against the tyranny of having, of possessing and of pure self-assertion. In our days "it is an effective form of resistance against the power of a society in which in practice nothing is without an equivalent for which it can be exchanged, in which everything has to too great an extent been enrolled under the banner of utilitarian ends and market value and which therefore is hardly able to admit any humanity other than that based on utilitarian considerations" (7). Evangelical poverty criticizes the extreme social weakening and devaluation of attitudes for which one literally does not get anything: attitudes like friendliness, gratefulness, love, respect for the dead, mourning, and so on. These attitudes are increasingly outlawed by society, because they don't as such provide impulses for new productive efforts. But they should continue to characterize the life of religious communities that want to resist the temptation of possessing.

So the evangelical counsels have a unifying force: they orientate people's possibilities in one direction, so that they can live without the hindrance of self-division, completely involved by the sake of God's Kingdom. The insight which one allows to relativize everything that is not God, in the first place one's own personality, one's possibilities and achievements, but at the same time the possibilities and the achievements of others has a strong liberating effect. It allows us to enjoy what has been given to us, our existence as well as the existence of others and of the whole creation.

At the same time this sense of liberated freedom opens a way to relate to others and to communicate something of our own profound happiness. Realizing that we are loved by God with all the limitations that characterize our created existence, we are able to recognize in others their right-to-being-limited and to be respected in their very limitations. That's why religious communities are in a privileged position to get apostolically involved with people who have nothing to rely upon but their bare humanity, people who are poor, sick, lonely, oppressed. Because religious, by their own choice of life, experience and live the transitoriness of all that is created or achieved, they are enabled to criticize everything in church or society that presents itself as absolute or eternal. This sense of transitoriness should also enable us to deal with inevitable changes, with ever new phenomenons. In this, to be conservative is to deny the thrust of the evangelical counsels..

2. A Community under the Cross

Every religious community is rooted in history. In whatsoever way it may develop in the course of time, changing and being changed by all kinds of influences from Church and society, somehow it will have to remain in touch with and inspired by the initial impulse of its charismatic beginning.

There is no doubt that the life of our Congregation has been profoundly marked by its Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. At a Chapter meeting in Ilkely (England) some years ago, conducted by people of the Movement for a Better World, we heard Fr. Taggi S.J., saying that he knew no

other Congregation that stressed so much its own charism as precisely as the Passionists. This statement should rejoice and alert us at the same time. For it could well be that we just go on repeating the conventional phrases that come pouring down on us from former times, thus creating a cataract of words that may hide a lack of creative sensitivity to what is really needed in our days.

Should we not be apprehensive, e.g., of the fact that our recent Chapter Document seems to thrive on almost unceasing references to the theme of the Cross and Passion? The first four paragraphs have no less than 8 explicit references, whereas the Rule of St. Paul of the Cross, from 1736 to 1775, in the same first four paragraphs contains only one single reference to that same theme.

Strangely enough, in none of these repetitious references does our Chapter Document take up the original term of “memory,” which Paul of the Cross himself used in the first draft of the Rule, composed from December 2-7, 1720 in the sacristy of San Carlo at Castellazzo.

Antonio Artola has recently made a detailed study on the Passion terminology as it occurs in the different versions of the Rule (8). In the Rule of 1736 the word “memory” is used three times, and the term “devotion” four times. But the striking thing is that “devotion” is always used in a juridical context, whereas “memory” has to do with the original inspiration. The 1741 version includes only 2 references to “memory” and 5 to “devotion.”

The use of this more juridical terminology was due to the Commission of Cardinals who had to examine the text of the Rule. They were more at ease with something concrete as devotion, which they preferred to the more theological term “memory.”

But in the revision of the Rule in 1746 Paul of the Cross may have had a different type of advisers, for in all the places where reference is made to the purpose of the Institute, he now uses only “memory” or “memory and cult” of the Passion. However, the formula of profession continued to use the term of “devotion.” This very fact has certainly influenced a great deal our traditional way of referring to the Passion mystery, so as to almost identifying the purpose of our Congregation with the propagation of a devotion.

In our very days we see a renewed theology of the Cross return to the biblical concept of “memory” and draw from it enriching and inspiring insights. Our Passionist community, committed “to promote by word and deed a deeper awareness of the meaning and value of Jesus’ Passion for each man and for the life of the world” (Ch. Doc. 8), will fail its claim when it neglects to integrate the enriching insights of this renewed theology of the Cross. A tradition cannot possibly be kept alive by just looking to the past. As J. B. Metz puts it: “The *memoria Jesu Christi* is not a memory which deceptively dispenses Christians from the risks involved in the future. It is not a middle-class counter-figure to hope. On the contrary, it anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope and doomed to fail. It is therefore a dangerous and at the same time liberating memory that oppresses and questions the present. The Church’s teachings and confessions of faith should be understood as formulae in which this challenging memory is publicly spelt out. The criterion of its authentic Christianity is the liberating and redeeming danger with which it introduces the remembered freedom of Jesus into modern society” (9).

To talk of the cross in terms of “memory” will make us avoid considering Jesus’ Passion in its punctuality, as an historical event closed on itself, and cause us more and more to see it as part of a process. We used to pray: “We adore and praise Thee, O Lord, because by Thy holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world,” thus using a formula which attributed salvation to the cross alone. This expression keeps its validity only as long as it is conceived as a shortened way to point to the summit of a protracted commitment and to the hope of new life. Because “soteriology” has compressed Jesus’ Passion and Life into a “doctrine of salvation” we have come to lose sight of the concrete situation and reason why Jesus was executed on the Cross.

The cross is the most characteristic and distinctive feature of Christian faith, but christian spirituality is not a spirituality of suffering; rather, it is a spirituality focused on the following of Jesus. Not all suffering is christian; only that which flows from the following of Jesus is. The latter is what Jesus demands of his disciples. Jesus’ cross itself is the end of a process. If we do not go through that process, then the cross to which we offer our acceptance may not be the christian cross. “The Cross is not the sort of suffering which is inseparable from this mortal life, but the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life” (D. Bonhoeffer). “Jesus does not suggest that his disciples should seek pain; he rather makes it clear that if they remain disciples they will not have to seek it, it will seek them” (10).

At the recent Stauros Congress in Houston (May 19-22, 1981) Dorothee Sölle called apathy “one of the most characteristic features of our time and the part of the world we usually call the First World. Apathy, an absence of suffering, and the desire to go through life without experiencing pain are all hallmarks of the culture dominant in the First World.”

Perhaps nothing is more contrary to the “memory” of Jesus’ Passion than precisely apathy as the cult of a suffering-free existence. We could not possibly go on speaking on Jesus’ Passion in an authentic way if we fail to get involved with those whose daily lives are marked by suffering that is not of their own choice; if we fail to fight apathy and the glamour of a culture that looks away from its victims. It is only when identifying with the people who are really suffering, by listening to their prophetic voices whispered in slums and prisons or in the disease-palaces of modern health care, that we are in a position of how to spell the message of the Cross in our days.

As a Passionist community we are challenged to do away with a dubious tradition of introspection which makes us almost claim a monopoly of the Word of the Cross. That message “applies critically to ourselves who look in hope to the Cross. It does not allow us to focus on the story of Jesus’ suffering in such a way as to forget the anonymous history of suffering in the world, in our concentration on the Cross of Jesus to forget the many crosses in the world, in our concern with his Passion to be silent about the many torments and countless instances of anonymous death, the sufferings passed over in silence, the persecution of untold thousands of human beings tortured to death in this century because of their faith, race or political attitude in fascist or communist regimes... But in the history of the Church and of Christianity (and we may well add, in the history of our Congregation) have we not separated Christ’s hope-giving suffering too sharply from the single passion story of mankind? By linking the Christian idea of suffering exclusively to his cross and to ourselves as his disciples, have we not created free zones in our world where the sufferings of others go on unhindered?... Only as we are alert to hear the dark prophecy of this suffering can we apply it fruitfully to ourselves, do we hear and confess aright the hopeful message of Christ’s suffering” (11).

The threatening reality evoked by Edith Sitwell's 1940 war poem continues to be present also in our days:

Still falls the Rain

Dark as the world of man, black as our loss -

Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails

Upon the Cross.

Still falls the Rain

With the sound like the pulse of the heart that is changed to the hammer-beat

In the Potter's Field, and the sound of the impious feet on the Tomb:

Still falls the Rain

at the feet of the Starved Man hung upon the Cross.

Christ that each day, each night, nails there, have mercy on us -

On Dives and Lazarus:

Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one...

3. An International Community

In the same way as the local christian community within the Church has been given an intensified awareness in recent years, and rightly so, our Chapter Document lays much stress upon our local community life. Our communion within the Church universal is an illusion and an alienation if it is not rooted in authentic local communities which are true centers of shared faith and life. The same can be said of our communion within the Congregation; it will be illusory unless it is deeply rooted in the concrete life of local communities. It is in the experience of grace and sinfulness within a community on a human scale that we may live communion concretely, that we are called to continual renewal of life and have the potential to become credible signs of the love commanded and promised by the Lord (12).

But as we attain greater authenticity and depth in the local community, we are prompted to reach beyond to the larger international community to which we belong. Our Congregation is present in no less than 47 countries, but I wonder if we really value it to be an international order. Par. 31 of our Chapter Document says: "Each local community must strive to strengthen the ties that bind it to the Congregation from which it has received life and with which it shares inspiration and purpose. We will be disposed to supply personnel, material and other forms of assistance for those parts of the Congregation that are in need..." Are we really disposed to fulfill these nice declarations or is anything of the kind absent from our spiritual and cultural horizon?

At a time when sociologists and anthropologists are speaking of the emergence of "the global village," are not international orders particularly challenged to register the needs and the possibilities inherent to this evolution process in Church and society? Do they not dissolve too soon the tension that necessarily exists between local tasks and universal needs? Are not international orders in a privileged position to give expression to the dimension of 'catholicity' which should characterize the Church? A catholicity in time, through contact with the vital treasures of tradition, and catholicity in space, through contacts that transcend the limits of a provincialistic scene.

Table 1 - Distribution of Catholics by Continent (In Millions)

Continents	December 1977		In 2000	
	Catholics	Population	Catholics	Population
Africa	53	423	94	831
Asia: countries with statistics	56	1,388	96	2,332
countries without statistics	?	1,016	?	1,357
Total	(56)	2,404	(96)	3,689
Oceania	5	22	9	30
South America	204	224	279	382
Central America - Caribbean	97	113	130	214
North America	58	240	85	289
Europe: countries with statistics	266	447	261	476
countries without statistics	?	222	?	257
Total	(266)	669	(261)	733
World: countries with statistics	739	2,857	954	4,554
countries without statistics	?	1,238	?	1,614
Total	(739)	4,095	(954)	6,168

Source: *Annuaire statistique de l'Eglise 1977*, p.44, and *Population et sociétés* (Paris), July-August 1979.

The above table shows that the number of Catholics will be decreasing in Europe in the decades ahead: from 266 million to 261 million in the year 2000 - the only continent where such a decrease is to be expected. By the end of the century the Western countries will have 36% of the world's Catholics, instead of the 44% at the present moment; and Latin America will have 44%, instead of 40% now. Africa and Asia together will have 20%, instead of 15% now.

There is little or no provision in our Chapter Document that allows our Congregation to become really international in the sense that it would be enabled to adopt overall policies with regard to universal needs and priorities. Precisely in a stage of our history where we have moved from a certain type of unity, which rather was a juridical uniformity, I am afraid we won't be ready or disposed yet to give up the liberating effects of pluriformity in view of a new type of unity that would draw its demands from a close examination of the global world situation. But this could mean at the same time that we are ready to bypass the challenge of our time: "Never before has the Church been confronted with a greater challenge. Never before has she had such an opportunity to become the Church of the World as is possible now with the coming of the Third Church" (13).

In the study "The Institutional Church in the Future" published by "Pro Mundi Vita" it is stated: "On all sides it is evident that, on the whole, Christianity and certainly Catholicism contradicts what it says - it is not the poorest nations that are the most evangelized. What is more, from the poor nations' point of view, it is the rich Christian world that appears not only as the origin of

domination and world exploitation, but also as the biggest obstacle to the achievement of greater international justice and to the defense of rights already acquired. Those same countries are responsible for the mad arms race, and the shameful exportation of arms, the financing of which are so sorely needed for the common betterment of our planet, making it a place worth living on. Such a situation touches the very core of evangelization. Once this is realized, it is easier to appreciate the deep insight of the 1971 Synod when it made the struggle for justice an essential element in the spread of evangelization” (14). It is, therefore, no exaggeration when J. Moltmann says: “The poor countries are not our ‘problem.’ We, the rich, industrialized countries are *their* problem.”

I find it symptomatic for our lack of international dimension that, as a Congregation that is mainly established in the rich Western countries, we never felt the need to take to heart the challenging questions that reach us from everywhere. “It may well be that we, who are so endowed with the wealth and spirit of Dives and so little acquainted with the condition of Lazarus the beggar, shall have to suffer unheard of humiliation before we can receive what is given only to those who beg. There are intimations of this coming great humiliation in many places, not least of all in the eyes of those who ask us for bread. We have yet to comprehend the darkness of our own deeds and the deeds of our fathers. We have been so accustomed to seeing ourselves in the role of Samaritans that it is hard for us to envisage ourselves as thieves. Yet it is in the latter role that most of the peoples of the earth have perceived us. We shall not escape their judgment. Whether at their hands or more subtly as the result of the works of our hands, we shall have to live with manifest peril” (15).

More and more we are coming to realize the impact of “*reverse mission*,” that we not only reach out to evangelize others, but that those to whom we are sent (people of other nations and cultures, minorities within our own nation, in fact all people to and with whom we minister) exert a profound influence on us. This idea of “reverse mission” is most clearly recognized and put to profit by ecclesial and religious communities in Latin America. “*Los pobres nos evangelizan*” is not just the title of a book (16), but a reality which causes the Latin American Church and many of its religious communities to raise from a centuries old tomb into the open space of new life.

Could not the idea of “reverse mission” revitalize also our very announcing the “word of the Cross”? Does our message really come “*desde el reverso de la historia*” (17)? Is there not a deep gap between “the faith we believe” and “the faith we live”? And could not this gap be considerably lessened precisely by “reverse mission” that would make us sensitive to the unique contributions, as far as the “word of the Cross” is concerned, not only by other Christian churches but also by the many people who cry out in despair, the very people with whom Christ wants to be identified (Mt. 25)? Should our community apostolate be mainly guided by the discussion of the “forms of apostolate,” or rather by the demanding examining of the signs of the time wherever this may lead us? A recent document of the SVD’s may show us a way: “In a world deeply scarred by injustice and the dehumanization of the majority of mankind, our faith in Christ calls us to discover His presence among the poor and the oppressed and to work for the establishment of His kingdom through the healing of social relationships. To this end we commit ourselves to a preferential option for the poor and to social justice. This will lead us to a confrontation with sinful structures of social, cultural and economic oppression, a confrontation that will be guided by the Gospel principle of overcoming evil with good. This commitment shall be realized by:

- a. efforts towards the immediate amelioration of conditions of poverty;
- b. the struggle against the structures of injustice and the denial of human rights;
- c. by self-reflection on our own complicity in many structures of oppression;
- d. by separating ourselves as far as possible from structures of injustice” (18).

Conclusion

Among the promising initiatives in our Congregation in recent years I reckon the organization of international study-sessions such as this one and of inter-regional meetings in Third-World-countries. They are complementary to the overall tendency to local autonomy and could, as such, play an important role in the updating of our Congregation, confronting it with the many-sided questions that emerge from a new world-situation, the very place of awaiting of God’s kingdom.

In the *Fioretti* of St. Francis we are told about the prayer of Brother Maseo that it consisted in repeating the vowel “U, U, U.” And the prayer of Brother Bernardo consisted in running around a mountain. We may be asked to do more in our days and to do it together. “The present age is marked by the idea of evolution. It is an age in which a unique lack of expectation prevails, leading to passivity and openness to manipulation. Therefore a new and passionate protest is needed against the putting off of the second coming. This cannot be prescribed by theologians or ordained by a synod, but must be unleashed by those who devote themselves so persistently to solidarity with the poor and suffering in the world (that is, to the demands of following Christ) that this does not seem possible without a shortening of the time. If this apocalyptic awareness were to emerge in the religious orders under the influence of living out the following of Christ despite its being barely livable, then this would most assuredly be the time of the religious orders” (19).

Therefore, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works, not neglecting to meet together, encouraging one another...” (Hebr. 10. 24-25)

- Harry Gielen, C.P.

Notes

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2. Idem, *Decreti e Raccomandazioni*, o.c., p. 131.
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4. Quoted in F.W. DILLISTONE, *Jesus Christ and His Cross*, London, 1953, p. 22-23.
5. D. BONHOEFFER, *Life Together*, London, 1954, p. 78.

6. Cf. J. B. METZ, *Followers of Christ. Perspectives on the Religious Life*, London/New York, 1978, p. 60.
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PASSIONIST COMMUNITY AS A PRIMARILY CHRISTOLOGICAL DATUM, BEFORE BEING A PSYCHOLOGICAL OR SOCIOLOGICAL ONE

Outline

Introduction.

The Starting Point.

The Qualities and Situation of Passionist Community.

Community: the Experience of the Kingdom.

Community: Summoned and Sent.

Community Profile.

Conclusion.

Introduction

The difficulty in speaking on a topic such as “community” is that it can be viewed from so many different points of view - on most of which, I am not qualified to speak. It is the difficulty of finding the correct starting point.

Community can be discussed in terms of psychology. It can be discussed within the framework of group dynamics and of interpersonal relationships. One can begin using the categories of sociology and talk of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, of primary and secondary unifiers.

I will speak of community in the framework of theology. My thesis may be summed up as follows: *Community is primarily a Christological datum before it is a psychological or sociological one.*

The Starting Point

The Chapter Document

I would like to begin by addressing my remarks to a statement taken from our present Chapter Document. In n. 55 of the Document we find the statement:

“Our apostolic commitment is an expression of our life in community.”

Fr. General, in his letter “*Passionist Apostolic Community*” (1979) quoted this sentence and makes the following comment:

“For St. Paul, the Passionist apostolate is an expression of a profound experience in community.”

As I understand these two statements, we are being told that the clue to our ministry will be found in the experience of community. In community we will find not only the motivation and resources, but also the very reality that we have to offer God’s poor in ministry. What is lived in community is then offered to the world.

This sentence from our Chapter Document is taken up and expanded in the proposed draft of a text for our new rule, to be presented at the forthcoming General Chapter. The sentence now reads:

“Because community life and apostolic activity are one sole entity with us, our apostolic commitment is an expression of our life in community” (n. 71).

The addition of these few words may seem only a minor expansion. However I think it makes a profound shift in meaning, a movement of the whole center of gravity. I believe that the addition of those few words turns the original sentence on its head so that it can no longer stand as written.

The Path

If it is true that apostolic activity and community are one sole entity with us, and I think it is; and,

if it is true that evangelically and theologically priority must always be given to mission, and I think it is;

then, I do not think we can say that our ministry stems from our experience of community. Rather, I believe the reverse to be true. Community is not a prior condition for ministry but the fruit of it. Mission generates community. Our common task dictates our common life.

To clarify, I am not opposing community to ministry. Nor am I referring to the amount of time and resources one devotes to one in comparison to the other. I realize that community and ministry are not so much opposites as they are a *continuum* along which each community must situate itself. Rather, I am asking wherein do we discover our model for community, and for our specifically Passionist community.

I believe that community is not so much something that we take to ministry but something we receive in ministry. The meaning, structures, the spirit and the charism that will characterize our community life will be found in the experience of ministry. To adapt Fr. General's statement, the Passionist community is an expression of a profound experience in the apostolate.

The Qualities and Situation of C.P. Community

To begin these reflections on community, and upon what ministry tells us community should be, I would like to speak about a number of features that characterize our community life, to reflect on these qualities in the light of the world in which they are lived.

Love in a Situation of Hostility

The first feature that characterizes community life with us is, I think, that our communities are made up of people who are committed to love one another. In our communities you find people who work, and work hard, at building genuine human relationship, relationship that go beyond the purely formal and work-oriented. Our people really care for one another. I have found the willingness to take the risk of real human love, a willingness to forego the thousand escape routes that institutional living makes possible. There has been a refusal to paper-over superficial relationship with fine words, a refusal to paper over real divisions with common observances. To remove the masks, to lower the facades and to remove the barricades can be highly risky, as the number of breakdowns in my own province shows. Yet it is a risk that our communities take for the love of the brethren.

Yet this community-in-love occurs in a world that is deeply divided, a world that is hostile and in which the other is perceived as "threat." This community-in-love takes place in a world divided by race and by color; by nationality, by class and by wealth; by ideology and by religious belief. And it is to that world that God has given his gift of community. Community is not primarily a

gift for those who already have enough love and to spare, but something to be lived with the loveless in a hating and hostile world.

Purpose in a Situation of Meaninglessness

The second prominent feature of our communities is that they are comprised of men who have found purpose and meaning in their lives. I think it would be true to say that our men have found something that makes life worth living, that gives their life a sense of direction. We have found a core around which to integrate our lives and by which to steer our course. When we come to death we can look back on a life that has much to show for it, goals achieved, people helped, talents fulfilled.

Yet this community-of-purpose takes place in a world that has no meaning and less direction. In the West and in the North it is a world where mental illness and apathy have reached major proportions, a world where utopias and pseudo religions abound, offering instant meaning and painless salvation. In the East and in the South it is a world where not only are most people denied life, what is worse, they are denied an identity. It is a world where, when death comes, it will be as if they had never lived; lives without purpose and deaths without meaning. Yet God's gift of community was not meant for people who already know where they are going and who can already rejoice that they have arrived. He meant it for a world ignorant and without direction.

Security in a Situation of Need

The third feature of our communities is that in them our needs are met. If you look at Maslow's listing of the various levels of needs, religious community offers the opportunity for all of them to be fulfilled. Community offers a roof over our head, a meal on our table and clothes on our back. After providing for our physical needs, it provides for our personal security, meeting our educational, employment and emotional needs. We find that community fulfills our need for culture and affirmation, leading us to the point where we can be integrated and self-actualizing.

Yet again, such community-in-security is lived in a world of desperate need. It is lived in a world starving, sick, without help, without hope and without heart. God's gift of community is a gift for a starving world, and it is that starving world that will dictate what our community will be.

In a world that is hostile, meaningless and starving, we experience and celebrate a life worth living and a love worth having. On the one hand, that is beautiful. On the other, it is highly dangerous if it is misunderstood. How do we understand this gift of community? Do we understand it to be a precious possession for which we give thanks? Is it a privileged space, a secure fortress, a safe harbor, a "cordon sanitaire"? Do we understand it to be the stable ground from which we go out and to which we return? If that is how we understand ourselves then we are not the community Christ expected us to be.

A Change of Attitude, a Change of Reality

What I am asking for is a change of attitude, a change of perspective, a change in the way we understand our community. Our way of living will remain the same; our ministry will remain the same. Yet a change of attitude and perspective is, in fact, a change of reality. To change our understanding is not merely to view the same thing in a different way; it is to view, and to be, a new and different reality all together.

The question Jesus asked in the parable ‘Who is my neighbor’ brings the listener into a “limit-situation.” The purpose of any parable is to place the listener in such a situation, where he must radically alter his perspective if he is to understand. The sacraments, for example, place those who celebrate them in precisely such a limit-situation: in a world where life is so devalued, Baptism challenges to a radically different perspective. In a world where sickness and old age are ignored, regretted or hidden, the Anointing of the Sick demands a new perspective and puts the celebrant into a different world.

In a world hostile, ignorant and starving, the Eucharist poses the question “Who is my Community?” in its most acute form. Compelled to recognize that my community is not the people with whom I live but the world in which I live, I do not have merely a different perspective but I live in a different community.

In such a changed perspective, trust, love, security can no longer be the place from which we go out and to which we return, rather it is the land we wish to discover. They are not the precious possession we have, but the hidden treasure we seek. No longer a secure fortress, community has become the perilous beachhead we try to hold; no longer a safe harbor but a fragile boat dangerously tossed on the Galilean sea. With the world and as the world, community is what we attempt to create: a space in the world where trust, security and love can flourish for the world.

Community: The Experience of the Kingdom

What are people meant to see when they “see” our communities? What are they meant to hear when they “hear” our communities? What is this world meant to experience when it experiences Passionists in community?

The Kingdom of God

What people are meant to experience in experiencing Passionist community is not merely people living together. The reality is deeper. What our communities are meant to be is the Proclamation and the *Establishment of the Kingdom of God*. To “hear” Passionists at community is to hear the proclamation that the Kingdom of God is not only a possibility but a reality. This world is meant to hear that the Kingdom is not only possible but inevitable.

Further, Passionist Community is not meant to be only the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom. It is meant to be the very establishing of that Kingdom as a reality. What people are meant to “see” when they see Passionists in community is the Kingdom itself, no longer a future possibility but a present reality.

To experience Passionist Community is to experience the Kingdom, to know the Kingdom; to touch and taste and feel and see the Kingdom. As the psalm says, it is to be able to walk all around it, to review its ramparts and look at its towers. A world hostile, ignorant and starving can already experience the Kingdom in experiencing the reality of a Passionist Community, can already see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living.

What does it mean to experience the Kingdom? Obviously the Kingdom of God is not a place, not a geographic area. To experience the Kingdom is not to experience a place. The term “Kingdom,” as I am sure you are aware, is translated now as “reign” in order to capture a little

more of its dynamism. To experience the Kingdom is to experience the reign of God. Or, put even more actively, it is to experience God reigning.

What are our communities? They are nothing other than the presence of God reigning over a world that is broken.

God Reigns in the Lordship of Jesus

To go further, what is it like to experience God reigning? How does God reign? Despite what so many of our hymns say, when God reigns he does not do so in power and majesty. When God reigns he does not do so in splendor and triumph and might. For God, Jesus tells us, is not like that. No, when God reigns, he reigns as Father. To experience God reigning is to experience a God who has made man's good his only concern, a God who has made his children's happiness his own cause. It is to know a God who cannot be happy unless his children are happy, a Father who suffers wherever his children suffer, who cannot be complete until they are whole, who joins in their laughter and shares in their tears, a God who has, quite literally, died of a broken heart.

Ultimately, the New Testament tells us, to experience God reigning as Father, is to experience the presence of Jesus. It is to experience a God who, in Jesus, has drawn near to his people.

What people are meant to see and hear in our community, what they are meant to touch and be touched by, is the Lordship of Jesus. To hear proclaimed and to see for themselves, that the Lordship of Jesus is humanity's only hope.

The Transparency of Christ

In my one brief year of pastoral work, we had a nun who used to play the organ at our weekly Masses, a Good Shepherd sister, Sr. St. John. John was one of those women who had grown wise with the passage of years. She was in vaudeville before taking the veil and would embellish the hymns, with trills and runs up and down the organ.

John came up for mass one day really excited and we asked her what was getting her so happy. She replied, "Two of our sisters have died. And we always go in threes, and that means I'm next."

That day we got a virtuoso performance on the organ. About two weeks later, John came up and she was depressed, really down. "What's wrong, John," we said. "The third one's gone," she said, "and it wasn't me. And I was so looking forward to seeing Him."

John was a Good Shepherd sister. And the word for "good" in "Good Shepherd" doesn't mean good as in "good boy" or "good girl," morally good, doing the right things and keeping the rules. The word "good" means "beautiful" or "attractive." What John was looking forward to was seeing the beautiful face of God. What people should see in our communities is the beautiful face of God, the splendor of God shining on the face of Jesus.

Faith is often thought of as a veil, something through which we see now, but one day to be removed so that we can see clearly. But Paul tells us, faith is in fact an unveiling. It is an already seeing. We don't have to wait to see since, as Paul says, there is no longer any veil over the face.

Or as he says in that beautiful passage from Ephesians. “The believing heart has eyes.” Or as Aquinas put it, “Oculata fide verunt” which is Greek for, “they saw with a faith which had eyes.”

What people are meant to see in our communities is the Face of Jesus already unveiled. What our communities should be *is* Jesus unveiling his face before a world that has no other hope but him. Our communities are meant to be the beautiful face of God turned already to the world, the compassionate face of Christ. This is the deepest vocation of our community, its very heart. This is what it means to say that community is primarily a christological datum.

Community: Summoned and Sent

Community then is not our idea, nor is it our achievement. At its heart our community is the presence of Christ, and we live community because we have been summoned to it by the Lord. And we live it in the places where we are sent by the Lord. Before drawing out some of the implications of what I have been saying, it will be helpful to examine the Great Commission in Matthew, where Jesus sends and commissions his disciples.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is part of the Resurrection narrative in Matthew. Matthew’s Resurrection narratives are very interesting. For Mathew has no story of the ascension into heaven. Unlike Luke, Matthew has no description of Jesus taking his seat at God’s right hand. Unlike John, Matthew has no story of Jesus being glorified. For Matthew, Jesus stays exactly who he was and exactly where he was before. When the Risen Christ appears to his disciples in the story of the Great Commission, he quite literally keeps his two feet well and truly on the ground.

Throughout his gospel, from the Nativity story onwards, Matthew has described Jesus as God-with-us. And that is precisely how he stays. He does not ascend, he does not leave his church. When Jesus exercises his lordship, he does not do it from God’s right hand, from above this world and from outside this world. Jesus exercises his lordship from within and from beneath. He does it as the simple one, without glory, without power and without majesty; he does it as a little child.

The other significant part of the narrative is the response of the disciples. When Jesus comes, they recognize him and fall on their knees and then they doubt. For Matthew this is the reality of the Church, on its knees before its Lord, the adoration and service of weak and doubting men. The people Jesus commissioned to go to the ends of the earth were not men with their problems solved and their doubts allayed. Jesus sent weak men able to do their job solely because Jesus would remain with them all days, even to the end of the world.

The Promised Presence of Jesus

The disciples were commissioned to be the body of Christ, his presence. They were sent to take their stand in those places where Jesus promised to be present. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus tells his disciples that if they are seeking him then there will be two places where he will be present: two privileged areas that would be the promised presence of Jesus. Matthew tells his church that if it is seeking Jesus, then there are two places it should look.

First, Jesus will be found in the experience of community. He will be found in its life and in its fellowship, in its worship and in its ministry. He will be found in the experience of fellow of just

being together in warmth and affection: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.” He will be found in the community’s worship: “This is my body, this is my blood.” Finally, he will be found in ministry: “I will be with you all days.” To experience Christ in fellowship, ministry and worship is a real experience of the Risen Christ at work in our lives, enabling, healing, forgiving, growing.

But there is another place that Jesus said he would be. It is found in the parable of the final judgement, in the condemnation of those who ignored the weak and immoral and godless: “For insofar as you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me.” If you want to find Christ, Matthew told his church, don’t just look to yourself, but look to all that is not church and anti church, to the poor and needy, to the unbelieving and the godless, the immoral and the unchurched. The Church may be the continuing incarnation of Christ, but so is the world.

To experience this Christ is to experience the Crucified Christ, to experience the weak and broken and dying one. To experience the whole Christ, we must experience both.

Community Profile

In this final section, I would like to outline some of the implications of what I have discussed. What implications are there for our community?

A Community

First, we must be a community. What exactly does it mean to say that “we must be a community?” What factually will it imply? I am afraid I am not certain. However, there is one thing which I believe it does *not* mean.

There has been a tendency in recent literature on *community* to speak of the religious community as the place in which a religious is meant to have his needs for intimacy met. Community is meant to provide the deep primary relationship without which real maturity and happiness is impossible. I hope I am not quoting him out of context, but Fr. General in his letter “*Reflections on our Passionist Vocation*” stated that: “*Each of us needs these kinds of relationships and our religious profession assures us of the right to receive them in community.*”

Personally, I cannot agree with such a tendency. I believe that such relationships are necessary, in fact indispensable; and hopefully and often in fact, these are found within one’s religious community. However, I do not believe that it is the purpose of a religious community to provide for these needs. It is, I think, a harmful expectation. Many have been disappointed because they wrongfully expected their community to meet their need for such relationships. As well, many people have had unjust demands made on them to relate at levels of which they were incapable and with religious with whom such a relationship is impossible.

If it is true that apostolic activity and community life are one sole entity with us, then obviously we must be a community. In the present Chapter Document, in the proposed text, and in the letters of Father General, there has been an emphasis on preaching, missions and retreats as our characteristic and distinctive apostolate. If the above-mentioned sentence from the proposed text is true, the community is our characteristic apostolate. We must be a community so that, as St. John says, “you and we together may share a common life, that life which we share with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.”

We must stand together. The epiphany of Christ, his coming and self-revealing does not take place through individuals but through people-in-relationship. Alone we are too poor, too weak and too inadequate to manifest the plenitude that Colossians tells us dwells in Christ. It would be like trying to paint the sunset with a single color. We must be people united in the body of Christ. We must be people gathered into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For the saving glory to have its full weight, for that Face to appear in all its beauty, then there must be, as Paul says, “no division within the body; for you, all of you, are Christ’s body and each one a part of it.”

A Community Encountered

We must be a community encountered by and in communion with the Lord. You cannot give what you haven’t got, and you cannot witness to what you have never experienced. Our community must be characterized by heightened encounter and deeper communion. As St. John says, “what we have heard with our own ears, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have touched and handled with our own hands, this we give to you so that you might join us in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The heart of our community is Christ; we have come to him and believed in him, as John says; we have eaten him as one eats bread; we have received him and submitted ourselves to him; we have put him on like a garment, we have been clothed in him. “I live now, no longer I but Christ lives in me.”

The very substance of our life together and of our apostolate is Christ. Hence the absolutely imperative importance of the contemplative tradition in our congregation. As the Transfiguration story in Luke tells us, not only can we not serve our neighbor, we are incapable of even recognizing him unless we have first recognized Jesus.

Further, I think there is a pressing need to recover our tradition of praying together, praying together in our work and from our work. A community is more than just the people who belong to it, and a community’s relationship with Christ is more than the sum total of the relationships of the individuals within it. Our communion with and in Christ must be a communion precisely as community, and this means we have to be with Jesus together, we have to talk with Jesus together, and we have to love Jesus together.

Our communities will only be the presence of Christ when they are immersed in him to the extent that his face is our vision, his power is our strength, his love is our life.

A Community Within and Without

Our community must be lived within and without. It must be lived within our world and without any walls. Just as Christ never left his world but remained at its heart, as God-with-us, so our community must be lived at the heart of this world. We do not come to this world from outside of it. We do not relate to it from above. It is lived within. This is very much a matter of our attitude. If we are to avoid a sort of “creeping colonialism,” then we must experience as one with those we serve. In fact, as it is often used and understood today, even service language can mask a form of power and domination. Service can in fact be a subtle form of domination, a means of securing one’s own identity at the cost of those we serve.

However, it is not merely a matter of attitude. Our community must be without walls, it must be visible. Unless people have access to our lives in community they are not of much use. And when I say our community life must be available, I mean our community life. People already

have access to our services, our counseling, our liturgies, our education and our material aid. But unless they get past the front parlor, literally and metaphorically, then we are fooling ourselves.

As ministry is more than merely humanitarian good works, even so community is more than the offer of psychological, sociological and economic security. Ministry and Community is an invitation to accept life in the Kingdom, to submit to the Lordship of Jesus.

Hence community must not only be visible, but be visibly christian. We must be and be seen to be, men who have accepted the Lordship of Jesus, who cling to that Lordship with all the fervour and desperation of drowning men clinging to a rope. Hence I do not think our task is anonymous Christian service and existence. The essence of religious life is that it is completely public and totally explicit. If it be true that with us apostolic activity and community be one sole entity, then the monastery hidden by walls, by privacy or by physical isolation is a waste. As is the house indistinguishable from any other on the block, and the apartment no different from any other in the building. As is the monk who is never seen whether he be in the monastery, the classroom or the factory floor.

How this accessibility and visibility is achieved, and how the explicit christian content is externalized is of course the major problem we face. I do not have any answers, and in fact there are no global answers. This is perhaps something upon which we could profitably share.

A Community Ministered To

We must be communities that are open in the sense of receptive, communities that are free enough to be ministered to. It is here I think that we come close to the heart of our Passionist community. As important as what we have to offer is, just as important is what we have to receive. Indeed, for us, what we have to receive is perhaps even more important, since what we are given is our very identity.

In our common life, in our worship and in our ministry, we experience the power and the presence of the Risen Christ. But the Risen Christ is not the whole Christ. We also need to experience the Crucified One, and that we do not have. The Crucified Christ is the gift the world has to offer us; it is the ministry we receive. What makes our lives Passionist is not the Cross we proclaim, but the Crucified we receive. To me, this is the source of the imperative importance of our Congregation's predilection for the poor. It is the poor that make us who we are.

So we do not live in this world confident in our abilities and talents, secure in the gifts we have to offer and the services we are able to render. As in Matthew Jesus did not come to his disciples in glory but as a child, so we cannot come to this world complete. We also live in this world starving ourselves and in desperate need for what only this world can give us. We need the wounded hands and the bleeding feet of this world. We need its broken heart. For they are his hands and his feet and his heart broken in love.

Our uniquely Passionist community life is not what we offer but what we are given. It is not what we have but what we receive, over and over again. Our Chapter Document would be much improved if it lost some of the proud certainty and the confident self possession with which it so easily outlines our life and our identity. It would be much improved if that certainty and self possession were replaced by a little humility, and a little gratitude that this is a world that will

give us to ourselves, that will give us our identity by being for us and in us, the presence of the Crucified.

A Community Weak and Fragile

Finally our communities must be places of real weakness. The apostles fell on their knees and they doubted. They doubted because they were weak men. And it was precisely because of that that Christ chose them. This was Paul's problem in Corinth. He had gone there and preached the Good News. But after he left, the "heavies" arrived: high-powered evangelists, the Billy Graham and the Hour-of-Power men; the big men with talents, resources and abilities to spare. Compared to them, Paul was shown up to be precisely what he was, a stammering epileptic with a touchy temper and a seemingly inspired ability to antagonize. Condescendingly they rejected Paul and turned to the Big Men, the "Pillars." This is really what an apostle is like. And Paul said, No!

Our communities are strong and effective, and that is good. It is also dangerous, because it tempts us to forget that the most valuable and cherished members of our community are those most broken. We need the constant salutary reminder that none of us are, or can afford to be, big men. The apostles fell on their knees and they doubted. Our communities will only ever be at home when they are on their knees and when they have the courage to be what they are, weak and doubting. Our communities will doubt and they will fail; they will be frightened and they will fall. But that is the only sort of community in which Christ can be present.

Conclusion

We live our community life in the midst of a hostile and hate-filled world. In that world we try to create a space where love can flourish and divisions be overcome. But let us never for a moment imagine that the world will fall over itself in gratitude. In the sort of world we live in, love will usually be crucified. It is quite on the cards that the world will turn on us and destroy us. It is a risk we take because we know that the world turned on Christ and destroyed him.

We live community in a chaotic and meaningless world. A world adrift in its own ignorance. In that world we try to create a space where truth can be had, where purpose and meaning is available. But let us never think for a moment that the world will even know we exist, nor that it will buy the truth that we have. But then very few were aware of Christ and even fewer bought his truth.

Finally we live community in a world filled with need. In that world we try to create a space where needs may be met and inadequacies overcome. But let us never think for a moment that we will be overwhelmed with thanks. This world will probably take what it needs and keep on its merry way. And that was how it treated Christ. They took his healing but not his love.

Being a community in our sort of world is a very risky affair. We can escape that risk if we treat community as a safe harbor in which we can find shelter. Alternatively we can take the risk of sailing out onto the high seas and place our trust in Him who has the power to still the waves and quiet the storm.

- Thomas McDonough, C.P.

A NEW LOOK AT PENANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Focusing

Every aspect of Christian living must be humanly credible. I do not mean acceptable, but able to be shown as life-enriching, life-enlarging and inspiring. The Gospel must be a source and cause of joy!

Not only must it stand the test of human reality; it must also be consonant and consistent with the vision of humanity given to us through the Gospel. When God stood alongside our humanity in Jesus it was not to overawe or demean it but to encourage and attract it towards the fulfilment of friendship and union.

This “being alongside” is the milieu of revelation. It takes two to complete the circuit of revelation. Communication needs dialogue if it is to be fruitful. Hence revelation is not a fixed formula of divinely imposed truths. It is a process of mutual sharing, of discovery and development; it is through interaction of persons. It is in the interplay of divine enlightenment and human understanding that the fire of insight and truth is kindled.

When we turn, therefore, to consider an aspect of Christian life such as Penance, it is imperative that we leave aside any idea or desire for direct divine mandate. We must enter into dialogue with the Jesus of the Gospels, listening, observing, seeking to understand and give our personal, present response. For it is Christ who opens the eyes of the blind to the realities and the demands of God. Whatever inheres in the creative, beneficent will of God for us can only be perceived in the light of Christ. He is the final and perfect word of God to us (Heb.1.1f).

Spotlighting

The Passion and death of Jesus are the peak-point of revelation. This dialogue of deed speaks to us of God at his best. In our experience so far, it is the fullest unfolding of God’s character and humanity’s true path to glory. It is the heart of the Gospel which requires that radical “change of heart” – the penance of accepting a crucified God.

This is a basic act of penance: that we submit to the symbol and the implications of the cross. There is a finality of Christ on the cross. It is a converging and coherent point of an eternal movement of dying, of self-giving. It also sets the pattern of humanity’s movement towards mankind and response of THE MAN towards God which found its fulfilment in the dying of Jesus of Nazareth. When the eternal and creative love of God spilled over to submerge the negation of death and nothingness there was pain, tears and blood.

When Jesus, as the man of the new Genesis, set out to turn God’s children back to their heavenly Father the path was of descent and lowliness. It was descent onto the plain of human life, onto the battleground of being and becoming human. For there is something within the human condition which seeks to deny being, to destroy life and return back to nothingness. Each of us possesses a mysterious destructive power which seeks to draw us towards non-being, to refuse to become human, to grow, to strive for and achieve our full stature as human persons.

Jesus as “Savior” has led the way in this combat and left us the strategy of victory: it is the “losing of life,” a life of penance which frees humanity from the limitations of self and sin.

If we are to imitate this life of penance left to us by Jesus these are the features and facets such a life must exhibit.

Motivation of Creative Love

The memory of the dear love which led God to “exhibit” himself on the cross in the attitude of one cursed and condemned should move the human heart to desire a share in such a love. When God reached out to grasp the fullness of life for us as a man, his hands were seen to be wounded. We too must accept the pain and *effort* of stretching our human frailty towards the “more” of which we are made capable by the grace and power of Christ. We become “self-creative” in our refusal to accept second-best, of what is less than human in any situation of free decision.

Acceptance of Reality

Motivated in this manner, the Christian, like Christ, must face and accept the solidarity of sin (cf. Lk. 3.2). The choice he makes involves confrontation with all forms of evil, of whatever is a denial of humanity, of life and growth. To enter into these shadow areas of life, the dominion of darkness, to battle with the powers of evil will drain the human spirit and lay the Christian open to the possibility of death.

Transposing and Transforming of Evil

Having chosen this confrontation, the Christian assumes responsibility of redemption. So that others might go free, he must remain to absorb the impact of evil on his own life and spirit. Clinging to the principle of life through death there will be the bearing of the burdens of humanity’s rejection of God, the offense of man’s apathy towards man, the abuse of power in human structures, the violence of conflict between need and greed.

Within this context of the cross there will be the constant choice to grow, to resist and to hold up the vision of the better way.

Such a view of “Penance” leaves the Christian life wide open to many forms of expression. If one chooses such a pattern as we see to have been set out by Jesus Christ, there can be no way in which the forms of response can be specified apart from the particular circumstances into which the choice of each Christian leads him. Each circumstance will demand its own “penitential” attitude and stance.

All the Christian can hope to do will be to reveal in each area of conflict, personal or public, that self-giving, creative love of God which he ponders in the person of Christ. It is that thought which must sustain him and be for him the firm ground of hope that the victory of light over darkness, of love over evil, is certain.

- Aelred Smith, C.P.

THE VIABILITY OF PENANCE TODAY

Outline:

- I. A Preliminary Distinction.
- II. Listening for the Voice of the Spirit.
- III. History and Critique of the Practice of Penance.
- IV. Penance Today.
- V. Conclusion.

I. A Preliminary Distinction

Before speaking on the viability of Penance today, if any, and before speaking of possible forms that it might take, there is a prior methodological distinction which I feel that it is helpful to make.

a) Charism and Spirit

During this week we have been discussing the various elements that go to make up the charism and spirit our Congregation. In this context the words “charism” and “spirit” are often used interchangeably. To be faithful to Scripture, however, we need to distinguish between them. If, as one writer suggests, we think of religious life as a hill with two slopes, then “charism” belongs on the *theological* slope, and “spirit” belongs on the moral slope.

That is, when we speak of “charism” we are referring to something that God does, something that God gives in gift and call, through His Spirit, to a person or to a community. When we refer to “spirit,” on the other hand, we are referring to something that we do; we are underlining the form our response to that call takes. “Charism” and “spirit” can be summarized as being the invitation and response from God to his people.

b) The Spirit of Penance

So, in speaking of the spirit of Penance in our Congregation we are on the moral side of the slope. In speaking of Penance we are speaking about a specific way in which we pattern our lives, a particular manner in which we respond to the call of God. Penance is thus a second order reality. That is, it depends for its validity on the prior call of God to act in this particular way rather than in another.

c) Two Conclusions

There are two conclusions that follow from this of which it is good to be aware:

- i) It means that Penance has no necessary, timeless validity in our Passionist spirituality. As part of our Passionist way of life, it is only valid when God calls us to it, and only for as long as God calls us to it, and it is valid only in the form to which God calls us. Otherwise there is the danger of institutionalizing it in the worst possible way. For example, in the present Chapter Document and in the proposed text for the General Chapter, where Penance is mentioned it seems to be done so in a stereotyped and purely formal fashion. It seems to be mentioned purely for the sake of being included, and its contents repeat much of what is in other sections,
- ii) Secondly, it means that in order to ascertain whether or not Penance is a valid mode of Passionist spirituality we do not look to the Founder nor appeal to the Congregation’s

history. Rather, we must listen for the voice of the Spirit. This means that we cannot ask, “Is the Spirit calling as to Penance today?” Even less can we ask, “What forms must our penance take today?” No, our first question must be much more open: “To what is the Spirit calling us?”

What, then, is the Spirit calling us to, and where must we listen in order to hear His voice?

II. LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT

a) in a monastery garden

In order to know what we are called to, we must listen for the voice of the Spirit, we must be alert for the Word of God. To find out what we must do to hear the word of God, I would like to comment on something that I presume that you have all done in your time here at St. John and Paul's, and that is to sit in the garden. It is a very pleasant experience sitting in the garden. The noise of the city is in the background, but it doesn't really disturb. It is quiet and peaceful. As we sit in the garden what do we listen for?

b) Where to Listen, and What to Listen For

The first and most obvious place to listen for the Word of the Lord is to search the Scriptures. There, primarily and preeminently we find God speaking, we find His word to reflect and pray over. But, with all due respects to the Scriptures, we do not listen there for the Word of God.

So, where do we listen? Well, there is a reasonable amount of writing in theology and spirituality which recommend us to listen within, that God's first word is not the word he speaks in Scripture but the word that he speaks in the depths of our being. “I will plant my law in your hearts” and “I will put my spirit within you.” First we must listen to our heart and then listen to the Scripture to verify that word. But, with all due respects to your hearts, it will not be there that you will first hear God's Word.

So, where do we listen. Back in the garden, we will find God's word precisely in that which we so quickly screen out, in the noise of the city. God's first word will be found in the roar of the city. “The Lord hears the cry of the poor” and “Your cry has come up to me.” To hear what the Spirit is asking of us today, we must listen to what the poor are asking of us. It is ironic really, that in order to hear God's Word, in order to concentrate and listen, we normally screen out the very wavelength that he is using, so that our monasteries become oasis in which God's Word is silent.

c) Conclusion

So, in order to hear the Spirit we must listen to the poor. Only after that can we listen to our own hearts; or rather, to the echo of their voice in our hearts. And only then do we go to the Scriptures, for until the voice of the poor is echoing in our hearts, the Scriptures will remain a closed book. So we then look to the Scripture to find out how our people have responded when they have found themselves in similar situations. And finally we go to our Chapter Document (and unfortunately, as I have said, at the moment you will find very little there to help you).

If we are called to penance today then it is because it is a call and demand that comes from the poor. If we are called to Penance today then it is because this way of life is demanded of us by the have-nots of this world with whom God had thrown in his lot.

III. HISTORY AND CRITIQUE OF THE PRACTICE OF PENANCE

Before outlining what I understand to be the way of life the Spirit is calling us to in Penance, I would first like to outline some of the ways in which our People have understood and practiced Penance.

a) History

i. *Beginnings.* Prior to the coming of the Irish missionaries to Europe, penance was understood and enacted as a dynamic, world-affirming praxis in the face of a sinful environment. In both the Old and the New Testaments, Penance was seen as an effort towards, and as a part of, a process of liberation. In fact it was more often that not seen as the work of God rather than as an exercise of his people. Rather, it was the work of God, summoning his people forward, clearing the path before them, often against their will. Penance was understood as being an attempt to overcome and eradicate all that was not of God, and hence an effort to overcome and eradicate all that was both inhuman and anti-human. Spurred on by God's promises, and sustained by a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, people tried to make that vision a reality - through penance - by removing anything that might hinder its realization.

ii. *The Irish.* Then came the Irish. In those days, anyway, the Irish were characterized by their quiet sensitive natures. They were introverted, highly imaginative and sensitive in temperament. This led them to turn the idea of Penance around. In the view of these missionaries, suffering and penances freely chosen were a punishment that was meant to be borne. Penance was no longer a liberating reality. Instead of looking forward to the new heaven and new earth, the monks looked backwards to sins committed, good deeds left undone, failures to be dealt with. Penance was a punishment.

iii. *The Asceticism of Compassion.* With the foundation of the Franciscans and the spread of their spirituality, and especially with the writings of Suso, Penance took on a different tone again. With their characteristic and beautiful emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, and, with their contemplation of the Passion, penance was understood within the framework of an asceticism of Compassion. The people's minds were filled with the enormity of the sufferings and pain borne by the gentle Saviour, the depth of his sorrow and the lonely anguish of his Passion. Out of compassion for him, people not only wished to keep him company but to take some of his suffering and to bear it themselves. I'm sure all of us have stood sometime or other by the bedside of someone dying or in pain and wished we could take some of their pain from them onto ourselves. Well, in the same way, inspired by pity, people, through penance took some of Christ's pain and bore it for him so that his pain might be less.

iv. *The Asceticism of Reparation.* Later there came devotion to the Sacred Heart and saints like Margaret Mary Alcoque. With these there developed an asceticism of reparation in the light of the Pierced Heart of the Redeemer. St. Paul of the Cross' spirituality of participation in the Passion has sometimes been seen in this framework. Within this spirituality, sufferings were to be borne and penances taken on in an effort to make up to the Sacred Heart for the insults and outrages that had been committed. It was an attempt in some way to repair and apologize for such sins committed in the face of Divine Love.

v. *The Asceticism of Substitution.* Finally there developed an asceticism of substitution. Within this asceticism the eyes are taken from Jesus and fastened instead upon the sinner or else upon an angry God. Sinners deserve, and will receive, the just punishments that their sins deserve. They will receive a torment too heavy to bear. Since many will not repent, or would fall under the punishment we offer ourselves as substitutes, as victims in their stead. Thus we bear the punishments that they would undergo by taking on penances or by accepting the sufferings that come our way. God, the Just Judge is thus induced to stay his hand. Our penances and sufferings act as a sort of counter weight, holding back the upraised hand of the wrathful God.

vi. Before going on to critique these varying spiritualities, I would like to emphasize that each contains highly important truths of which we must keep hold. It is important to realize that no growth is painless and certainly none is automatic, that in our efforts we will make mistakes and that these mistakes must be repaired, as the asceticism of Reparation asserts. Our efforts to repair such mistakes is a way of following the advice of St. Peter “Do not make the Holy Spirit sad.”

And finally, with the asceticism of substitution, it is important that we realize that none of us ever stands alone, either in sin or in grace. There is a bond of solidarity with our brothers and sisters, and there is a mutual responsibility that we must bear towards each other.

b) Critique

However, outweighing these positive aspects, a number of considerations make such an understanding of Penance impossible today.

i. *The Interiorization and Privatization of Penance.* The practice of Penance gradually came to assume the same intense interiorization and the same relegation to the private sphere as that which characterized religion in general. Two reasons may be given for this: the effects of the Enlightenment and the influence of an ascetical model of spirituality.

During the Enlightenment two emphases needed to be highlighted. The first was the exaltation of Reason. Reason was literally idolized and anything that could not stand the test of reason, anything that was not logically deducible or scientifically provable was dismissed out of court. The second emphasis was on Utility. Only those things may claim attention in the public forum which are socially utilizable or profitable.

On both counts religion was judged to have no claim. Relegated to the purely private sector, religion, and so penance, came to be understood as matters for purely individual concern. They were interior matters only. Similarly since religion was then judged as existing to meet an individual's private needs, so penance became a private practice meant to meet my own private needs and existing for my individual good.

This cultural shift in the status of Penance was reinforced by the association of Penance in theology and spirituality with the ascetical model of holiness. In this framework the ascetical life is a carefully worked out science which aids the individual in growth in sanctity. Spiritual devotions and exercises, like physical exercises, were a means to strengthen the practice of the virtues and so deepen one's holiness. Holiness was something achieved by practice and exercise. Such an understanding of holiness still is found in our own Chapter Document and the proposed text. Set within the section on Prayer, Penance is an exercise undertaken to improve our prayer. And prayer itself is an exercise to aid the keeping of the counsels.

Standing against this interiorization of penance, it must be emphasized that:

- neither religion or penance can ever be a purely private affair. It is public rather than private, social and communitarian rather than personal, outward looking rather than inward.
- Secondly, in Scripture, a charism is never given for the personal good of the individual who receives it. A charism is always given for service. Thus our penance, and even our suffering, are meant to be drawn into the ambit of our service of others.
- Thirdly, the ascetical model of holiness will no longer hold up. According to Vatican II, there is only one holiness, that of God himself. All that is possible for an individual is to share in the holiness of God. Penitential practices are not a means to holiness; they are in fact an expression of holiness. Penance is not a means of conforming my life to the Crucified; it springs from a prior living conformity that expressed itself in my every action.

ii. *Dualism*. The theologies and spiritualities of penance that I have outlined were also theoretically and psychologically based on an unacceptable dualism. They were caught up in a dualistic framework that saw the body as being evil and the soul as the treasure to be protected. The body was to be quelled or subdued lest it lead into sin. Penance was not so much a freeing of the body as a subjugation of it.

This was in turn based on an underlying view that the world itself was evil. Penance and the Christian life became a flight from the world into a sanitized zone of safety and salvation. In contradistinction to the biblical understanding of penance as a world-affirming and liberating praxis, penance is rather a world-condemning praxis, one which leaves the world in its evil awaiting its condemnation.

However, not only were they dualistic; in many cases these practices rested on pagan philosophy. In Stoicism, the ideal virtue was apathy, to be beyond pain and beyond suffering, beyond the degrading demands of the body. This was mirrored in an image of God as apathetic, beyond suffering and beyond death. Any understanding of penance that makes the Stoic ideal of apathy its aim is a penance that is incapable of love, and one that ultimately betrays not only the reality of pain, but also the reality of God himself.

iii. *Ideologies*. Finally these spiritualities were used as ideologies. This, of course, was not the fault of the theologies themselves, but they did lend themselves to such a use. By saying that they were used as ideologies, I mean that they were appealed to as a justification for or a rationalization of situations and practices that were inhuman, destructive and which should have been denied rather than justified or explained. When faced with suffering caused by natural causes, by social injustice, by disease, people, on the basis of these theologies were told to willingly accept their lot in compassion, reparation or substitution. Without denying that these theologies may have been of great help for people faced with unavoidable pain, to ask people to accept such suffering or to “offer it up” is today insulting and unjustifiable as a first response. Similarly, in the more recent past, penance was appealed to when religious were asked to joyfully and voluntarily accept a stifling conformity, a personal destruction and the repression of anything unique or distinctive in their personalities, lifestyle or friendships. Stripped of its ideology, penance in fact was often an exercise in sadism by superiors or a recommendation for the religious to be masochistic.

IV. PENANCE TODAY

Introduction

So far, Ascetical Theology has provided the theoretical framework within which Penance has found its theological justification. That framework, I have argued, is no longer viable and in any case it has, practically speaking, ceased to exist. The result is that either penance is no longer consciously adverted to or practiced; or it is met, as it is in this Institute, as a traditional practice in desperate search for a new theory. I am, however, very wary of attempts to give new justifications to old values and customs. Not only does it rarely work, but historically such attempts are responsible for a fair proportion of the Church's present difficulties.

In the case of Penance then, it will not be a matter of finding a new way to secure an old value, since the value once secured by Penance no longer has the same priority or validity. Nor will it be a matter of finding new justifications for our old customs. The behavioral sciences, as well as experience, have shown us that people's behavior is not changed by providing more knowledge. Rather, if Penance is to have a place in our lives, it will only be by finding ways, old or new, to respond to the new demands that life and the Voice of God make on us.

When Penance is mentioned these days, it is usual to hear certain sorts of statements: "There are enough problems in daily living without searching for extra mortifications; or, "Community living is penance enough." These statements are true as far as they go. Unfortunately they don't go far enough. It is true that life does provide its own measure of pain and suffering. And it is true that if we are looking for penitential practices life does provide sufficient. However suffering is not Penance, although suffering may become Penance.

Suffering will only become Penance when it is understood as an invitation to live in a certain way for certain reasons. Merely coping with life's pain is not penance. Penance is, in this sense, a moral virtue, a deliberate response to the call of the Spirit. It is only when life's suffering is understood, accepted and personally willed as our own response to the Spirit that it becomes Penance. Penance is then both the way of life to which we are called, and the particular way we understand that life.

In what follows I would like to discuss two things: first, the way we are to understand the life we are called to; and second, some of the characteristics of that life today. Then, the theological framework within which penance is understood and the way it is to be lived.

Theological Framework

The framework within which theologically we can situate penance is made up of three factors drawn from recent theology. From the Death-of-God Theology, from the Theology of Hope, and from the Political and Liberation Theologies of the present. I believe that underlying and uniting these three schools is the same problem, the challenge of theology: how to speak of God in a world characterized by what Schillebeeckx describes as a "barbarous too much" suffering. In their attempts to respond to this fundamental question, those three theologies provide the theological scaffolding to understand Penance.

A. Death-of-God Theology

The Death-of-God theology is often dismissed as a passing fad, now long over. Such an understanding does the DOG theologians a disservice and doesn't appreciate the contribution they have made.

The DOG Theology is far older than the brief school in the late sixties. Its roots go back to 1756 when the ontological optimism of the Enlightenment was blown apart at the seams by an earthquake at Lisbon. Faced with this catastrophe, the Enlightenment's answers -Leibnitz's "Best of all possible worlds," and Pope's "Whatever is, is right" - withered before the criticisms of Kant and Voltaire. There could be no justification for such a God. Indeed, said Kant, such attempts to justify God were worse than accusations against him.

In the following century, Nietzsche's refusal of religion was motivated not so much by a proud atheism as by a despairing humanism. When he declared "God is dead," it was not that God did not exist, but that such a God could not exist. Similarly, Marx's famous statement that religion is the opium of the people was not in the first instance a criticism of religion, as a criticism of the conditions that made religion necessary. Religious distress, he wrote, "is at the same time an expression of real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation."

And so down through Freud to the DOG movement of the 60's. In proclaiming the "death of God," these men were proclaiming the death of the God of the philosophers, the abstract, remote, unchanging and immovable God Who had replaced the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were proclaiming the death of a "God-in-himself." And in fact there is no place in our world for a God, self-contained and self-sufficient. A God beyond pain, as Moltmann has said, is a God beyond love. And a God beyond love is no longer a God but a stone.

B. Theology of Hope

These schools of thought are faced with that basic question: Is there anything to hope for? For people trapped in the present, with no past to lean on and no future to look forward to, will it always be the case that, to quote Moltmann again, "murderers will triumph over their victims?" The answer of the theologians of Hope is profoundly optimistic, and it is optimistic precisely because it is even more profoundly realistic. Much of our own hope for a future without suffering is the belief that in God we will find a suffering-free zone in which we will be safe. The theologians of hope reply that until the Kingdom comes in its completion, there is no such suffering-free zone, not even in God. There is hope for the suffering, not because God cannot suffer, but because even though he suffers, he is stronger than suffering. In the Cross we see the suffering that is in the heart of God, yet a suffering which cannot destroy him. There is hope for the dead, not because God cannot die; but even though God dies, yet God is stronger than death.

In the Cross and resurrection we see the future God has promised, a future for which he has undertaken to stand guarantor. Even though we suffer, that future is a certainty, for God has thrown in his lot with ours and has staked his future on our own.

C. Political and Liberation Theology

Political and Liberation Theologies are not so much another theological school as an attempt to draw out and realize the practical implications in the theology of Hope. If God has thrown in his lot with the poor, if he has taken sides, then that is a clear indication of where he expects us to stand, in solidarity with the poor, in critique of all in our society that supports and legitimates the status quo. And further, if God has promised us a future, then that future cannot be merely contemplated. It must be built. We can contemplate only that which is, or has been before. That which has never been must be created and built. We must go out, lay hold of, and make real that future which is coming and which has not yet existed.

A Spirituality of Penance

The Death of God Theology and the Theology of Hope provide us with two important truths. They proclaim the death of God and the dying of God. The death of God-in-himself and the dying of God in our world. Political and Liberation Theologies provide us with the motivation, justification and criteria we need for effective action. The ironic thing is that not only does our world not have a place for the God of the Philosophers, neither does it have a place for the God of Jesus. As Bonhoeffer wrote, God has allowed himself to be edged out of the world and onto a cross.

This theme of the suffering God who identifies with his people's pain is reasonably common now; the God who comes to his people in their anguish, who suffers with them, who suffers for them. Following that lead, we must take our stand too in solidarity with a suffering world. *But* there is another side to the story.

The fact that our world is in agony demands that we do something. But, the fact that our God is in agony demands that we take some responsibility for his pain. It is here I think that those old spiritualities had a point. For we are called to share the suffering of God as much as he shares in ours. As he stands with us, so we must stand with him in his pain.

Penance is then not merely our identifying with a suffering world. At its deepest level, Penance is our identifying with a suffering God. Penance is a call to take up our stand within the broken heart of God. It is not that we take on some of God's suffering so that his will be less; when your suffering is infinite it can't be less. Nor is it making up for the suffering that he has been caused. Nor is it an identification with the suffering he underwent on Calvary.

So often when someone is in pain, all you can do is to be with them, to befriend and be-friend to them. Often without words, in silence, to make time for them. So we need to befriend and be-friend to God, to share in his pain. Ours are not the only eyes from which the tears must be wiped away. In penance, we befriend God for he needs our friendship and company as much as we need his. The God who dies for us now, quite literally, cannot live without us.

The framework in which we must understand Penance is this: a sharing in the pain of God by sharing in the pain of his world.

IV. PENANCE TODAY

And now finally to our question: What is the Spirit calling us to today? What is that the Poor ask of us? Understanding Penance to imply either suffering freely accepted or suffering deliberately chosen, I would like to outline an answer in a number of theses. None of them is completely distinct, and they will at times overlap.

1. Any call to penance today is a call to WITNESS and SERVICE. In contradistinction to the interiorized, privatized view of penance, today it must be understood as a public act of our institution as an institution. In contradistinction to the ascetical models the practice of Penance has as its goal, the service of others. I do not think there is place today for a Penance that has as its aim interior growth, personal sanctity or individual mortification.

2. The call to Penance today is a call to take sides, to side with life in a world that is dying. Following the biblical mandate, our siding with life in a world where love is usually crucified is an act of faith in and commitment to the future.

3. We are called to befriend and be-friend in our world and to our world, taking as our model the friendship of Jesus. Our presence as friend, our refusal to abandon this world, should speak of Emmanuel, God-with-you, for only in our presence can God be present in the darkest places of our world's dark night.

4. Since there is never a stranger who suffers, only ever a brother or sister, Penance will not mean a deliverance out of suffering but a deliverance into it, until suffering itself is no more.

5. To take our stand with the suffering and with those who have no voice, will mean taking our stand with the dead. Our penance is to keep alive the memory of their vanished lives, their destroyed hopes and forgotten existence. Our penance is to claim even for them a say in what the future will be.

6. To take our stand with the suffering is to take our stand against suffering; to take a stand against the violence of our world, against the death that surrounds us. It means taking a stand against that which kills the body and that which can kill the soul. By suffering we are called to deny suffering the right to exist.

7. In particular this will mean:

The Asceticism of Opposition: the penance of taking a critical and active stance against much if not all of our popular culture with its frighteningly corrosive philosophy of self expression and fulfillment. Penance will mean showing and living that for a christian self sacrifice is ultimately the only self expression and road to fulfillment.

The Asceticism of Sympathy: where lives are fragmented, communication stifled, and apathy the leading psychiatric disease among youth, this is the penance of openness between one person and another. It is the penance of honest communication, the willingness to forgo the escape hatches life, especially religious life, offers.

The Asceticism of Plurality: this is the penance of allowing the other to be other, without molding them into my own image. As a penance it will not only mean encouraging differences, it will also mean positively promoting free and open criticism of what may appear our most cherished values.

The Asceticism of Powerlessness: where we are historically and economically the powerful, this penance is that of "letting go," personally and institutionally, of our lives and work and, if necessary, even our identity. It means that if you want to know what penance should be today you shouldn't be listening to me, but should take the risk of going outside and letting the poor tell you both who you are and what your penance should be.

The Asceticism of Contrition: this is the penance of developing a conscience sensitive not only to what we have done, but also sensitive to what we have allowed to happen to others, both in our monasteries and in our world, both presently and historically.

The Asceticism of Humility: this is the penance that comes in recognizing that the world does not revolve around ourselves and our apostolates. It is the pain that is borne in humbly acknowledging that presently God is not only doing most of his good works outside our ranks, he is also doing them outside our Church,

The Asceticism of Dying: as an institution we must have the openness and generosity to face death. This is the penance that comes in recognizing that the day may come when God may no longer have a purpose for us, when he will call no more young men to our ranks, when he will call those we have to leave and work elsewhere.

The Asceticism of Risk: We are called to stand in solidarity with the suffering, in love with the loveless, in life with the dying. Yet we have no guarantees that our own hope is strong enough, our own generosity large enough, our own love mature enough. We not only may fail, we probably will fail and might even be destroyed. Penance is, quite literally, laying our institutional life on the line, for the sake of the poor, and in the awareness that we may not survive the attempt.

All these may be summed up in one: The Asceticism of Love, born of the Cross in the midst of the world.

V. Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to quote a few lines of Isaac Watts' well known hymn:

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count as loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God.
What e're vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to his blood.
See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e're such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
I would be a treasure far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

As Passionists, we are called to stand before the cross of Christ and of the world. In baptism that Cross was driven deep into our souls; at every Eucharist, his wounds are carved again upon our hearts. In the last analysis, Penance is nothing other than the systematic adaptation of our whole lives to the Cross which each of us accepted and carried at our Profession. When we listen to our world, the crosses we bear really are far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands our souls, our life, our all.

- Thomas McDonough, C.P.