

# 11

**Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality**

## **PASSIONISTS AND THE PRESENT-DAY THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS**

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## **THE CONCEPT OF NAKED SUFFERING (NUDO-PATIRE) IN THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF PAUL OF THE CROSS**

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Rome 1982  
Passionist General Curia  
Piazza SS. Giovanni e Paolo, 13

The lecture, *Los Pasionistas ante la actual teologia de la Cruz*, was delivered during a Congress at Zaragoza, Spain, Sept. 10-12, 1980, commemorating the centenary of the first Passionist foundation in that country. It was published in the *Boletin "Stauros"*, Spanish edition, 1980 -3, and has been translated by Norbert M. Dorsey, C.P.

The article originally titled, *The Naked Suffering (Nudo-Patire) in the Mystical Experience of Paul of the Cross*, was published in "Epherimedes Theologicae Lovaniensis", XLIII (1987), fasc. 1, vii & pp. 210-222, and has been re-edited and adapted for this series.

Cum permissu:  
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### **OUTLINE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The theology of the Cross is enjoying a spectacular audience these days in the most varied theological circles, beyond confessional barriers and geographical limitations. This renewal of stauological studies also promises well in the fields of spirituality and pastoral praxis. Even a cursory glance at theological booklists on the subject bears witness to a fact that cannot leave a Congregation such as ours indifferent, missioned as we are to preach the Word of the Cross and to live a spirituality centered on the Passion of Christ. I think that simple affirmation amply justifies the theme of these reflections and shows that it is a matter of extreme importance for us, as well as being relevant to the subject of this Congress.

The title of this lecture, *Passionists and the present-day theology of the Cross*, suggests various possible approaches and developments. From the outset, therefore, we feel obliged to define and state the sense in which we understand it and hope to treat it.

Some might take the title to mean a highlighting of the part played by the Passionists in working out and discussing the theme of the Cross. It is not my intention, however, to sum up here the collaboration the Passionists have given and are giving to a present-day theology of the Cross. There will be many historians of contemporary theology who will recognize and evaluate it in due time, as can be seen already to a certain extent in the book of Profs. M. Flick and Z. Alszeghi (1).

Although, as we have just said, we do not intend to offer a detailed balance-sheet of Passionist contributions to a new theology of the Cross, it would not be right to pass over that work in complete silence, or without at least some reference to the contribution that has been made. We must first allude to the Congress on “La Sapienza della Croce Oggi (The Wisdom of the Cross Today) held in Rome on occasion of the II Centenary of the death of our Holy Founder (1975) and organized by the Italian Passionists. That Congress gathered together a large number of leading theologians whose work filled three impressive volumes (2). The importance of this meeting was decisive for the theology of the Cross because it served to confirm its place within theology in general, and at the same time opened up a wider field of theological investigation that provided interesting data hitherto not sufficiently taken into account.

Mention should also be made of the international association “Stauros”, formed by a group of Passionists and backed by the superiors of the Congregation, “to promote the study of the Gospel of the Passion of Christ.” This international and inter-confessional association has been functioning for seven years already and has published a considerable number of studies and bibliographical bulletins in various languages on themes related to that of the Cross. It should be noted that the bibliographical information service it offers is indispensable for any kind of research on this subject.

And finally we should refer to the steady work being done by the Passionist professors in the faculty of “The theology of the Cross” in the Pontifical Antonianum College in Rome.

Having made these brief allusions we now wish to speak of the particular orientation we desire to give to this conference. These lines are all inspired by the conviction that the current of stauological studies is a great opportunity for the Passionists, both for spiritual renewal and pastoral re-awakening. I want, then, to reflect on and to try to show what a great change the present theological climate affords us. At a time when religious life is toiling in the styles of

spiritual and pastoral renewal, without neglecting the exacting search for its own identity, it is of incalculable value to be able to count on the supplementary help of a strong current of theological and pastoral research that is also trying to shed light on what is the very kernel of our existence in the Church, our spirituality, our pastoral objectives and methods. I am convinced it represents a providential occasion for our revitalization. To neglect it would be, to say the least, rash.

But what is the value of the present-day theology of the Cross? If we take it as only one more theological fashion imposed more or less arbitrarily by some theologians in quest of popularity and tired of looking round for other themes, then there would be some justification in our indifference towards theological circles that have recently concentrated on this theology of the Cross. But such a point of view would surely be superficial, since it overlooks the implications underlying the phenomena of man's changing history and theological reflection. Now, as in times past, there are plenty of examples to show how a theological current obeys determined needs arising in the human spirit. As the theologians of liberation express it, theology is a "second word" with respect to the "first word" which is the actual historical situation of man (3). Put differently, theology arises in answer to real human problems. If this were not so, it would lack an ecclesial function. Can this relationship be shown to exist in the concrete case of present-day theology of the Cross? Did it arise in answer to the real needs of modern man? And does it, in fact, correspond with them?

We shall not yet give a direct answer to these queries. But it should be evident that the matter we are dealing with is an important one and that if we can prove a positive relationship between this theology and the problems of modern man, it would mean that we are faced with an authentic need felt by the man of today to shed the light of the Word of the Cross on his own life, a Word that more than ever needs to be pronounced in our times. This will give us a clearer perception of the fact that we Passionists are called to the mission of proclaiming the Word of the Cross; and that never less than now could we change our orientation. With fresh conviction we have to repeat today the words of our Chapter Document: "Our mission still retains all its strength and actuality" (2).

## **THE NEW THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS**

What is, in fact, this new theology of the Cross? How did it first arise? What are its main lines and principal theses? All these questions have to be answered if we are to demonstrate the concrete possibilities of the new theology.

What we have called "present-day theology of the Cross" is hard to define because it is not a question of a specifically determined confessional or geographical school of theology. It is more like a convergence of preoccupations and studies from varied fields that have found in the Cross of Jesus the central point of the Christian faith that we must turn to once more today; it is a change of direction, for many reasons judged opportune and necessary, but which at the same time is not uncritically repetitive.

It is to be noted that the trend leading to interest in the Cross is not a spontaneous phenomenon, that is, it had antecedent motives. Among the reasons to explain this interest we can count the following:

1. For years a certain uneasiness has been manifested before the existing soteriological models, and the task of a thorough revision of the theme of Christian salvation has become ever more pressing. Since the Marxist and Freudian criticism of religion, it has become especially troublesome to go on repeating those soteriological models that were inherited from the past and were logically conditioned by the culture and expectations of salvation of the period in which they were formulated. We also have to note the fact that this salvation theology included a way of understanding the Church-world relationship that was already becoming unacceptable. In recent years liberation theology as well as various European political theologies have contributed heavily to placing the salvation theme in the front line of the theological actuality, advancing original ideas that have been favorably received, not only in Latin America but in the whole Church. We have, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez who defined liberation theology as “a salvation theology in the concrete, historical and political conditions of our day” (4).

2. Emerging from the Protestant exegetical camp, especially in Germany, the problem of the relationship between the Christ of history and the Christ of faith appeared in Catholic theology. As a reaction against Bultmann’s lack of interest in the historical Jesus, his own disciples threw themselves decisively into the investigation of this very point, with important results that aroused the interest of a large number of theologians. All this critico-historical scrutiny of the New Testament, especially of the historical Jesus, offered fresh openings for Christological reflection that necessarily affected the theme of the Cross. What is more, the very special kind of execution in the death of Jesus, and the fact that it was the most certain historical data in the New Testament, made it the focus of all this investigation.

3. Besides these antecedents, the theme of the Cross has other lasting and very contemporary reasons for emphasis, such as the problem of theodicy (if God is omnipotent love, why is life so often tragic and hard?). This truly excruciating problem resurfaced during the two great wars of our century and have made modern man ask how we can speak responsibly and validly of God after Auschwitz (5). The question of human suffering, too, has become a source of atheism (G.S. 19), for the man of today sees that in spite of the progress he has himself produced, he is subject, and even more so than any man of the past, to the very same suffering. This concern has often been expressed by the Magisterium in our day (G.S. 6, 8 etc.; *Redemptor Hominis*, 8, 15-17).

It is precisely in this field that the theology we are commenting on has its greatest reservations with regard to some popular concepts of the Christian attitude to pain, an attitude protected by a particular way of meditating on the Passion of Christ.

The theme of suffering deserves special attention because around it have arisen the strongest polemics among theologians. Moltmann’s book, *The Crucified God*, has been severely criticized for its explanation of a theology of human suffering, both on the Protestant (his own) side, as well as the Catholic (Sölle, Boff ) (6). His critics maintain the impossibility of giving a rational explanation of the meaning of suffering. What is more, they consider an attempt of this kind, however theological, ends inevitably in justifying human suffering, especially the kind resulting from the unjust and oppressive behavior of man to his like. Hence, they hold that the only Christian attitude to suffering is to confront it, to resist suffering that is brought about by injustice, and to risk one’s life for justice sake. As for suffering that cannot be attributed to injustice, they would have an attitude of conquest: overcome pain without denying it nor being resigned to it, so that a man remains human and believing, in and with the suffering.

## **TO RECOVER THE MEANING OF THE CROSS**

This new theology of the Cross is trying to get away from the difficulty of the progressive emptying of the meaning of the Cross in the Christian world. For it is precisely the omni-presence of the Cross in our culture that makes it easily and dangerously tend towards the common destiny of worn-out symbols, that is, a progressive weakening and impoverishment of its significance. We should not, though, put all the responsibility for such a deterioration on mere familiarity and consequent routine. That would amount to blaming it on popular religiosity, a recourse used only too frequently and easily. Popular religiosity, it seems to me, shows more the effects than the causes of this loss of meaning (7).

One symptom of the depreciation process of the Cross is evident in the cleavage manifested on various levels between the Cross and the Crucified. As José Ig. González FAUS has written: "It is absolutely fatal for Christian piety to have become accustomed to talking of the Cross more than of the Crucified: Separated from the Crucified and transported into a culture where it is not familiar, the Cross inevitably loses its strength" (8). In fact, since in our countries we no longer use the cross for capital punishment, the sign of it fails to evoke the figure and destiny of the Crucified One. For this reason, the same theologian suggests in another place: "It might not be a bad thing, maybe, if for a time we used the gallows, a garrote wire or an electric chair to represent the Cross of Jesus, only like that could we keep alive the scandal of his death" (9).

But this cleavage between the Cross and the Crucified touches much deeper levels than the simple phase-out of a concrete instrument of capital punishment. In the history of western theology we can perceive a process in which the Cross is being displaced from the central position it occupied in christology and is gradually changing into a disincarnate soteriological symbol. In affecting a separation between christology and soteriology and making them distinct treatises, the basis is laid for the cross to be considered as only a section of soteriology. This has a serious effect on the reality of the cross itself, which then begins to be seen as not so much the destiny of Jesus, as the supra-historical moment in which man's sin was destroyed and God's honor repaired. In this perspective the real conflict would not be that of Jesus, but rather what happens between insolent and sinful humanity and the offended God. Thus the cross is emptied of its christological significance and left to soteriology to take care of. Against this danger we should see the cross as the cross of Jesus, belonging to Jesus and speaking of him because it is his. We need to recover the cross for christology as well. In other words, Jesus is our key to the cross, which can only be understood united to his life and not as isolated event or a symbol in its own right. The cross can only stand as the cross of Jesus. Not that soteriology may not make use of the cross. But it must always be made clear that the cross is salvation precisely because it is the cross of Jesus.

Finally, there is another aspect that is usually studied in the history of christology, that applies equally to the theme of the cross. It is a verified fact that through the centuries the image of Jesus has been considerably varied. We could say that each epoch has its own way of representing Jesus. Now in the buildup of these images of Jesus are contained ideological elements in the negative sense of the word. And we have to keep these in mind so as not to fall into the trap of accepting as authentic tradition, what is merely a reflection of interest subtly manipulated and consciously or unconsciously accepted. In preaching the cross, too, we have other questions to answer such as these: Who are we preaching? From where, to whom, and what are we preaching? And to whom or for what, in actual fact, is our preaching of use? What are we trying to gain with our speaking of the cross? Here is a field for reflection, examen and investigation

that may possibly bring us to a more balanced judgement on the phenomenon of the deterioration of the symbol of the cross.

This situation has brought theology a renewing task, so that symbols void of meaning may end their languid existence by the act of dying. They cannot stay alive unless they manage to recover the capacity of putting us into communication with their meaning and significance (10).

The importance of this task is in direct proportion to the weight of the theme for Christian faith. A glance at the New Testament texts shows us the decisive position of the project of the cross. We have only to note the length of the Passion narratives in each of the Gospels, or the central position the death of Jesus holds in the most ancient formulas of the faith (1 Cor 15:3-5). The thought and life of Paul gives special emphasis to the cross, as can be seen from these words addressed to the disturbed community of Corinth: "I resolved that while I was with you I would think of nothing but Jesus Christ nailed to the Cross" (1 Cor 2:2). Or these others to the Galatians: "My present bodily life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). We find a similar outlook in the rest of the New Testament.

From the New Testament it does not seem too much to affirm that, far from being a mere luxury without which one could still think oneself Christian, the cross is absolutely basic for Christian faith. This means that a Jesus who would deny the cross cannot be the Christ the believing Christian confesses and on whom he bases his hope. Neither can we follow Christ without being ready to take in dead earnest and follow to its most radical consequences his identification mark: the cross. Hence, no theology can be valid that downgrades the message of the cross and does not take it as the central criterion of Christian faith. In the hierarchy of truths of Christian doctrine as proposed by Vatican II (U.R., 11), the cross may not be relegated to an appendix but has to be seen as the foundation of Christian faith.

According to Moltmann, there is a further motive for a renewal of the message of the cross that is peculiar to the Christian religious situation today. For him, Christian faith is faced with an identity and relevance dilemma, which runs thus:

1. When Christian faith becomes obsessed by its own identity and closes in on itself, it becomes purer but less relevant, and it ends up by saying nothing to modern man. It becomes inaccessible even to the believer because of the obscure language it creates.
2. When attention is concentrated wholly on relevance and faith seeks to be heard at all costs, it risks being diluted in the world around and losing its identity (11).

In this situation, Moltmann holds that the only way out is the cross, where maximum identity and the maximum relevance are present simultaneously. In the cross we know who Jesus is (Mk 18:39) and from the cross Jesus draws all men (Jn 12:32), showing himself a stumbling-block to the Jews and folly for the pagans, but for believers, the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23s). Once again we are obliged to point out the need of bringing the salvific message of the cross to this world of ours.

Finally, we have to indicate some possible steps to be taken to renew the meaning of the cross. Rather than stages to travel one after the other, we shall speak of the dimensions in which we have to "read" the cross. While setting down these readings we shall point out some important

trends in today's theology of the Cross. But in no way do we propose to be exhaustive nor to mention all that is being or might be done today.

## **1. An Historical Reading of the Cross**

Long before being a symbol, the cross is an historical reality affecting Jesus from whom in any case it derives its signifying power. The salvific meaning of the cross proclaimed by our faith depends on the fact that Jesus was nailed to it. Therefore, this historical reading will reconstruct the connection between the originating reality and the symbol, indicating a starting point to which any attempt at renewal must be faithful.

Such an historical reading of the Cross of Jesus should begin by revitalizing the scandalous character of an execution. Even if we are quite sure of it, we must stress the fact that Jesus of Nazareth did not die a natural death but was executed in virtue of a juridical condemnation. Those who condemned him, examined his life, suspected his activity, investigated what he taught, and decided he deserved capital punishment according to their laws. A vital consequence follows from this juridical character: the death of Jesus is not simply the last moment of a life, an isolated fact that could be studied on its own, but it refers back to his whole life and only from that life does his crucifixion draw its meaning. To say that Jesus' death on the Cross was the consequence of the lifestyle he chose and the message he proclaimed is, above all else, an historical statement which can be used later on for our theological reflection. The juridical character of the death of Jesus obliges us, therefore, to read his whole life in the light of history.

Clearly this is not the place to trace out in detail the whole history of Jesus. But we may draw attention briefly to the accusation brought against him. Bearing in mind the difficulty of determining precisely the history of the trial and condemnation of Jesus, we venture, with many exegetes, to set down as a minimum two main accusations:

### **A) Accusation of blasphemy (cf. Mt 14:61 s par.; Jn 10:33)**

Under this general heading can be gathered various data scattered through the Gospel text indicating the religious conflict that was a feature of the life of Jesus: his attitude to the Law and the Temple, accusations of magic practices in the name of Satan, and false prophecy, etc.

This accusation made the death of Jesus particularly hard. It meant a total "no" pronounced by the official representatives of God before the Nazarene's claim to announce and inaugurate the kingdom and to be in personal relationship of unique familiarity with ABBA. In the eyes of all Jews, to die as blasphemer was to die with no dignity whatever and in the most absolute solitude. And still more so for a man with claims such as Jesus made. For him, this kind of death, with no possibility of being considered a martyr or a fighter for his country, spelled a total undermining of his life, making it out of the question for anyone to take up and follow on with his cause.

### **B) Political accusation (cf. Lk 23:1-5; Jn 19:12)**

Even if Luke alone concretizes this accusation, everything tends – and the following details confirm it – to show that Jesus' condemnation was ultimately political: the manner of execution (crucifixion is typically, though not exclusively, Roman), the title on the cross, the presence of criminals (above all if, as many think, they were zealots), etc. According to this accusation Jesus was considered an enemy of the public order imposed by Rome since he preached disobedience

and tried to effect it by force. Even if the life of Jesus is sufficient to refute these accusations as false, it is certain that the most “political” act for everyone, Jews and Romans alike, was to raise him on the cross and to sacrifice his life in libation to the high interest of public order and the stability of the religious organization.

If in what we have said about the accusations raised against Jesus there are considerable technical and historical problems, these are still greater when we interrogate Jesus’ attitude to his own death and the value he attaches to it himself (12). In spite of the difficulties, present-day theology is interested in penetrating the mind of Jesus in these last moments of his life. Here, too, it is helpful to remember what we noted above, namely, that Jesus’ death is only comprehensible when we take into consideration his whole life.

The cause to which he dedicated his whole existence was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the central object of all his preaching and his activity in general. With that phrase, derived from the faith and expectations of his people, Jesus preaches and claims to actualize God’s salvific self-giving to man as the true Good News (Gospel) for all peoples. If his death had any meaning for Jesus Himself, it would be shown in the light of the Kingdom of God. From this we can establish two important points:

1. When he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, Jesus demanded, and himself lived, faith, understood as unlimited trust in God. This does not mean an absence of tensions, for it has to mature in the midst of suffering and obscurity. The New Testament will call this faith lived by Jesus on the cross “obedience till death” (Phil 2: 8; Heb 5:8); not simply resignation but a positive doing of God’s will, that is, fulfilling with his whole energy that for which he lived and to which he had been called. This means that in death the relationship of Jesus with God remained fully alive and its deepest significance lies in that relationship. Jesus died in the presence of and with his ABBA, trusting and abandoned into his hands, above all obscurity yet not without obscurity.

2. At the same time, the Kingdom, incorruptible and decisive salvific will of God for man, demands a commitment to bring about a real historical fraternity and solidarity in line with that divine will. The love demanded is no easy-going, irenic, idyllic vision of human history, but a constant service of man in the concrete (on whose behalf each one of us should be willing to change himself and to change everything else, if that is necessary), a service that is given even anonymously or in spite of rejection. This is the fraternity offered by the Crucified One to all of us, the ultimate act of a life defined as total service of all men: “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for man” (Mk 10:45 par).

## **2. A Theological Reading of the Cross**

The death of Jesus seen from the pages of history does not cover all the meaning read into it by the believer, nor does it wholly explain the movement that rose up around Jesus. To follow a man who ended his life in complete failure would be more like a desperate and basically fanatical faith, than any sign of a hopeful attitude. If, as believers, we find hope precisely in the Crucified Jesus, it is because we believe we have the right to affirm something more of him, though this something more is unheard of, even for us. The Resurrection of the Crucified One does, in fact, provide a basis for speaking of this something more, that is, that death is not the last word about and for Jesus; for he is living fully in God, from and for us and with us, from and for God.

Nevertheless, the Resurrection does not blot out what happened on the cross; it only reveals a deeper truth and greater scandal, because it makes us turn our gaze to the great absent one at the cross: God Himself. So we must ask: if God passes ultimate judgement on the Crucified by raising him from among the dead, where is God at the Cross? Where was He and what was He doing when Jesus cried: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34 par). If Jesus is going to be raised to life, why such a horrible death?

With the question of the Crucified One we hear the immense cry of pain rising up from every point of human history that makes more acute and scandalous the same question coming across the same abyss. Theology makes no claim to replace the mystery by rationalizing it, nor to cover up in words the reality of the cross. But mystery is not reduction to a paralyzing silence, it leads us rather to a confession of faith and to a very demanding activity.

The words Mark puts on the lips of the dying Jesus – the only ones he utters according to the above quotation – occupy, in fact, the center of reflection on the cross. The most compact chapter of Mark’s work is inspired by them. To sum up briefly Moltmann’s thought and taking up one of his main theses, we should say that the cross is the place where the true God is revealed in his supreme expression as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A revelation expressed thus: “The Son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father as he dies. The Father suffers in his love the grief of the death of the Son. In that case, whatever proceeds from the event between the Father and the Son must be understood as the Spirit of the surrender of the Father and the Son, as the Spirit which creates love for forsaken men, as the Spirit which brings the dead alive” (13).

God’s silence at the Cross of his Son does not mean a God who neither sees nor feels the cross and all the crosses of history, but the cross had led him inwards. It is not indifferent silence but a co-suffering; not a-patheia, but sym-pathia. Thus, we are led to speak of a revolution in our very concept of God as soon as the cross becomes a criterion of our speech about God. The cross becomes the only place from which we can speak in a Christian way of God.

### **3. A Soteriological Reading of the Cross**

The above-mentioned revolution shows us a God, not eager for human blood, but one who gives his blood as sign of communion and liberation. If the presence of God on the cross reveals itself to us as real and full to the point that we can read into it solidarity with man and God’s assumption of all human sorrow, this does not mean suppression of our own cross, but something far more hopeful: the possibility of living every moment in communion with God, sustained by utter fidelity (Rom 8:38s) whose end is our own resurrection (Rom 8:11).

We would understand this soteriological reading of the cross amiss if, as we proclaim our salvation, we were to feel obliged to detach our feet from the earth of history, both of Jesus and our own. Soteriological statements on the death of Jesus understood as abstract principles separate from the whole of history, risk appearing to take sorrow and death as values in themselves and end fatally by justifying human injustice itself with the label “mystery”. That way, we have a reading of the cross that makes it the symbol of humiliating resignation, paralyzing all our energy in the fight against poverty and misery (14).

But if the cross goes on sending us to Jesus and to the true God in Him, a reading that would inhibit such a struggle should be considered blasphemous, and the resulting salvation inhuman

and repugnant. The resurrection of the Crucified One Himself is another matter. For God did not allow Jesus' cause (that is Jesus Himself in the most concrete and fullest sense of the word) to come to an end through his death, rather it was definitely affirmed in spite of everything by the manifestation in his rising of his joyful identification with God. In this action we can perceive the nature of the salvation God has prepared for us: to act justly in an unjust world, that is, the one condemned as a blasphemer in the name of God turns out to be the living Son of God, while those who condemned him are disowned as representatives of God. But this is not just one more of the many retaliations we know of in human history. As Moltmann says: "The message of the new righteousness which eschatological faith brings into the world says that, in fact, the executioners will not finally triumph over their victims. It also says that in the end the victims will not triumph over their executioners. The one will triumph who first died for the victims and then also for the executioners, and in so doing revealed a new righteousness which breaks through the vicious circles of hate and vengeance and which from the lost victims and executioners creates a new mankind with a new humanity" (15). From now on, our task is to seek this new humanity, fixing all our hope in the Crucified Lord, for in him salvation is as personal as well as a promised reality acquired for all men.

#### **4. A Reading of the Cross for Practical Christian Living**

The spirituality of the Cross does not consist merely in a specific spirituality for times of suffering, as we sometimes let people think. St. Paul of the Cross saw this perfectly when he founded his Congregation not exclusively nor even mainly for the care of the infirm, for example, but above all to announce the message of the cross to the world and through it to convert sinners, that is, to reestablish a praxis that corresponds with faith in Jesus Crucified. Indeed, the cross of Jesus especially brings to mind the concrete acts that brought him to that situation. Thus, remembrance of the Crucified One becomes operative under all life circumstances and not only for certain moments.

To follow the Crucified One is not, then, an unhealthy pursuit of sorrow, but the taking to oneself of all that animated the life of Jesus to its ultimate consequence, the cross. To sum it up, we could speak of the two poles of his existence: God and man. God whose cause-vocation is man, and man whose cause-vocation is and should be God. The spirituality of the cross cannot be had at a reduced rate; it has to fulfill the whole program and follow the whole road that Jesus took. But along the way it must remain in communion with the Crucified One, who alone knows the road.

Although the Cross of Jesus certainly illuminates the whole of human existence, it is no less true that there exists a particular affinity between his Cross and the human experience of suffering. It is an affinity of situations that the believer tries to turn into an affinity of attitudes and an increased opportunity for communion with the Crucified.

Here we should recall the distinction made above between suffering provoked by man to man and that for which he is not responsible, though this contemplates suffering a little "from the outside", and is not the main distinction. In either case, though, the death of Jesus is clearly of gain.

Thus, his death may be presented as the consequence of a life committed to the oppressed. His death will appear as a result of the decision to refuse to yield or come to terms with the

oppressor. Hence, his death is a spur for all those working bravely for the liberation of their brethren and a call to shake off the heavy shackles of oppression in search of a more just world.

As for suffering not caused by other men, we should insist that Jesus did not seek death and suffering as values in themselves, but that even in such a situation he remained faithful to all his life had stood for: God and his Kingdom for men. To put it more dogmatically we should say; in Jesus, God Himself is personally present in the man who suffers, willing a solidarity and a promise of salvation already in process in history through the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, through communion with the Crucified, christian suffering is called and led to stand lovingly and obediently open before God in an attitude of offering and solidarity with all men. This by no means eliminates suffering and darkness, but it is certain that such a situation of poverty opens up vast spiritual horizons.

## **CONCLUSION**

This rapid enumeration of the main themes of present-day theology of the Cross will enable us to judge the importance of what is at stake from the theological as well as the spiritual and pastoral points of view. Compared with other more traditional theses, the “novelty” of this theology is evident. Hence, some disquieting questions arise:

Are we able to assimilate these theses?

Is this new theology of the Cross adapted to the spirit of our Congregation?

Does it confirm our intuitions and experience, or does it disavow and oblige us to correct them?

Or if we prefer less radical and less risky approaches: how can we make use of this theology in a way that will fortify and renew our spirituality and pastoral action?

To give answers we would need detailed comparisons between our Passionist heritage and each of the points mentioned so as to support our conclusions. As this would go beyond the limits of this paper, it is not possible here and now. Having to bring this paper to a close we want to offer two conclusions taken from our Chapter Document.

The first, number 6, referring to our specific vow, says, among other things: “By means of this special vow we bind ourselves to meditate and study the Passion of Christ in order to promote by word and deed a deeper awareness of its meaning and value for each man and for the life of the world.” The theology of the Cross which we have tried to summarize here, which is now being elaborated in the Church, will be very useful for us if we aim at carrying out what the Document demands. For an easier and better grasp I venture to suggest the use of developing adequate and diversified material for separate needs (catechetics, homiletics, devotion, theological and spiritual formation adapted to our priests, brothers, students and novices), material that will unite this theology of the Cross with all that is best and most valid in our Passionist heritage.

As a second conclusion, I would remind myself and ourselves of the last section of number 9 in the same Document: “If the message of the Cross has not first penetrated our lives, we ought not to presume to proclaim it to others.” By quoting these words we have no wish to frighten or paralyze anyone. We would look on them rather as a spur and stimulus to go on deepening and improving the quality of our Passionist spirituality. But we have to remind ourselves that this spirituality does not only consist in making the Passion the main object of our meditations, but

includes all the events of our lives as we duly ponder the Passion of Jesus. And when in our world of today we meditate on that Passion, we know on whose side and to what we should dedicate our lives. As Father General insisted in Duesto, and as this theology of the Cross repeats continually, those who live immersed in the mystery of the Cross should struggle with Christ and like Christ against injustice and oppression, at the side of the poor and of all those who suffer. Meditation does not exempt us from this solidarity, but spurs us on, just as solidarity is the authentic condition for our meditation and prayer.

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#### NOTES

1. Cfr. their work, *Il minsitero delta croce: Saggio di teologia sistematica*, Queriniana, Brescia 1978 (Biblioteca di teologia contemporanea 31).
2. *La Sapienza delta Croce Oggi*, Elle di Ci, Torino 1976. The three volumes are subtitled according to the wisdom of the cross in revelation and ecumenism, in spirituality, and in culture and pastoral theology.
3. For example: G. Gutierrez, *Theologia de la liberacion. Perspectivas*, Salamanca 1972, 2nd Ed., p. 35; H. Assmann, *Teologia desde la praxis de la liberacion*, Salamanca 1973, p. 50.
4. G. Gutierrez, *Evangelio y praxis de liberacion*, in the collection: "Fe cristiana y cambio social en America Latina", Salamanca 1973, p. 245.
5. Cfr. J. Gomez Caffarena, *Creer "despues de Auschwitz"*, in "Jesucristo en la historla y en la fe," Salamanca 1977, p. 80-85.
8. J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, SCM Press Ltd, London (3d printing) 1977; D. SOLLE, *Sufrimiento*, Salamanca 1978; L. Boff, *Pasion de Cristo, pasion del mundo*, Bogota 1978.
7. S. Galilea has studied this theme as it refers to Latin America in *Aspectos criticos en la espiritualidad actual*, Bogota 1975, esp. pp. 37-44.
8. J.I. Gonzalez Faus, *Sabiduria de la crux. Manifiesto para un pesimismo carinoso*, in "Razon y fe" (dic. 1979) 439. The article was reedited for his book: *Este es el hombre. Estudios sobre identidad cristiana y realizacion humana*, Santander 1980, pp. 281-93.
9. Idem, *Acceso a Jesus. Ensayo de teologia narrativa*, Salamanca 1979, p. 82.
10. Ch. Duquoc proposes speaking not so much of the cross as of the Crucified: cfr., *Crux de Cristo y sufrimiento humano*, in "Concilium, 119 (1976), p. 403-413.
11. J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-41; also in, *El experimento esperanza*, Salamanca 1977, pp. 15-18.
12. Given the abundant bibliography on this theme, we cite only one recent and concise study: J. Losada, *?Como ha interpretado Jesus su muerte?*, in "Communio", 2 (1980), pp. 15-18.
13. J. Moltmann, *op. cit.* p. 245. X. Pikaza, *El signo de la crux. Ensayo de confrontacion trinitaria*, in "Communio", 2 (1980), pp. 55-66, can also be profitably consulted.
14. Cfr. D. Wiederkehr, *Fe, redencion, liberacion. De la soteriologia antigua a la moderna*, Madred 1979, esp. pp. 45-65.
15. J. Moltmann, *op. cit.* p. 178.

**THE CONCEPT OF NAKED SUFFERING (NUDO-PATIRE)  
IN THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF PAUL OF THE CROSS**

- Ernest Henau, C.P.

In the literature of Christian mysticism, Paul of the Cross has attracted special attention because of a particular phenomenon: the so-called “night” (1) he passed through. It lasted for about fifty years and since it was, as at least one author maintains, a unique case, Paul rightly has been awarded the title of “prince of desolation” (2).

A certain approach to the study of mysticism, together with a relative vagueness on the part of Paul himself, have led to somewhat romanced interpretations of his spiritual experience. These were first evolved by R. Garrigou-Lagrange and later taken over rather uncritically by J. Lebreton and H. Martin. Garrigou-Lagrange based his interpretation of the phenomenon on the presently untenable theory that Paul emphasized participation in the Passion of Christ under the aspect of reparation. That thesis has already been rejected by Fr. Oswald, as well as by S. Breton (3).

Perhaps Garrigou-Lagrange let himself be misguided in this matter by the frequent mention in Paul’s writings of the pierced Heart of the Redeemer. However, insofar as we are able to investigate, those references are not directly connected with the Sacred Heart devotion of Paray-le-Monial. Paul considered the pierced Heart of Christ in a scriptural and patristic sense, as being the source of the fountain of living waters, the wound in His side and its flowing blood as filling the Church with the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit (4).

Even if the function of reparation were present in the Passion experience of Paul (5), then we must observe that, as the basis for an interpretation, it inevitably leads to a dead end. For it is not at all typical of Paul of the Cross and it assumes too small a place in his thinking, a place that is not at all sufficiently proven. It will be necessary, therefore, to attempt a more existential interpretation, such as the one given by S. Breton. This interpretation can only take root in a basic desire to participate in the Passion of Christ, because that participation constitutes an end in itself and does not have to be endowed with other extrinsic or problematic objectives.

## 1. Suffering or the Tragic Structure of Existence

The focus of our attention has been crystallized in the following remark made by Paul of the Cross: "So far as I remember, for about fifty years I have not spent one day without suffering... Of some souls, you can read that they remained in such desolations and spiritual abandonment for five, ten or fifteen years. But as for myself, I prefer not to think of them for otherwise they terrify me" (7). Not exactly defined are the kinds of suffering Paul meant. Yet we can exclude physical and moral difficulties because, as we gather from other passages, he usually specifically mentions his illnesses or infirmities. And the same is true of other adversities or calumnies to which he falls victim. So, we are concerned with a particular type of suffering that transcends physical or moral ones (even though they are sometimes included, as will be noted later).

Somewhat clearer information is gained from a letter that Paul wrote to his confessor: "Since I have a little free time today I must ask your pardon, which I do on my knees, if I sometimes write some harsh word, ill-sounding and full of melancholy and depression. But, believe me, I am really in a deplorable state. May God preserve any soul from this. *Sed merito haec patior (but I am deserving of this)*, and it is a miracle that I am not totally lost. *What's more, I have great difficulty in tolerating myself, And there are days, practically every day, when I don't know how to put up with myself. Yet still, with great effort, I try to bear with others although I always fall short*" (8).

Here we are meeting, of course, a kind of melancholy which, as E. Zofforli has observed, is one of the strong notes of Paul's character: "He had moments of sheer joy and of unadulterated and overflowing happiness, but the dominant note of his correspondence... is the sadness which often turns into fear and is close to anguish" (9). But as R. Guardini remarked in his well-known essay on melancholy (*Vom Sinn der Schwermut*) (10) apropos of some pages of the diary of S. Kierkegaard, it isn't necessary to call immediately for a psychiatrist to explain such expressions. What we are dealing with is really a sense of the tragic in life (11\*), sealed within existence itself. It is not the "unhappy consciousness" (conscience malheureuse) of J.P. Sartre, but the experienced, tragic "structure of human existence" (*Struktur des Daseins*) described by V. Frankl (11). Or better, as has been written by L. Lavelle, a usually more optimistic philosopher, it is "that basic suffering in life, of which all the other particular sufferings are only modes and signs" (12).

Yet this diagnosis doesn't give a satisfactory explanation. For Paul, evidently more is involved. It isn't just the kind of suffering which constitutes an inevitable modality of the human existence, the fact that one is still not fully integrated (difficulty in standing oneself). Nor is it just the suffering inherent in an incapacity to communicate or in the human desire to be in control of other influences in our world (pain of bearing other people). Paul compares his own situation with that of the damned: "My unhappy state is hardly less miserable than that of the damned, because I actually feel a real abandonment by God. Only a little light of hope is left in me... The

hand of God is upon me in an inexplicable way” (13). “I am going through the darkness of hell” (14).

For Paul, the sole human relief in this desolation lies in confidential conversation or writing. However, even this is crossed with a reflex of reserve which, nonetheless, vibrates with an unconscious nostalgia for understanding and affection. “You are mistaken”, he wrote to Thomas Fossi, “in saying that my religious are aware of my trials; that isn’t so. For outwardly I make myself as cheerful as the others and as discreet as I can be. And I meticulously keep those secrets, for it is enough that God alone knows them and I am not seeking pity from anyone. My religious surely realize the other small troubles such as the setbacks which I have in the foundations, the endless burdens of correspondence, journeys, the missions, etc. For the rest, though, they are not aware of anything” (15).

Paul opens his heart only to those with whom he is united in a kind of spiritual relationship and who are capable of understanding his trials. Very often this means to women, such as Agnes Grazi or Sister Gertrude Gandolfi. To the former he wrote: “My child in Jesus Christ, I want to let you know that your poor spiritual father is plunged in the depth of misery, both within and without. And although my soul has never been without a cross, now I am in such a state that I am stricken with horror by the great assaults and attacks of my enemies. My sins deserve this. Say nothing about this for I don’t write to seek your sympathy, no indeed; it is only for you to pray and get others to pray for this most wretched of men who is now overwhelmed in his direst need and at the absolute limit. On the outside I put on a calm face so as not to frighten anyone, for God wants me to act thus, but within I am in the midst of a great stormy sea... Don’t talk about this; just tell others to recommend my needs to God. On January 3rd I will be forty-one years old; offer Holy Communion for me” (16).

The human note at the end of that letter is surely a touching one; but Paul is feeling anxious. By talking about personal trials, one runs the risk of taking pleasure in them. As he mentioned to Thomas Fossi: “There is no need to confront your sufferings face to face, nor to examine them in such minute detail, nor to think so much about them, again in such detail, to see whether the sufferings are becoming easier to bear or not, whether you are taking pleasure in them, etc. You must leave aside such thoughts but press on in all simplicity to what is good, loving God’s Will in all things” (17). Yet, Paul cannot refrain from sharing his anguish with his confidants because, so to speak, he has to let off steam. Still, writing or speaking about his secret suffering is tempered by the exhortation not to betray it. And when the need is most desperate, he makes his justification: “a father unburdens himself of his miseries to his children” (18).

Often, when physical ills and internal desolation afflicted him simultaneously, Paul would use language that, at first sight, might not be expected from a saint: “For five days now I have been nailed on this straw mattress with pains and spasms in the joints and nerves of the knees and feet. With the other horrible scourges and terrible desolation, they have overcome my human strength and, just as deep union and joys are a foretaste of beatitude for just souls, these are a foretaste of a hell already begun... I am writing from bed and this night has truly been a hell of a night” (19).

From these few sample quotations, we can already draw some tentative conclusions. In speaking of Paul’s state of soul, the “night” does not mean either physical illness or the moral suffering caused by other people (calumny, suspicions, opposition, etc. ) Likewise, a sense of the tragic structure of human life, mentioned above, is only a kind of modality of this “night”; one could call it the least controlled evidence of it at the level of awareness. We find a somewhat more

precise description in the phrases “being abandoned by God” and “the hand of God is resting on me in an inexplicable way” (20).

The point here is a sensation of desolation, a naked suffering (*nudo patire*), according to Paul’s own words (21).

A priori, this expression has three meanings: on the psychological level, a suffering without consolation; on the metaphysical level, a suffering without purpose; and on the mystical level, suffering as a pure passivity, according to Tauler, or *potentia receptiva nuda*, according to Eckhart. While Paul is speaking of a *stare nel nihilò passivo modo* (22) (“remain passively in your nothingness”) that reminds us of Tauler, and while taking into account what has been stated above, we may presume that “naked suffering” requires a mystical interpretation, while nonetheless including the meaning of the other levels.

## II. Naked Suffering or the Tragic Structure of Christian Existence

So what is the content of the concept *nudo-patire*? It involves more than a suffering brought about by oneself or by other people. It means a suffering in the field of our relationship with God. On this point Paul himself indicates the focus of the problem when he refers to his feeling of being abandoned by God and of experiencing himself as being without faith, hope, and love (23).

“Naked suffering” is thus situated in the area of the relationship of the human spirit to God, echoed, of course, by a kind of “redundance” in the relationship to oneself and others. But we will take little further interest in those latter areas, since our intention is to clarify the deeper and proper meaning of the *nudo-patire* in its inner dynamisms.

In asking yet a further question about the content of naked suffering, we will surely come closer to it by a description Paul writes in a letter defining the *nudo-patire* as “the perfect, experimental knowledge of one’s own nothingness” (24). Still, this definition is vague, too. For Paul is not considering “nothingness” as a metaphysical term, but as an operative, many-sided notion that covers a large field of meanings and all of them changing according to the context. However, with the “experimental knowledge of nothingness” as a starting point, it is exactly the variety of meanings that will help us to concretize the notion of “naked suffering”.

Paul writes of a certain period of his life: “I had lost all devotion... even the ringing of church bells filled me with horror” (25). These words could be taken as of little significance. But they can also be understood literally. In that case, they reveal a feeling of disgust for all things religious, symbolized by the bells calling one to fulfill a religious duty.

We do not mean to enlarge the significance of those words, even when we call attention to their relationship with Paul’s frequent mention of his temptations to blasphemy. With his “Diary” as our starting point, let us try to understand the origin of these temptations. Its source lies in the splitting-up of the areas of faith and experienced existence.

For the sake of his faith, Paul left behind everything that could be of direct significance to his concrete daily existence in order to venture upon an experiment in radical self-denial (26). Obviously, once the usual ties in the area of the spirit are broken, his physical and psychical

constitution will take its revenge. And so will the imagination, by pushing forward things which Paul would rather keep in the background (27).

A lack of significance in an area of personality where it is demanded by our concrete existence, makes the whole “Umwelt” (spiritual environment) become meaningless in the here-and-now. Seeking deeper meaning, the “ego” isolates itself; and then a feeling of anxiety arises which, without necessarily being neurotic, could easily develop in that way. Since the anguish is experienced as being inherent in existence, it turns into a distaste for and a hatred of the world about it (28), simply because it is incapable of finding the significance one wants in daily life. This aversion reaches its climax in a hatred of Him, from Whom one would naturally expect to find meaningfulness. Doubtless, this is what is behind the frequently repeated statements about temptations to blasphemy. “About those temptations against God, I beg Him to free me from them, from those diabolical words that lacerate the heart and soul. The suffering itself is not important, but what a person cannot bear is the feeling of being tempted against his God” (28). On this point S. Breton speaks of “an anti-theistic feeling which expressed itself in terms of cursing and is lived as a deep and yet impossible attitude” (29).

A blasphemy in fact can only have its point of departure in an antinomy: to acknowledge God (which is impossible in a consistent atheism), and the possibility of not acknowledging Him. It doesn't matter that Paul is experiencing the blasphemy only as a temptation, as a possibility that could be realized. In any case it causes a feeling of being trapped between two poles: on one side the possibility of a revolt against God, and on the other side the recognition of this same God in faith. So this conflict situation brings about a naked suffering, the dramatic nature of which can only be understood from the viewpoint of the saint's relationship to the Absolute. The possibility of revolting against God, which is the echo of that naked suffering within the psyche and which one recognizes as being a temptation (that is to say, as a positively real possibility), constitutes the most concrete and evident rendering of the sin (30).

In one of his letters (31), Paul labels sin a “nothingness,” “a deadful nothingness opposing the infinite Being of the infinitely Perfect.” So it is logical that the experimental knowledge of his own nullity goes not only toward a particular incarnation of sin (blasphemy), but also to the very root of sin driven deeply into human existence. Paul often calls himself the greatest sinner (32), and he believes that his sins are the reason for the opposition he faces in founding his religious Institute (33). Over against that, he testified that he was not aware of ever having committed a mortal sin. Then why does he repeatedly call himself a great, if not the greatest, sinner?

We exclude the hypothesis of a pathological sense of guilt, because such a state usually greatly restricts the activity of a person and that certainly did not apply in Paul's case. Neither can we label his statements as an emerging form of morbid self-degradation. That hypothesis is out-matched by the fact that, during the process of canonization, the promotor fidei produced not less than about ninety statements from writings and witnesses where we hear the saint praising himself, his virtues and successes (*glorioso de se loqueretur*) (34). Lastly, could there be a possibility of supposing blindness to other people's sin, in a confessor who has faced all kinds of evil for over fifty years?

As S. Breton has already noted, Paul made his avowals of being the greatest sinner in an absolute way, without reference or comparison to anything else (35). A first interpretation of such statements can be found in the writings of John of the Cross, where he speaks of a dark night which he then compares to a purging fire. The saint had once gathered a little pile of moist

faggots so that he could make a fire in his chilly room of the newly built convent at Segovia on a severe Castilian winter evening. It brings his thoughts back to the blazing fire, to God, who draws men in a spiritual state which he calls a “night”. He wrote, therefore: “This divine fire of contemplative love... before it unites and transforms the soul in itself, first purges it of all its contrary accidents. It drives out its unsightliness, and makes it black and dark, so that it seems worse than before and more unsightly and abominable than it was wont to be. For this divine purgation is removing all the evil and vicious humours which the soul has never perceived because they have been so deeply rooted and grounded in it, it has never realized, in fact, that it has had so much evil within itself. But now that they are to be driven forth and annihilated, these humours reveal themselves and become visible to the soul because it is so brightly illuminated by this dark light of divine contemplation (although it is no worse than before, either in itself or in relation to God) ; and, as it sees in itself that which it saw not before, it is clear to it that not only it is unfit to be seen by God, but deserves His abhorrence and that He does indeed abhor it” (36).

For Paul, though, the stress lies not so much on the acceptance of the imperfections he in fact perceives within himself through the light of God’s purging fire, as on the experimental knowledge of his own nothingness and the acceptance of the possibility of sin. And he translates that perception in this way: “We are capable of doing every evil, but through the divine mercy we hope not to” (37). So what is pointed to is not only a particular sin, but the possibility of unlimited sins. Just as “*materia prima*” owns the possibility of taking shape in all kinds of things, likewise man’s “nothingness,” as a result of this indefiniteness, has the capacity of turning away from God in a variety of ways. In calling himself the greatest sinner, therefore, Paul points to the on-going possibility within himself of failing, of withdrawing from the fountainhead of life, God.

When Paul says in an absolute way: “I am the greatest sinner”, he is not thus merely using a figure of speech. It is a lucid and sincere admission of the possibility of committing sin: “We are capable of doing every evil,” a possibility that is engraved into the human existence on behalf of freedom. Paul only proves the actual disorder in human striving, and the inevitable equivocalness of freedom in regard to his faith. Thus he trusts in the Divine Mercy in order to be able to map out his life in a direction towards his God.

One can understand how this whole awareness could evoke an imaginary followup in a vision of hell, that is, of a world running the risk of destroying itself when cutoff from its source, of a humankind which, by disorderly moving on, is preparing its own defeat and ruin. We have defined the “night” Paul went through as being the possibility of revolting against God (taking shape in the temptation of blasphemy), as well as a clear admission of the unlimited possibility of sinning within himself. His negative experience of it goes even further: *taedet nos etiam vivere* (“despairing even of life”), as he fearfully quoted (39).

This means, at the level of existence, a translation of his experimental knowledge of nothingness into the acceptance of the absurdity of a world which in itself (without reference to the Absolute) cannot have any sense at all: an experience of the emptiness, of the incoherence, of the universal insipidity of a world forsaken by God.

However, once these deepest depths of the experience of the *nudo-patire* are reached, the world again becomes transparent because the diabolical cycle is blasted open by referring to the zenith of the Passion mystery: the cry of Christ on the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk. 15:34), and the companion words to that complete desolation, “Father, into

Thy hands I commend my spirit,” expressing the unconditional sacrificing of himself to the Father. The negative desolation is echoed by the integral surrender which, in a kind of Copernican revolution, turns the negative (40) into positive, and achieves a triumph over the apparent nothingness. In His surrender, the Word actualizes His *esse-ad-Patrem*, which constitutes the nucleus and the nature of His divine personality within the Trinitarian relationships.

“You are devoid of any consolation,” Paul wrote to Anna Maria Calcagnani, “and I am grateful to God for it. For now you are more likened to the Divine Spouse, who likewise remained in complete abandonment on the cross. In that desolation, He consummated the great sacrifice and completed it with those divine words: ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Thus he gave Himself over to the Father and accomplished the work of our redemption. Do likewise, my blessed daughter. Now you are in anguish on the bed of the cross, and what more is to be done but to breathe forth your soul into the bosom of the Father and say likewise, ‘Into your hands I commend my spirit?’ And having said that, then die happily that precious mystical death that I have mentioned before. If you die that mystical death, you will live a new life, you will be reborn to a new life in the Divine Word, Jesus Christ. Ah, what a life that will be! It is so glorious and so full of heavenly understanding that you will not even know how to talk about it to me, your poor father and the servant of your soul” (41).

And there is also the most intimate and truly dramatic participation in the Passion of Christ: “This participation, yielded from the fulness of the power of victory, may well grow, according to the will of the Lord, into the most profound helplessness, the experience of an interior night, desolation and rejection which, while participation in the cross, may exceed any limit which can be naturally experienced or endured. It may even increase in such a way that one subjectively loses any spiritual light, any outlook and hope in the future redemption and resurrection. Nonetheless, this darkness infallibly proceeds from the light, subjectively and even objectively it supposes the light. The light is never withdrawn from any faithful man unless, once having known it, he at least implicitly assents to its loss” (42).

This participation in Christ’s desolation on the cross, in the bitterness of its acceptance, also brings a liberation. For it melts away every chain that keeps a man bound to himself and creates space for vivid faith and pure love. Paul writes: “Don’t worry about the darkness you must walk through, for these trials are necessary to exercise yourself in living faith. Then, free from every image, you will remain in interior solitude, resting in God and adoring Him in spirit and in truth” (43). “In that darkness enkindle your faith and, dead to everything created, attach yourself to God in love. True love, silence, solitude... Withdraw yourself in naked faith into the interior temple of your spirit, the highest part of your mind, and there you will find rest and possess all riches” (44). And here again we come up with a reducing to essentials: “I know that the cross of our beloved Jesus will be more deeply rooted in your heart and you will sing: to suffer, and not to die; or rather, either to suffer or to die; or better still, neither to suffer nor to die, but only a total transformation in the Divine Will” (45). These are the dialectics of rendering and surrendering, which have such an important role in the spirituality of Paul of the Cross (46).

Participation in the desolation of the cross is the most efficacious teacher of truly pure love: “To be truly able to love, one must have drunk the chalice to the dregs and to have suffered dereliction and death; that is the human, and perhaps also the divine, drama” (47). In the naked suffering any delight, any form of possession, any form of autarchic love has been done away with. As a result of this absolute detachment, one attains the very pure relationship of the Son to

the Father. If we want to emphasize the negative aspect of such detachment, it could be said that this naked suffering activates the essence of their spirit in its radical nakedness, that is to say, transcending any sensible satisfaction or consolation, every image defined in creation, in a word, everything that keeps us bound to ourselves and to the earth. On the other hand, if we want to stress the positive aspect, then we should say that the complete resignation involved in the nudo-patire will preeminently be the act which creates our relationship as child to the Father in Christ, and thus renews in a specific “actualness” our relationship to the Absolute. Participation in the Passion and its desolation is a constitutive element of the spirit.

This doctrine of the active resignation involved in the nudo-patire makes it clear how St. Paul of the Cross managed to build a synthesis of two schools of spirituality: that of the mystics from the Rhineland, and that of Franciscanism (which had been inherited by Paul). We recognize the themes common to the mysticism of introversion: mystical death, divine nativity, nakedness of spirit, etc. But instead of reaching this nakedness by transcending the Passion, as has been done in the mysticism of introversion, Paul does it by running into the consequences of participation in the Passion, thus giving evidence of his Franciscan heritage.

We may consider these pages on participation in the desolation of Christ in his Passion as being a concrete application of the axiom: in striving for complete openness towards the mystery of God, detachment from any created thing is the very condition of ever more radical demands. In order to realize this detachment, God seems to withdraw Himself so that we will come to recognize and assent to our constitutive relationship with the Absolute. “The gradual detachment, the going beyond images, and the restoring of the spirit to the nudity of its original relationship with the Absolute entail more than simple repose. The odyssey of the unhappy conscience is not a peaceful trip or the refined diversion of people who suffer from, as the saying goes, ‘intellectual illness’ (mal de Sorbonne). It is, rather, the return of the spirit to its essence and foundation. Such a return is at the heart of the spiritual life and perhaps also of philosophy. The torment experienced by the mystics under the weight of the Cross, beyond any sensible joy, is only the resounding within the human soul of the action of the relationship that is gradually bringing them out of their shells. That suffering is the trace of that activity, or more exactly, its expression” (48).

In the whole of the participation in the Passion, the sharing in the desolation of the cross does not constitute a clearly marked phase, but the fundamental law of a movement that is constantly proceeding and repeating. It is, as it were, the keynote, the ever-returning theme of a symphony.

Conceived in this way, participation in the Passion, with the participation in the desolation of the cross as its zenith, cannot be reduced, as one might suspect, to a pathological delight in suffering or to a morbid attachment to it, nor to a sentimentalism. For in the complaints of Paul of the Cross that were mentioned in the first part of this study, one clearly hears the absolute and vital “no” that Paul threw against any nonsense of suffering for itself. Instead, suffering has been transcended by endowing it with meaning. And exactly this “mit Sinn begaben” (“to fill with meaning”) (49), as proved by P. Polak, rules out any pathological form of Passion mysticism.

As for Paul’s suffering, taken in its most frightening form of the nudo-patire, it means a dynamic driving of oneself by an inexorable logic to the rim of the bottomless Abyss, to God. The progressive self-annihilation, the nakedness of spirit, unites Paul in an authentic way to the action of Christ: to his relationship with the Father, to the Kenosis and the Agape, the emptying of oneself and the giving of oneself in love and service, to the agony, and, consummating the

desolation of the cross as a rest-point, to the “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.” From that angle we can understand how, notwithstanding his vital “no”, Paul also says a “yes” to suffering.

We conclude, therefore, with a quotation from R.M. Rilke which, adapted to our theme, summarizes Paul’s attitude: “If we don’t ever assent to the awfulness of life, with a definitive decision and even with a sense of jubilation, we shall never take possession of the unutterable powers of our existence. We then remain on the margin, and when the final decision comes we shall have experienced neither life nor death” (50).

## NOTES

1. The expression “night” is seldom used by Paul of the Cross. R. Garrigou-Lagrange used it to signify the whole of the sufferings, vexations and spiritual aridity that Paul had to endure. To Garrigou-Lagrange, Paul of the Cross was an heroic witness to the idea and function of reparation and the Congregation he founded was the sociological continuation of that exceptional mission, Cfr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Nuit de t’esprit réparatrice en S. Paul de la Croix*, in “Études Carmelitaines”, 1938, t. II, pp. 287-293. (English, cfr., “A Great Example: The Reparatory Night of the Spirit in St. Paul of the Cross.” *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, St. Louis-London, 1951, Vol. II, pp. 502-10.
2. H. Martin, in *Dict. Spir.*, t. III, col. 835, s.v. Désolation.
3. Fr. Oswald, *De mystieke weq van de H. Paulus van het Kruis (1694-1775), ordetichter, volkspredikant en geestelijk leidsman*; Mook, 1954, p. 77; S. Breton, *Mystique de ta Passion, Étude sur la doctrine spirituelle de S. Paul de la Croix*, Tournai (Belgium), 1963, p. 128 and pp. 188-89.
4. Cfr. H. Rahner, *Strome fliessen aus seinem Leib. Die aszetische Deutungsgeschichte von Joh. 7:37-38*, in “*Zeitschr. Asz. Myst.*”, 1943 (XVIII), pp. 141-49.
5. E. Zoffoli sustains that opinion quite formally, for in many places he seems to recognize an echo of the revelations to St. Margaret M. Alacoque. Cfr. E. Zoffoli, *S. Paolo delta Croce. Storia critica*, Vol. II, pp. 1038, 1460, 1463.
6. K. Rahner, *Some Theses on the Theology of the Devotion*, in “Heart of the Saviour”, ed. by J. Stierly, New York, 1967, pp. 131-55
7. Quoted by P. Gaétan, *Oraison et ascension mystique de S. Paul de la Croix*, Leuven, 1930, p. 117.
8. P. Gaéten, o.c., pp. 136-37.
9. E. Zoffoli, o.c., Vol. II, p. 485.
10. Zurich, 1949.
- 11\*. There is a big difference between “tragic awareness” (*coscience tragique*) and an “unhappy consciousness” (*conscience malheureuse*): “Beyond appearance and consciousness, there remains - still not discernable, obscure, and sometimes ironic - the certitude of sense. Because of this the tragic-consciousness should be carefully distinguished from the unhappy-consciousness, insofar as the latter resists any effort to wrench it from its unhappiness. There is nothing less unhappy than the consciousness of Christ, and the consciousness of the Christian who follows Christ.” G. Morel, *Le sens de l’existence selon S. Jean de la Croix*, t. II, “Logique”, Paris, 1960, p. 196, n. 57.
11. “Placed before the abyss, man sees into its depths; and what he realizes at the bottom of the abyss is the tragic structure of his existence. The reality that opens to him is this: the very being of man, in a profound and definite sense, is suffering, and the essence of man is to be a sufferer; *Homo patiens*.” V. Frankl, *Homo patiens. Versuch einer Pathodizee*, Wien, 1950, p. 67.

12. As quoted by J. Lacroix in *L'échec*, Paris, 1984, p. 45.
13. *Letter di S. Paolo della Croce*, Roma 1924, (4 vols), I, p. 236. In subsequent notes, references to this source will be indicated with the abbreviation, L. The literal translation for the "hand of God" would be "the scourge of God"; cf. n. 19, 20.
14. L., I, p. 232.
15. L., I, p. 606.
16. L., I, p. 122.
17. L., I, p. 541.
18. L., I, p. 195.
19. L., II, p. 498.
20. L., I, p. 236.
21. L., II, p. 298.
22. L., III, p. 347.
23. L., I, p. 154.
24. L., II, p. 298.
25. L., I, p. 410.
26. After he went through a period of hesitating and seeking, Paul decided to become a hermit. In order to prepare himself, he made a spiritual retreat of two weeks. Thus, on November 23rd, 1720, he moved into a damp and uncomfortable cell, next to the church of San Carlo in Castellazzo. There, living in extreme privation, he annotated his experiences and analyzed his state of mind. Cfr. S. Paolo della Croce, *Diario spirituale. Testo critico*, ed. by E. Zoffoli Roma 1984. In subsequent notes, references to this source will be marked by the abbreviation, *Dsp*.
27. Cfr. his statements about psychological reactions, sorrows, etc., *Dsp*, 21 Dec. 1720, sqq.
28. Cfr., *Dsp*, 25 Nov. 1720.
29. S. Breton, *op. cit.*, p. 208:
30. S. Breton, *ibid.*
31. L., I, p. 471.
32. He calls himself "a great sinner, an abyss of iniquity" (L, I, p. 24); "a truly vile creature" (I, p. 28) ; "an infamous traitor, who betrays so good a God at every moment" (I, p. 131) ; "a wicked sinner" (I, p. 175); "A vast swamp of vice" (II, p. 661); "a miserable sinner, more foul-smelling than a dead dog... the crucifier of Jesus Christ" (III, p. 738); "the greatest sinner" (II, p. 342).
33. L., I, p. 477; II, pp. 158, 289, etc.
34. E. Zoffoli *op. cit.*, II, g. 1065.
35. S. Breton, *op. cit.*, p. 211:
36. John of the Cross, "Dark night", Book II, ch. X, quoted from *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, London, 1965.
37. Quoted by E. Zoffoli, *op. cit.*, t. II, g. 1077.
38. E. Zoffoli *op. cit.*, t. II, p. 1879. Cfr. also, S. Breton, *op. cit.*, p. 213. 39. L, II, p. 809.
40. "The negative is neither accidental nor despairing, since it is at once lived and overcome in God. Here the suffering becomes meditation or, rather mediator... The experience of failure becomes that of total love." Cfr. J. La Croix, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
41. L., III, p. 825-28.
42. H. Urs von Balthasar. *Het beschouwende gebed* (On contemplative prayer), Hasselt, 1982, p. 21s.
43. L., I, g. 523. Cfr. also: "True adorers worship the Father in spirit and in truth; take note of it all, for in these sacred words of Jesus Christ are contained all that is most perfect in prayer. It

does not consist in joyful feelings and sensible delights, but in spirit and in truth, the truth which means remaining in our nothingness and poverty, without robbing anything from God.” Cfr. L, I, p. 795.

44. L., I, p. 523.

45. L., II, p. 440.

46. L., III, p. 807.

47. J. Lacroix, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

48. S. Breton, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

49. p. Polak, *Frankls Existenzanalyse in ihrer Bedeutung fur Anthropologie und Psychoterapie*, Innsbruck, 1949, p. 22.

50. R.M. Rilke, quoted in V. Frankl, *op. cit.*, p. 68; “Wer nicht der Fürchterlichkeit des Lebens irgendwann, mit einem endgültigen Entschlusse, zustimmt, ja ihr zujubelt, der nimmt die unsaglichen Volmächte unseres Daseins nie in Besitz, der geht am Rande hin, der wird, wenn einmal die Entscheidung fällt, weder ein Legendiger noch ein Toter gewesen sein.”