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**Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality**

**LIVING THE PASSION OF CHRIST**

**The Memory of the Passion in Latin America**

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Cum permissu:  
Jose Agustin Orbezo, C.P., Sup. Gen.

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## **C O N T E N T S**

I. CONTENTS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

II. SUBJECTS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

III. FORMS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

IV. LIFE IN OUR PASSIONIST COMMUNITIES

V. THE PASSION CONSIDERED IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

VI. THE PASSIONIST'S EVANGELIZING MISSION

## CONTENTS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

### INTRODUCTION

The Word of God liberates. So attest the Bible and Tradition. Does the history of our peoples also attest to it?

There is no doubt that very different things can be stated under the heading: “The Word of God and the History of Humankind.” Indeed this theme can be considered in the light of biblical and theological studies, or in the light of what has actually happened in the history of mankind as a result of the preaching of the Word of God. Depending on whether the focus is on one or the other, the things stated will be different, certainly, and perhaps even contradictory.

Biblical Theology arranges numerous elements to show that the Word of God is a Word of Life which begets life. It is a liberating Word which awakens consciousness to the recognition of personal dignity. It is a word which calls the community together, uniting it and setting it in motion. It is a dynamic word moving the individual to commit himself in the active building of the kingdom of God in history. Biblical Theology will affirm that the Word of God is not merely an expression, but a Person, and, that that person became flesh, uniting himself with man in his weakness, in his sinfulness, in his uncertainty, in his conflicted existence in a history which seems always desirous to expel him from life, rather than welcome him into it. Many other things can be said about the Word of God in human history from the Bible, Tradition and Theology.

But if one focuses on the second and asks about the effect that the Word of God has produced in mankind’s history, the response will necessarily be much more shaded. The commemoration of the fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of Latin America evokes this question, because it refers concretely to the effect which evangelization has produced in our peoples during these 500 years. Certainly one must be very careful about statements that are too vague and excessively simplified. One cannot utter generic statements that evangelization has been alienating and that it has contributed to making legitimate the oppressive actions of the powerful by spiritualizing the resigned response of the oppressed.

But indeed one can, and it is fitting to, ask whether something of that kind has happened, and to what degree has it happened. Above all one can ask whether something of that kind is still happening.

Nowadays the Latin American Church has taken the clear option for the complete liberating of the peoples of the continents. This option, which took shape in Medellin, and confirmed by Puebla, now comes face to face with the fifth centenary in the proposal made by the Pope for the re-evangelization or for a second evangelization. This proposal must not overlook the fact that there does exist a first evangelization, and that, consequently, our peoples are not in a “*tabula rasa*” situation, but have incorporated much meaning that already forms part of their cultural being. The question is whether there exists in the collective conscious and subconscious of the Latin American People a meaning which might impede an adequate understanding of the message of freedom which once again today one wishes to propose about the Gospel.

This is not an idle question. There are many theologians today who maintain that over many centuries there has been a mistaken understanding of the message of liberation or redemption. The Anselmian theory of satisfaction lies at the heart of the criticism which is harsh indeed. This theory has widely dominated theology from the 13th century to our own day.

Latin America has been evangelized under this schema of interpretation of the Redemption, and Religious Life has developed under the same schema.

Faithfulness to the Memory of the Passion demands a serious questioning of the schema of interpretation in order to retrieve the nucleus of the message which lies beyond the schema.

For that purpose, the work which we present proposes to show two different ways of reading the Word of God, especially in what refers to the Passion and Death of Jesus.

Of these two ways, only one gives the key to reading what the very Word of God itself offers; but it is true that the other way has taken possession of the consciousness of many Christians. The reason for this is the ambiguous meanings which frequently result in translating the data of Faith into human language that is necessarily conditioned by the socio-cultural matrix in which it is formed. This has happened with many Biblical concepts, and this, in a special way, with the concepts which are related to the central theme of the Redemption.

The task will consist then, first in identifying the key for reading what the Word of God proposes. Then, using that key, we will read about the Death of Jesus, correcting the viewpoint from which frequently the idea of “sacrifice” is applied to this Death.

There are many important things at play here: the Idea of God, the reality of man, the meaning of christian commitment, the meaning of history, the mission of the Church, the value of the different schools of spirituality, etc.

We Passionists must remember that the Church has entrusted us to keep watch over the Memory of the Passion of Jesus, which demands that we be attentive to the key with which we meditate upon it and preach it.

## **A. LIKE THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE GOD OF LIFE**

### **1. In the Beginning...**

When one wants to refer to what is considered the ultimate explanation of things, or to the ultimate meaning of existence, frequently, especially in biblical language, the expression “IN THE BEGINNING” is used. With this expression one wants to say “everything is explained by...everything is resolved in...” The expression has no chronological meaning; it is not necessarily that which exists before the rest. It refers, rather, to an axiological order; it indicates what is acting in the fundamental meaning, or without meaning which is ascribed to something. It would be equivalent to saying “the key of all this is in...”

This explanatory key constitutes not so much an answer for the man who seeks to know truth, as much as an answer for the man who wants to live with meaning, who is seeking to know whether his life has some direction and leads to some end. From this flows the vital importance of what each individual places on “in the beginning...” From this beginning or foundation will depend

what each one builds in his life. There he will have to search for the beginning of a life marked by fear or anxiety, or, better, by hope and the desire to live.

The beginning which each one accepts as the explanation of life becomes the mental structure in accord with which he will think, feel, act.

Jesus, who was “in the beginning...” (Jn 1) came to tell man that he had an “in the beginning.” And what He said became Good News, a liberating Gospel.

During the passing of centuries, have the followers of Jesus continued upholding what Jesus affirmed was “in the beginning,” or have they been finding “in the beginning” in something else?

## **2. In the Beginning...An Offended God?**

Observing from without the religious attitudes of many believers, analyzing the content of many sermons and instructions, and the tenor of not a few prayers and devotions leaves the suspicion that the Christian Bible begins with the words “in the beginning...an offended God...”

This seems to be the explanatory key to the religion of many people, and even the key for their life. With this key they read the Bible and understand the history of Salvation. At the beginning of everything a Commandment which was disobeyed; at the beginning a God whose honor was wounded and, as a consequence, seriously offended. As a correlative of this, in the beginning there is guilty man, worthy of the greatest punishment.

In this light, or better, under this shadow, many project the history of man: “In sin did my mother conceive me.” And beginning with that fact follow all the miseries. The ensemble of punishments listed in the 4th chapter of Genesis will be the summary of the history of all times, the expression of the reaction of an offended God in the face of the arrogance of man who sought to be like Him. Here is found the origin and explanation for all the evils in the world. The logical question in the presence of suffering is the one proposed to Jesus: “Master, who has sinned? He or his parents?” (Jn 9:2). It is the question which arises from a conviction: “In the beginning an offended God.” Because of this he was born blind; because of this the Galileans were put to the sword; because of this the tower of Siloe crushed those...

Upon this principle many have built what they consider a wise way of life, interpreting in this way the text: “The beginning of Wisdom is the Fear of God.” As if one should read it: “the key to it all is to fear God.” Beginning with that, an ever guilty conscience will set before God every means to appease him, to change his angry countenance, so that it becomes benign. It will offer Him the fruit of his works and will make offerings of animals and of fruits. God will accept none of this, since he is the Master of all and needs none of it.

Man then will offer his own kind of sacrifice, his renunciations, his sufferings. He will humiliate himself, hoping that “a contrite and humbled heart” (Ps 50:19) will not be despised by the Lord. None of this appears to be enough. Nothing comes near to reaching and changing the “beginning” of an offended God. Everything will be a vain effort. Nothing, no matter how great man’s effort, will satisfy an infinitely offended God. Expiatory sacrifice will end up being the religious act *par excellence*, but it will always remain insufficient. A history will not arrive at the point of purging the fault of each and every one. All the sorrow in the world will not move God; all the poverty of the poor will not be effective in moving him to pardon and mercy.

Only Jesus, in virtue of being both God and Man, will be able to touch the “beginning” and effect a change in the very roots of history. He unites the conditions suitable for reparation that will take place when the hour in which He will offer his blood on the Cross will arrive. This sacrifice, indeed, will be able to satisfy the offended God, who, by raising Jesus from the dead, will demonstrate his willingness to be reconciled with man.

Even so, every man will have to continue to offer his measure of sorrow and suffering, will have to carry his own cross, to complete “what is lacking in the Passion of Christ” (Col 1:24).

The entrance will continue to be narrow. The chosen are few (Mt 7:13-14). For many people – perhaps most? – it certainly would have been better had they never been born. In spite of the death of Jesus; in spite of Easter; in spite of the sending of the Spirit upon all peoples even to the ends of the earth and the end of time, man will always have to face the almost impossible way of conquering God, without ever knowing whether he is worthy of love or of hate, and with constant fear that death, like a thief, will take him by surprise and throw him into hell without time to make a sign of the Cross, or to mumble an Ave Maria, much less to confess himself.

The Christian, the eternal penitent, will have to beat his breast all his days, knowing himself to be a sinner and guilty: “Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” The innocent child, even before reaching the use of reason, says it. He will continue to repeat it during his entire life. A thousand times will he be absolved, and a thousand times he will again turn to say to God that he is a guilty sinner; and he will beg God to have compassion, to have pity.

Man: a miserable creature, worthy of suffering. Many will remain of the opinion that the glory of God consists in the devaluation of man. Others will be convinced of this and will preach self-annihilation, humiliation, self contempt as a counterbalance to that arrogant attitude which was “in the beginning.” In this way will they understand the evangelical call to self denial, to losing one’s life. This will justify sorrowful disinterestedness and separation: flight from the world, abandonment of parents, disparagement of brothers, privation of the joys of this life. In the holocaust of themselves they will sum up the greatest expression of surrender to God. The altar of Sacrifice, the Eucharistic table, will be full of tears, renuncements, disciplines, fasts, vigils, etc.

A “victim” spirituality will arise from this context as the privileged expression of the following of Christ Crucified: a spirituality of Compassion for Christ, the Divine-human victim: the sorrowing servant (Isaiah 53), who took upon himself the faults of all. A penitential spirituality, which will make of each one a victim for his own sins and the sins of the others. A good part of religious life is characterized by this spirituality, which we call “victim” spirituality, and about which we think it necessary to question the “beginning” on which it is founded. Can it be, perhaps, the beginning of an offended God and of guilty man, of man possessed by fear?

The existence of many religious lives tortured by scruples, full of fear, paralyzed spirituality, bereft of inner freedom, justifies this question and obliges one to take this theme seriously.

### **3. In the Beginning...The God of Life**

From the very same source: the Bible, Tradition, Magisterium, other Christians derive a completely different key for reading their lives and interpreting history. It is so different that we are tempted to say that any likeness with the earlier way of reading is purely coincidental.

If it were a matter of different theoretical interpretations of doctrine, we would not place too much importance on it. But it is not. It is a matter of life, of meaning each one will give to his own life, beginning with the fact of having been evangelized. In the name of the Gospel, he will live in one way or the other. This cannot be a matter of indifference for the evangelizer. He has to understand what vision of the Gospel which has been entrusted to Him he is opening for his people!

In the Bible there is a history of sin and a history of sorrow. This is absolutely clear. It is undeniable that this occupies a place of great importance. It is also clear that sorrow and death are associated with sin, but it is equally clear, even more completely so, that sorrow and death are not associated with God. Sorrow and death, divisions and hatreds, oppression and every type of devaluation of the human person are not God's punishment for his sin, are not the reaction of an offended God against arrogant man who has wounded His honor. God does not involve himself with the death of the individual, but with his life, with his salvation. In this is the "good news" Jesus brought. This is the beginning which explains everything, and in which everything is resolved: "In the beginning...the God of Life."

Human history is dominated by the LOVE of God, by the divine AGAPE, by a divine plan according to which man, both as an individual and in community, is destined for the fullness of life. This destiny is not conditioned by any behavior of man outside of the fact of accepting freely what is offered to him freely, lovingly, with an irrevocable will, and is unchangeably loyal. The alliance of God with man does not have a bilateral character, but a unilateral one. Commercial language or juridic language do not translate, but rather betray the relationship which God has established with man. There is nothing that can be interpreted in this relationship as equivalent to a "do ut des." Everything is "eudokia": if it please me to do so...

God does not offer man all the trees of Paradise on condition that he abstain from the tree that is in the center. God tells man that in the center of each tree there is a wisdom which will lead him to life. At the same time, He reminds man that, if this wisdom is not taken into account, life will not be able to advance. A peach will never satisfy the desire of one who approaches looking for an apple.

The allusion to death is not a threat from God in the case that there is disobedience, something like a punishment which will come from outside of the options man may have. It is, on God's part, the revelation of the secret of life, so that man may know how to seek, and what he may encounter. Can telling someone that he will die if he takes poison be interpreted as a punishment he will receive in the case that he actually ingests it?

Man sinned. Humanity wrote, and continues writing, a history of sin. This means that he missed the target in his legitimate search to satisfy his desire to live. Some times he merely made a mistake; other times he often erred knowing that he was erring. Voluntary and involuntary errors were repeated with each generation, until the very atmosphere each man finds when he comes into this world was conformed to it. He finds the air he will begin to breath so formed. Men have poorly structured their living together, and that is the sin of the world.

What is the result of this personal and social, actual and structural sin? It is not that God's honor is wounded, as it could be interpreted in a feudal structure of the relationship of a Lord and his vassal; nor is it this result which causes God sorrow. What grieves God is the problem of man, because his glory is the glory of man full of life (St. Irenaeus). And He remains affected in his glory when man instead of finding life encounters death.

The effect of sin is that many millions of his children remain oppressed beneath the weight of structures of death begotten of sin. Because of this God suffers. An incredible thing for the most distinguished thinkers of humanity as it was for the Athenian philosophers. But it is so: "I have heard the cry of my people..." (Exodus 3:7).

God's answer to this created situation is neither punishment nor threat. His response is to continue to be unchangeably the God of Life. "I have decided to free my people." (Ex 3:8).

When the individual, thinking that he is adopting attitudes acceptable to God, offers Him sacrifices to appease him, God does not accept that worship. He does not refuse it because he is implacable and insatiable, but because the sacrifices man is offering do not point him (man) in the right direction. They do not point him towards repairing the situation, which is the real problem that indeed grieves God more than it does man. God always has eternal life. The one who does not have it, or who has it insecurely, because of circumstances which he continually creates or finds, is man. These circumstances must be changed. The way of seeking must be modified: this will be the sacrifice agreeable to God because it strikes the heart of the problem.

The history of sin exists, is real and is very important. Nevertheless, the history of Jesus is not primarily a history with a relationship to sin. It is primarily and essentially a history with a relationship to the love of the Father. "God so loved the world, that he sent his only son." (Jn 3:16). It does not say, "So great did man sin," though it could have said it. Because of the two statements, only one of the affirmations is "in the beginning."

Jesus did not come into the world to announce that in the beginning there was an offended God and a guilty man. He came to say that God is with man, very close to all those upon whom life pours out sufferings and privations, very close to those whose peers consider them unworthy sinners. Jesus does not dwell upon culpability, nor does he set before people a black vision of themselves leading them into shame and self-contempt. On the contrary. The Samaritan woman goes her way happily celebrating her meeting with someone who has told her all that she has done. Jesus had told her all that she had done in an entirely different manner so that the result was her feeling healed in life! How many others had been telling her and repeating all that she had done and kept on doing, but, with what a different tone, which loaded her with blame and condemnation!

Does Jesus make any reproach to Zachaeus? His invitation of himself to the house of the tax collector was for this man a meeting with life, and in this meeting, the discovery which healed him of the error of his sin. "In the beginning the God of Life" Jesus seems to have made him understand, and it was enough. How many others had been reminding him: "In the beginning a God offended by the sins such as you commit..." And no change was effected in this man who kept on finding the way to enrich himself with sweet silver.

The frontal effort to change the severe image of God which the religious leaders of his age presented created problems for Jesus. He appeared like a blasphemer for presenting a "different"



God; he appeared as opposed to the Law because he interpreted it with a new key. But he never turned back from this evangelical journey.

He never was an accomplice to a religious system which was making God a man-like being, more completely religious because he is all powerful. He went forth seeking out all those whom life had shut out, and seated them in the first places. He anticipated the eschatological celebrations and gave out the places at the table according to the heart of God: firstly, the prostitutes. It is not a matter of saying cynically that it mattered equally to Jesus whether a woman was like Mary, his Mother, or like a prostitute of the streets. It is a question of saying, indeed, that in the beginning is the God of Life, and not the offended God, needing adequate reparation. The God who is pleased to give life where it is absent, where there is death. In this consists his glory, wherein he has granted us to know something of the glory of God.

They killed Him because of this. Yes that is what they killed Him for. They did not kill Him because it was decreed from all eternity that the Son of God would pour out His blood for the salvation of the world, as the price to pay for an infinite debt. They killed him because he said that God did not need any offering in order to love and pardon, to give life and to give it in definitive form. They killed Him because he said that sinners are not rejected by God and that they do not have to despise themselves in order to be accepted into the Father's house when they return from their escapades. The older brother could not understand this behavior, but this is God's behavior, even though the older brother (Scribe, Pharisee, priest, Levite) does not understand it. (Lk 15)

God is the one who raised Jesus up, not the one who crucified Him: "You crucified Him, God raised Him up" (Hebrews 3:14-15) is the content of the apostolic kerygma. It is true there are many texts which can sound as though God is responsible for this death. "Neither did He spare his own son, but handed Him over," says St. Paul to the Romans (Rom 8:32). If someone throws himself into the sea to save someone else who is drowning, can he be considered a suicide, if he ends up drowning? And if a father invites his son to throw himself into the sea to save some one, can he be considered a murderer? How then can anyone consider as an executioner the God who: "So loved the world that He sent His only son that it might have eternal life and that none of those who believe in Him might perish" (Jn 3:16)?

God is the one who raised Jesus up, because He is committed to Life and not to death, because Father and Son in the Unity of the same Holy Spirit are in a plan of love and of life for all persons.

The person who has received the Gospel and has allowed himself to be evangelized, by that very fact, feels that there disappears from his life all the fears, torturing scruples, anxieties, painful ways to God, rigors of Law and compulsion of threats. He is free. This is not to underestimate the seriousness of sin, but it is to believe that he has risen above his own sin and that, by that very fact, he will be able to defeat sin in his life.

This man will not spend his lifetime trying to conquer God, because his greatest and most joyful experience is that he has been conquered by God: "Overtaken by Christ" (Gal 4:9; Phil 3:22). Rather he will dedicate himself, like the Samaritan woman, to allowing the liberating force which has passed through his own existence pass on to others. He will not fall back upon himself, like a dog does to its own vomit, indefinitely accusing himself of his fault, although he

ends by listening to the loving words of the Father who has treated him as his son and has had him sit down at the family table.

He will believe God. He will pick up his cot and begin to walk. He will leap up and walk upon the waters. He will believe his God. He is a free man, with a freedom which he has not stolen, but which the Holy Spirit has given to him. Who could even think of a Lazarus obsessed by the bandages which had covered him, once he is free of them? We all are hopeful that he once again became involved in life with the same naturalness as before, forgetting an experience that could have traumatized him.

In the beginning, the God of life. In the beginning, man brought to life by the irrevocable world and the unchanging fidelity of God. All is new. All points to the future, is open to it, is open to a sure hope. Everything is an invitation to construct a future, for, indeed, in the beginning is the God of life, the future is sealed by the life of God. Then, the key of everything is life.

Is it possible to doubt this? For sure. It would be much easier to doubt than to believe. And even those who believe are doubtful. Jesus, too, had his crisis, and in what form: in the dark moments of His agony on the Cross. His prayer in those moments sufficiently indicate it: "Why have you abandoned me?" (Mk 15:34). Who ultimately is correct? What was there to be had really "in the beginning"? An offended God, who now is party to the executioners leaving Jesus alone; or the God of life, for whom He had achieved all that was the motive for his condemnation?

A real, sorrowful crisis which finally became positive: "Into your hands I commend my spirit." (Lk 23:46)

The disciples are sent into the world, even to its very ends, to spread the power of the Resurrection. The Christian knows himself to be resurrected, he knows himself a new person; he knows himself as belonging to life. Although the struggle against sin is never resolved favorably, sin is overcome in him. Now he will never again remain defeated by sin which he sometimes commits. God always raises him up and sets him on his feet. And not only after he repents and returns, but even before: "When we were still sinners, God pardoned us" (Rom 5:8-10). If it were not so, he would never indeed be able to repent. The Christian now will no longer fear death; he will not fear that death will surprise him in sin. He will always reject sin for what it signifies, but he will not be afraid that death will take him by surprise and he will not allow himself to react in its presence. That is because this would be to fear God, since God is always He who is coming unexpectedly. What better than that He come before hand? The problem would be if he did not come.

The non-evangelized Christian, controlled by fear and scruples, never ends the effort to destroy sin in his life, because he is obsessed with sin. The evangelized Christian, on the other hand, easily frees himself from sin because he has exorcized it. He has not permitted it to remain as a "principle" in his life. Because he has accepted as fact that the God of life and He alone is the sole beginning, he therefore does not develop a "victim" spirituality, but a "martyr" spirituality. This spirituality has as its axis love and solidarity. Through this the Christian consecrates his life to bringing to his suffering brethren, to sorrowful man, the life which the Lord has given Him. The evangelized Christian is a witness to the resurrection because he has experienced the resurrection. Full of thankfulness, he will bring the power of the resurrection to his brothers who are still in the shadow of death. He will be a witness to the God of life in the regions of death.

## **B. LIKE THE SCANDAL OF THE CROSS – YESTERDAY AND TODAY – SO AS NOT TO MAKE POWERLESS THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

From the earliest times of the Church there is an axiom which sets forth the reciprocal relationship between the Eucharist and the Church: “The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.” It does not appear to be forcing things to change this proposition by replacing “Eucharist” with “Memory of the Passion,” since the Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion, *par excellence*, and every recalling of the Passion made outside of the Eucharist converges on it. We would then read the axiom like this: “The Church makes the Memory of the Passion, and the Memory of the Passion makes the Church.” Between the Church and the Memory of the Passion there is a reciprocal influence. This is theologically and historically true.

From a theological standpoint we affirm that the Church has received the command to keep the meaning of the Passion by coming together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:9; 1 Cor 11:24-25). In its turn, the eucharistic memorial builds up the Church, the whole Body formed by Christ the Head and his members in communion of life with Him.

From this historical point of view this correspondence is particularly worthy of being analyzed.

Throughout the entire history of Christianity, the Church has always kept the Memory of the Passion. The Eucharist and the Sacraments have been uninterruptedly celebrated; preaching has been constant. The spirituality developed throughout the centuries has been centered on the Passion. From the very beginning, the Cross has been the outstanding symbol of the community of Christ’s disciples.

As it keeps the Memory of the Passion the Church remains, at the same time, configured by this memory, for better or worse, according to how that remembering corresponds to what is remembered. Paul had already indicated in the earliest times deficiencies in the way of keeping the memory of the crucified, thus producing a “making empty” of the Cross of the Lord (1 Cor 1:17).

The history of the Church makes one think how certain forms of keeping the memory have in effect produced forgetfulness: Eucharists which serve as ornamental settings for fiestas, commemorations or testimonials; Masses in which armaments are blessed; a cross which is present in torture chambers or adorns the home of a torturer, etc. These are ways of remembering which cause one to wonder if perchance the keeping of the Memory of the Passion is truly the Passion of Jesus being remembered, or whether on the contrary it is the Passion of Jesus which finds itself forgotten.

The Memory of the Passion gives a particular shape to the community that keeps it. Church buildings, liturgies, the content of prayers, hymns, through which the memory of the crucified is kept, have the power to mold a life-style and to shape a definite commitment. The Church which is poor rises up out of the authentic memory of the Crucified. A powerful Church, one committed to the powers of this world, throws a cloak of oblivion over what took place on Calvary.

On the manner in which the community keeps the Memory of the Passion of its Lord will depend the form whereby it will present itself to God; what it will understand about salvation; how it will think about its journey in history, and what options it will continue to take.

The history of Latin America is in good measure, we think, the history of this axiom upon which we are commenting. The missionaries brought the Cross and announced it, some in one way, others in another. In some cases the Cross was close to the Sword; in other cases it was far removed. According to the manner of announcing was the christian community formed and grown in our lands. The wheat and the chaff have grown up together. Jointly with the announcing of the human dignity in the person of the natives there has been exploitation and oppression in their religion and culture in their lives and lands. There is no doubt that a certain kind of theology, and certainly the one which predominated at the time of the discovery of America, was favorable to this ambiguity, and lent itself to a facile manipulation which favored the powerful to the detriment of the weak. This theology did not favor the reading of the message with the key of the God of Life.

## **1. Mistaken Meaning of the Concept of Sacrifice**

When the Church keeps the Memory of the Passion, it recalls the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary; it assumes that death to be a true sacrifice. However, what does it mean to say that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice? What meaning does the concept of “sacrifice” have in christian terminology? What considerations does one evoke in his mind when he remembers the death of Jesus as “sacrifice”?

If this were an unequivocal concept, we would be in the presence of a clear and precise vision. But that is not how it is. The concept “sacrifice” has come from the Old Testament into the New by way of a rupture: a complete change of the meaning. Not only has the form of the sacrifice changed, along with the content, but the very meaning of sacrifice has itself been changed.

The witness to this break is clear in the New Testament, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews; but it has not been maintained with equal clarity throughout later theological reflection. This causes a problem.

To retain a language, while making it clear that the words have new meaning, is itself rather cumbersome. But, to retain that language without making it clear that the meanings are totally different can only be a source of much misunderstanding. That is what has happened with words which are often part of christian vocabulary: sacrifice, victim, expiation, propitiation, blood, etc. The key to the reading of the Bible finds in these terms its critical point. It is right here that the key will end up being God offended and man guilty, or rather God of life and man called to life.

## **2. Died for Our Sins**

For centuries the theology of the Redemption has been marked by the work of Saint Anselm of Canterbury, known by the name “theory of satisfaction.” Certainly it is the theology that is best known by the Christian people because it is the one that has been taught to it. Briefly this theory presents matters thus: the sin of our first parents was of such gravity that it deserved eternal death. On account of this they were expelled from Paradise, but at the same time they were graced with the promise of the Redemption. That Redemption had to be effected by means of the death of the Son of God made Man, because an infinite debt (by reason of the fact that the one offended is God) can only be adequately repaid by someone who is God. The blood of Jesus, shed in His Passion, was the price of infinite value that obtained the Father’s pardon and opened the possibility of Salvation for sinful man. “The satisfaction had to be in keeping with the

greatness of the sin; and I suppose that you do not doubt that,” said St. Anselm to his questioner, Bosen.

The “sacrifice” of Jesus was the price of our salvation. Jesus was the victim demanded by the Father in order for Him to grant pardon. His suffering and death were the condition of Man’s salvation.

In this presentation it is clear the concept of salvation is unequivocal with the ancient sacrifices. There is, indeed, an important qualitative difference regarding the victims: animal sacrifices are replaced with the sacrifice of Jesus, God-made-Man. But the substance of the idea of sacrifice remains totally the same. A victim must be offered to repay the debt: something, or someone must die or be changed in order to obtain life.

## **C. AS THE GREATEST EXPRESSION OF GOD’S LOVE**

### **1. The Passion of Jesus Is the Greatest and Most Admirable Work of Divine Love. (St. Paul of the Cross)**

The juridic schema stands out clearly in the anselmian presentation, a product of the feudal system of that age. It is difficult to avoid the temptation to see in this presentation the application of the law of the talion: “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” And it becomes even more difficult for one to understand this explanation within the compass of grace and mercy. What apparent relationship does this presentation have with the parable of the merciful father (Lk 15).

Will this be the sacrifice demanded by the Father? The line which has been unwinding throughout the entire history of salvation has been going in a different direction. With the coming of the fullness of times, need one turn in a completely different direction? In no way. On the contrary that line becomes basic. “God so loved the world that he handed over his only Son so that the world might be saved through Him” (Jn 3:16). “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). These two texts make certain the key to the reading.

The idea of sacrifice suffers a complete rupturing in the New Testament. So much so, that it is not even used, excepting in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in this case, in order to state that it is a matter of something completely new (Hebrews 10).

### **2. The Epistle to the Hebrews**

Of all the New Testament writings the one which is most orientated toward a sacrificial interpretation of the Passion and Death of Jesus is the Letter to the Hebrews. Now then, that letter has been commonly read with the key of expiatory sacrifice, where the Blood of Jesus replaces the blood of animals offered in the Old Testament. This interpretation is in keeping with the anselmian theory of satisfaction: in effect, the blood of the Son of God constitutes adequate satisfaction for the infinite offense of the sin of man. The Mass, in this interpretation, (which is better known) is the offering of that blood poured out once and for all on the Cross.

In this interpretation the death of Jesus seems detached from his life and his earlier practice. The death is concerned as death, as sacrifice, as immolation. It is of interest as the sad price paid by the Son of God to the Father offended by sin, and who demands such a propitiatory victim.

What importance the life of Jesus and his experience may have for the work of Redemption is not clearly apparent. His death has almost a ritual value: in exchange for the offering of the blood of Jesus, the believer obtains salvation. The sign of this salvation will be a ritual also: Communion will express the alliance re-established between God and the sinner.

For some years now, some theologians and exegetes have given special attention to the Letter to the Hebrews, and have offered some very valid conclusions for understanding the nature of the priesthood of Jesus and of His sacrifice. A new reading allows us to discover a very close relationship between this letter and the other New Testament books, even though at first glance the language of Hebrews appears to be so different.

The originality of the Letter to the Hebrews rests in the author's indication of the total difference between the ancient sacrifices and the sacrifice of Jesus.

The chief function of the priest in the ancient cult was to offer expiatory sacrifice, and, because of this a whole mechanism for legal purity and separation was set up: separation between the priest and the faithful people. Finally, the impossibility of a true union between the victim and God, since an animal could not obtain an authentic communion with God (Vanhoye).

Consequently, the expiatory sacrifice is unable to pardon sin. In the case of Jesus all the separations are abolished, above all the separation between Jesus, the priest, and the people, since his sacrifice was an act of complete communion with men (Hebrews 5:7-9).

The Letter to the Hebrews observes that the ancient cult was ritual, exterior, conventional and not efficacious: while the cult Jesus inaugurated is real, personal, existential and efficacious.

Consequently, between the ancient priesthood and that of Christ there are no real likenesses. All that remains in common is a category: "priesthood" and "sacrifice" but with meanings that are different, even opposed.

Hebrews announces the constitutive characteristics of the priesthood of Christ, or rather, the reason why the author wants to call Christ a priest. These characteristics are fidelity and mercy.

According to the Letter, the priestly ministry of Jesus (and, therefore, his sacrifice) consisted in an unconditional obedience to God, his Father, which He did effectively through solidarity with human sorrow even to death. Even more, this total self-giving to the service of mercy is what consecrated him priest and transformed Him, uniting Him perfectly to God and gave him the power to be able to pardon sin: "and when He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

The Letter to the Hebrews joins the rest of the New Testament in these three elements :

1. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God.
2. As a consequence of that, He sets loose a praxis of mercy.
3. Finally, He pardons sin.

These three activities ought not to be understood apart from one another, but rather as constituting one and the same reality. The three articulate organically with one another to constitute the concrete functioning of the ministry of Jesus.

The pardon of sins must be understood in line with the meaning which Jesus gave to the Kingdom He was announcing. Kingdom, in the presentation of Jesus, is the creating action of God who establishes his sovereignty over man by transforming him from within. This same thing is the meaning of pardon for sin according to the thought of Paul. In effect, Paul refers to the pardon of sins through the theme of justification and of reconciliation: the gratuitous action of God through which the power of God breaks in upon the believer, a work contrary in meaning to the power of sin, and supplants the sovereignty sin exercised.

Both in the teachings of Jesus and in those of Paul, pardon for sins is not a purely juridic thing (condonation of punishment) but is existential: the sovereignty of God displaces the sovereignty of sin, that is to say, the Power of God takes the place of the power of sin.

In what does this power of God consist? How does God manifest his sovereignty? Here is where the Kingdom, pardon for sins and mercy are interrelated. Effectively God exercises his sovereign power through His mercy: the love typical of God which humbly bends down over the weak to lift them up.

The mercy of God is the love of God which “touches” man in his temporalness and in his flesh. By touching him in his flesh (mercy), He becomes present with His sovereignty (pardon for sin) and enables the one pardoned to exercise mercy toward the weak, to be with those in need as God was with him (the Kingdom = the sovereignty of solidarity).

The ministry of Jesus consisted in his Fidelity and Mercy. (Jn 1:14) He was totally faithful to the Father, even unto death, that is to say, He exercised the mercy of the Father by “touching” the sorrows of the weak, even to the end. In this way the power of sin was displaced; the egoism which imprisons each one within himself was crushed; a new way of being was introduced: “You must love one another as I have loved you; be merciful as you yourselves have received mercy” (John 15:12).

When the priesthood of Jesus and the sacrifice He offered are thus understood, it is impossible to limit them to the exact moment of his Passion and Death. They flow over throughout his whole life, from the moment of his Incarnation. They pass through everything and through each one of the actions which he did during his life. They culminate and become definitive, are raised to the extreme on the Cross.

This priesthood and this sacrifice do not belong, in the first place, to ritual order. They belong in the first and decisive place to the existential order, the order of reality, the order of life. The praxis of Jesus is constituted in the “res” of the Sacrament.

The meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus is a life placed at the service of the merciful Father, at the service of the mercy the Father wants to exercise toward men, especially toward those who cry out for mercy. The sacrifice Jesus offers is not His blood as a substitute for the blood of animals ritually offered to the divinity in order to appease Him. It is His blood, which signifies His life, which He places at the disposal of mankind. And this without measure, even to the end.

The difference from what is the ordinary way of thinking of many remains very clear. The ordinary Christian understands the sacrifice of the Cross and the memorial in the Eucharist as a ritual sacrifice which he, joined to Christ, offers to God for the pardon of his sins. The Mass is

made up of a double movement: first it goes from man to God by the mediation of Jesus; the second goes from God to man, also by the mediation of Jesus. Man needing pardon, asks for it; God, attentive to His Son, grants it.

In the New Testament concept, on the contrary, including the Epistle to the Hebrews, the ministry of Jesus is in a triple movement: the first descends from the Father, who gives his Son that He may exercise his ministry of mercy for the weak; the second is the ministry of mercy accomplished by Jesus with complete fidelity; the third is the joyful celebration of that ministry fully accomplished. "I give you thanks, Father, because you have revealed these things to the little ones" (Lk 10:21).

This threefold movement is also what the Church celebrates in the Eucharist: 1) it receives Christ who makes it able to exercise the ministry of mercy; 2) it makes this ministry continuously effective; 3) finally, it returns thanks for the movement of solidarity displayed. In the current practice of the Sacraments and of the Eucharist, many Christians remain centered upon themselves, upon their spiritual and material necessities; they come confidently to God to obtain the satisfaction of their needs. Frequently they live this out like a bargaining: "do ut des," trying to change God's will in their favor.

In the New Testament scheme of things, celebrating the memory of the Lord is the joyful acceptance of entry into the circle of those who receive life from the God of life, who touches with mercy those who laboriously seek life. Such acceptance will manifest itself in the commitment to achieve, in one's own turn, the practice of mercy according to God's style (cf. Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36). This practice will fill the community with joy, and will join it together to offer it up in thanksgiving.

The offering of sacrifices is replaced by the saving action of God who enters into human history to make something new and different together with man. The sacrifice begins to take on meaning: to take a different way, to achieve a praxis that is different, capable of transforming situations, of modifying man's life on earth. In this consists the real sacrifice: to consecrate a life to this, and not to backtrack in the face of threats, nor in the face of the reality of death. In this consists the obedience of Jesus to the Father, because this was His will, and this was to make effective the Will of the Father. To build up the kingdom is equivalent to offering sacrifices.

It is not man, then, who initially makes the sacrifice. God is the one who does it, Jesus being the greatest expression of this new way of God. Sacrifice is not the condition for God to give life, but it is the Way through which God keeps opening the passage to life. It is the way He first traversed. It is the way with which He identifies Himself: "I am the Way..."

We recall this when we keep the memory of the praxis of Jesus, accomplished during his life and sealed with his blood.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **"You Have Heard it Said..."**

Many times Jesus used this way of speaking. By this He showed that, while speaking, he was aware that the minds of his listeners were not a "tabula rasa," that in them were written many things, and that, therefore, it was necessary to take them into account, before introducing the



Gospel. We must keep this same thing in mind when we are preaching the Passion of Jesus to our people. In the conscious and in the collective unconscious there are ideas and images that need evaluation as to whether they make possible or impede the receiving of the joyful message of the Cross.

**“But I Say to You...”**

In many cases the Lord had to put his announcement in opposition to what people had already accepted. Will it not be the same in our Latin America? For this it is necessary to keep in mind the Gospel of the Passion in all that it means regarding Fidelity and the Mercy of God for mankind. It is necessary to keep before our eyes what Paul of the Cross said: “The Passion is the most stupendous work of the love of God.”

**“Be Perfect as My Father”**

From the life and death of the Lord we understand this invitation from Jesus in the way St. Luke understood and handed it on: “Be merciful as my Father is merciful.” It is a perfection made up of gestures of unity and brotherly self-giving one to the other. It is a perfection which is not so preoccupied with moral esthetic, as the philosophers of Athens considered.

## II

### **SUBJECTS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION (Those called to live it.)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

“Keeping memory” from a Scriptural point of view is both a personal as well as community way of entering into salvation history. It amounts to making a theology of history as an actualization of the very atmosphere of God’s work in such a way as to permit that the historical context, both personal and common existence, should correspond to the will of God himself, Lord of all history.

The act of “keeping memory” presupposes God’s action affirmed by faith. At the same time faith acquires an historical-salvific dimension which both characterizes it and determines its expression and growth. When faith keeps a memorial of something this is essentially historical-salvific.

The point of departure of “keeping memory” is nothing less than a special action on God’s part in the life of his people. This action of God is a totally free gift to his people and is experienced as grace. This basic action is the starting point of a special history within the development of history as a whole, which is thus directed toward an objective proper to the will of God, and history itself becomes God’s plan.

At the same time, this first action on God’s part is foundational, since it makes man a participant in his plan. A group of people ceases merely to exist in order to become God’s people, executing God’s plan, and, for that reason, participants in God’s true design for them as a people.

In the Old Testament God’s basic and foundational action is revealed in the freedom from Egyptian bondage and the consequences which flowed from this: the fulfillment of the Promise and their election, new basis for the life of the people, possession of the land and the construction of a new society in conformity with God’s action.

Israel is thereby constituted God’s chosen people. From here on God’s plan of salvation history begins to take shape and in diverse epochs is actualized as memorial. Given the fact that God’s action is continuous, which in itself accounts for the fact that the people can continue to be “God’s people,” the fact of “keeping memory” makes present the various realities expressed in the Covenant.: It is therefore possible to distinguish two possibilities related to “memory.”

On the one hand we see that important historical happenings of the people, when they are faithful to the Covenant, are transformed or lived as salvation history. There is a positive memorial and its liturgical celebration takes on a festive air, in such a way that the Passover and other festivities become for the people a reassurance of God’s presence in their midst as well as offering a choice for an evermore fulfilling future.

God is therefore lived and understood as Lord in a new and more extensive way. The people are able to perceive themselves more thoroughly as God’s people and acquire new and greater vigor to move God’s plan forward into history.

On the other hand there exists the possibility of God's people deviating from their fidelity to the Covenant. The life of the people becomes but a pale reflection of God's plan, or even an anti-plan, in relation to God and to their being. Any memory becomes a tense or contradictory reality within the life of the people and for the sake of the people. So far as God himself is concerned, "keeping memory" goes on, but in a different manner: the prophet comes on the scene, whose task it will be to keep and to foster the memory in the people's midst.

It is extremely important, therefore, even from a pedagogical-catechetical point of view, to describe the process that is engendered amongst the people. In the eyes of the deuteronomical historian the process of returning to Covenant fidelity would be thus: the people wander astray; misfortune and suffering of the people, especially among certain elements of the same; appearance of the prophets; prevarication is denounced; a call to conversion. If they pay heed to the prophet, the people are converted and thus return to God's initial plan, a phenomenon which includes a change and transformation of the underlying circumstances which had brought about their sin.

If the prophet goes unheeded, then there appears a situation of judgement, with ever more difficult consequences ensuing for the people, in so far as they are God's people.

What appears to be so paradoxical is God's unceasing action on behalf of his people, even when they have been unfaithful to the Covenant. God is ever mindful of his elect. God is concerned for the faithfulness of his people, because this spells out their very life. So long as God's plan is unrealized, his presence is obscured, and only with difficulty can he be perceived as the Lord of history. God's people become a contradictory sign which does not speak clearly of their role in the midst of other peoples. Their future will rest in the hands of certain of their number who will be motivated by their selfish and entirely human interests, which will eventually bring about a calamity for the majority.

For the New Testament, the fundamental and basic eschatological happening is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, manifested in his gestures, his words, his faithfulness even to death, and the subsequent corroboration of all this through his resurrection.

Jesus of Nazareth did not live primarily for himself, but rather for God's ultimate plan, which is the Kingdom. God's definitive happening for all mankind is his Kingdom in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit assures the effective presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord, in the Christian community. It is the continuous and efficacious presence of the Lord Jesus through the Spirit that Christians are constituted into a salvific community at the service of the Kingdom of God. The Church is both sign and instrument of the Kingdom's presence in the world.

The Church actualizes the Kingdom of God "proclaiming the memory" of the Life, Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Just as was described for the Old Testament, in the Church, likewise, we have two possibilities of "memory": proclaiming memory can be a new and festive reality, or it can imply stress and conflict which can only be resolved through a process of conversion to service in the Kingdom.

## **A. COMMUNITY-CHURCH**

The Church is at a crossroads of two realities: the reality of God and the reality of mankind's history throughout its different periods. Both realities condition her and constitute her. On the one hand she herself belongs to the history of people and yet, on the other, she is a sociological reality determined by, as well as determinant of, human development.

Nevertheless, within the context of human historical development, the Church sees herself otherwise, given the fact that the succession of human events are, for her, history which is assumed and defined by God. This history is read from the vantage point of her best option, precisely as salvation history.

At the same time, the Church stands before God, but not simply as a religious group before its divinity. The God which faces the Church is the God of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. He is the God of the promises and action of the Old Testament who has definitively opened himself a road in Jesus in order to establish his Kingdom in the ambience of the history of men.

The Church is both sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God throughout history. Such is her peculiar identity and from thence spring her being and activity in the midst of people. This affects the Church not only as a group or mass of believers, but also in so far as it totally affects every person, each and every Christian, creating in him or her a special and determined personality. Each and every Christian, as a follower of Christ Jesus, is an extender of the effective presence of the Lord Jesus to his or her immediate environment and to the christian community as a whole which is the Church.

It is obvious that God's action through Jesus of Nazareth, which is continued by the Spirit, is the fundamental and founding reality of the Church and of her activity in the course of history, in order that this latter may be the realization of God's plan.

The Kingdom of God has opened up a path through the history of mankind in the person of Jesus Christ in a particular way, manifested through his words, his decisions, his gestures, and in his death and resurrection.

The death of Jesus, as presented in the Gospels, is the crowning moment of the historical fabric of his life. If it be true that the Kingdom of God has been, for Jesus, the plan for his existence in history, then his death is a final revelation of the reality of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ dies because of his fidelity to the will of God, which is his Kingdom in the lives of men. He dies because of his loving faithfulness to the men and women among whom he had lived and for whom he acted on behalf of God.

In so far as it entails the Lordship of God over the totality of its existence, the Kingdom of God shines forth in the death of Jesus. In his death we see the powerful effectiveness of the Kingdom, because Jesus never deviated from the Kingdom, any more than he allowed himself to be overcome by any other ruler of this world. Neither difficulties, nor persecution by the powerful of his day, nor fear, nor even death itself was able to subvert his adherence to God and to men. Jesus died because of his continual faithfulness to the options he took: a tight and continuous belt connects his life with his death and, because of this, both his life and his death could be interpreted by early Christians as being salvific.

The death of Jesus is lived and interpreted by early Christians in a salvific way, because in it all manner of evil has been vanquished. The death of Jesus gives birth to a new person and a new community. The memory of the death of Jesus is cause for the new person, and the christian community, to perceive itself as called, as chosen by God himself in the death of Jesus; a feeling arises of being the Church of God.

The Gospels, as lived experience and as writings, are the primitive way in which the Church proclaimed her being and her activity. They are born of the very life of the Church and may, for that reason, be called a "Memory of the Church." From within they are the means of expression by which the Church actualizes the Memory of the Passion for all people. It is through this reality that the Church itself is converted into Gospel, which is to say into the actualization of the definitive happening of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus within the history of men.

The Church is the word of the Cross lived and proclaimed amongst men, as St. Paul tells us in I Corinthians when he defines the Gospel as the Word of the Cross, salvation for those who believe.

The Church "actualizes the Memory of the Passion" when she evangelizes, when she herself lives the Gospel and is at the service of that Gospel which she proclaims and promotes among the people with whom she shares her existence.

Basing ourselves on the description of that evangelizing dynamism appearing in the Puebla document, we can concretize the Memory of the Passion the Church presents when she evangelizes.

The Church proclaims the "Memory of the Passion" when she herself acts as God's witness in Christ Jesus through the action of the Spirit; the Gospel is made present in her as the experience of God present throughout history. The concrete existence of believing men and women comes within the sphere of God's action, and that existence is transformed and enters into the novelty of God's eschatological action. The existence of these men and women is made possible as a life of faith. Personal existence is re-dimensioned and is expressed in that conversion which, as a personal choice, will tend to remain within the aforementioned sphere of God's action with the consequences that are implied. This experience will change the direction of interpersonal relationships and so give rise to a fundamental fraternity constituted by God and chosen as community life.

Finally, the existence of the faithful is immersed in a dynamism proper to the Kingdom of God and is expressed as a following of Jesus Christ.

Through this foundational reality the Church becomes aware of a new vitality within herself prompting and projecting her into the history of every period to actualize the "Memory of the Passion," to make present the word of the Cross, and in so doing she is newly reconstituted as witness of God.

The Church actualizes the "Memory of the Passion" when she proclaims the Gospel of the Cross; when her catechizing, her preaching and all her concrete means of proclamation awaken the life of faith in other men and women. The proclaimed Word of the Cross confronts the individual with himself, with God and with his own past. The Word of the Cross reveals to man what he is and offers him a vast new perspective; it frees man from himself so that from his position of liberty he may open himself to the mystery of God reflected in Jesus Crucified.

Through the preaching of the Church, the individual is offered the chance of sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, opening up the field of his own existence to conversion and to its fullest consequence which is the following of Jesus Christ.

The Word of the Cross reveals to man the limitations, the mistakes and the possibilities of his own life-story from its very roots. A new reading of the same and a new attitude is encouraged: his life-story is perceived as a place for the historical realization of the Kingdom of God.

The following of Jesus Crucified implies an obligation to share in the transformation and strengthening of social structures in such a way that they may function according to Gospel criteria. This discovery of the community dimension involved in following Jesus gives rise to a serious resolve of the christian community to bring about societies where justice and rights are a basis for living together with dignity.

The Church's proclamation of the Gospel of the Cross brings one face to face with God, revealing to him the God of the Crucified Jesus. The Word of the Cross is likewise a source of ideological liberation on a religious level. Every full religious experience will be affected by the dynamism of the Cross of Jesus, just as will the systematic presentation of the same as theology.

Given the fact that in its concrete social realities and on a multitude of levels the history of man is frequently at odds with God's plans, for which Jesus Christ lived and died, it falls to the Church to denounce everything that manipulates or distorts the "Memory of the Passion" in the course of human events.

It is this Memory of the Passion which causes the Church to be a prophetic word, which resounds in sovereign clamor down the ages of history, exposing every obstacle in the path of the Kingdom of God.

The Word of the Cross can discern and reveal sinful situations on both a personal and social level; it can discover the existing connections between this reality and its concretization in unjust social institutions and structures. Viewed from the Cross, the necessity of salvation and liberation for us sinful humans and of those structures of human integration and living which we have created becomes all the more apparent.

The Church actualizes the Memory of the Passion every time she makes a determined effort to be a haven of reconciliation for those of us who experience the need, so often denied us, of living together in harmony. This implies the creation of truly fraternal human communities where there would be fewer of those divisions we've managed to create, such as those related to race, wealth, politics, social and regional problems, etc.

It is especially at those times of historical transition, marked by a thirst for revenge on the part of opposing sectors, when the Church is really able to actualize the Memory of the Passion, as she becomes a locus for dialogue, trying to mediate between opposing groups, encouraging a constructive dialogue in a quest for reconciliation and the making of a better society by dint of a common effort.

The Cross of Jesus, which has broken down all walls of division, gathers people around it without any sort of discrimination. The Church actualizes the Memory of the Crucified when she

strives to have all people contribute their personal values toward the creation of fraternal communities which will live in communion.

Not only does the Church become the locus of fraternity, she also becomes an educator of peoples, and enters fully into a multi-cultural world where she will seek to dialogue and make her own contribution toward the creation of more harmonious societies. The Word of the Cross is divine wisdom in the midst of ideologies and societal projects.

The Church actualizes the Memory of the Passion in a particularly trenchant manner when she makes her own the options of Jesus Christ.

Faced with the spectacle of millions of brethren in our countries who live in situations of dire poverty and marginalization, the Church actualizes the Memory of the Passion when she opts for the poor in order to accompany them in their liberation process toward a more dignified standard of living which will make the Gospel truth more credible.

The Church, faithful to the Kingdom of God, discerns the scandal of the Cross in the lives of the poor, and she goes to pains to see the suffering which unjustly hangs over them disappear. Actualizing memory, therefore, involves a whole lot of very concrete attitudes: to be with the poor, to listen to them, to learn the reality of life from their point of view and experience, to share their hopes, and to conjoin efforts to bring about the Kingdom of God.

This is all the more urgent for the Church since these realities are not something that happen casually or spontaneously in traditionally Catholic countries. The present as well as the future of a great many people and a great many Christians depends, in good measure, on the response that is given to this situation.

The Church actualizes the memory of the Crucified One every time she encounters persecution by those who wield power throughout history and she remains faithful to these options. She does this through the power of the Word of the Cross, even at the risk of the lives of many Christians. In the Church, martyrdom is a privileged way of actualizing the Memory of the Passion before the world.

Finally, the Church actualizes the Memory of the Passion when she sees herself as a pilgrim on the road of history; when, by virtue of the Gospel truth she possesses, she is able to discern what is truly evangelical while avoiding the absolutization of forms or institutions. Faced with the second coming of the Son of Man, the Church is able to see beyond and, at the same time, present herself in every social moment as crisis and prophesy of what is definitive.

All these realities together constitute the Church as memory and which express her. "Actualizing Memory" come about by virtue of the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It is precisely through this style of living the Gospel that it is possible to show that the life of the Resurrected One has changed and restructured, in an effectively concrete way, the lives of Christians from the present until the total transformation according to the life of God.

## **B. ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS AND HIS FOUNDING CHARISM. THE CONGREGATION BORN OF IT**

Moved by the Spirit of Jesus present in the Church, St. Paul of the Cross was able to grasp clearly the meaning of the death of Jesus for that moment in history when he lived.

In a negatively expressed statement, which may well be called a prophetic axiom, he reveals an historical evaluation from God's point of view: "Forgetting the Passion of Jesus is the cause of a great many evils in this world."

In these historical moments we are living in Latin America, that phrase of Paul's strikes us as particularly clear-sighted and a poignant diagnosis of our reality.

Paul of the Cross was the first one to enter into the reality of the Cross of Jesus, and his very name is profoundly indicative of his option and his spiritual experience. Paul was aware that the Cross was the property of the Crucified One, and he wanted to be his property!

Entering by the way of the Cross of Jesus, he allowed himself to be absorbed by the mighty reality of God, always active, and he resolved to live his life according to the absolute criterion of the will of God.

It is from this new focus of Paul's existence that is born the affirmation, positively expressed, and which sounds like a project and personal decision for the Church and for the people of his day: "The Passion of Jesus is the most efficacious remedy for all ills."

Paul's continual call to meditate on the Passion of Jesus and to teach the people to meditate on the Passion, more than a mere enunciation of a theme or method of prayer, indicates something urgent before God which shines forth from the Crucified One. Paul's personal life developed according to the very dynamism of the Passion of Jesus and is made quite evident by the Scripture texts cited most frequently in his writings. The Cross had become the way toward a profound religious experience, toward action, and toward the reading of personal and common reality.

The charism of Paul of the Cross gradually found expression within the Church, at whose service he placed himself as a preacher of popular missions. Once again the Word of the Cross resounded as God's Gospel, confronting people's concrete existence.

The efficacy of the Word of the Cross is patent in the many conversions he was able to promote, in the many people he directed, and who lived profoundly christian lives. Paul was a true evangelizer of his day!

Meanwhile, Paul of the Cross was concerned lest this reality he now lived were to be lost. To make sure this didn't happen, he gradually devised a particular mode of christian life which was to take on flesh in the Congregation of the Passion. The fundamental structure he had in mind was that of the early christian communities: he desired to gather companions who would live as evangelical communities.

Paul was certain that the same dynamism which characterized the early christian community would adequately mold the existence of those men: they would live the will of God, whose greatest work was the death of Christ Jesus. Those men were to experience the reality of the Gospel and live in accordance with it. To become holy men demands a renewed process and goal: to be identified with the Crucified Jesus Christ in whom is fully revealed that holiness of God that envelops all history.



Each Passionist Community had as its basis and option the conversion into a living image of Jesus Crucified. In this manner the continuing Passion and death of Jesus became a reality for the Community, for the Church as a whole and for the people of their day.

Austerity, solitude, penance, poverty of life, silence...are all at the service of a greater dynamism which emanates directly from the Word of the Cross that is the concrete expression of the will of God.

All those structures which gradually molded the Passionist life in the days of St. Paul of the Cross and after have as their objective to facilitate that which constitutes the most profound reality of every Passionist: the following of Jesus Crucified!

Paul's first companions and many others who joined later believed and lived as true followers of Jesus Christ in their day and for the times they lived in.

This is Paul of the Cross' fundamental criterion for his communities: following Jesus Crucified is the concrete way in which Passionists actualize the Memory of the Passion within the Church and in the world at large. This is the focal point which unifies the community and apostolic life of the Congregation; this is the correct way to read the reality confronting them just as it enables them to respond efficaciously to the needs and fresh challenges posed by both the Church and the history of mankind.

Following Jesus Crucified is the way the Gospel of the Cross is incarnated in the Passionist Congregation. It constitutes the Memory which prolongs the voice of the Spirit Paul of the Cross heard and which he wished should continue as a lasting echo to be heard by every Passionist.

### **C. OUR PASSIONIST COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

Since they were first established in Latin America, the Passionist communities have shared in the evangelization of the Latin-American Church in the way which is proper to them: through the Gospel of the Cross.

The Word of the Cross has been proclaimed in many quarters of the continent through diverse ecclesial services by many Passionists who arrived from other countries and by those of us who are native to the land.

The Church in Latin America has experienced stress and upheavals within her ranks due to factors that were both internal and external. Religious life was not exempt from this, and it has been the lot of our Passionist Congregation in her Communities present here.

The Latin-American Church has listened to the voice of the Spirit who has spoken to her. Following this there has been a process of reading anew, of revision of forms and structures, of experimentation with forms more adequate to her being and activity when seen in her own reality. This process is not yet over, yet formidable and positive realizations can already be attributed to it.

The voice of the Spirit clamoring since Vatican Council II was heard, and the Church saw herself as the Sacrament of the Kingdom in the world, as both a sign and instrument of God's plan

opening its way through history. Because she is in the world, the Church shares in the joys and hopes, in the miseries and sorrows of everybody, especially the poorest.

Religious also heard the voice of the Spirit and, by virtue of that same power, God brought us in touch with the realities of Latin-Americans, amongst whom we live and with whom we share in the same historical process.

We Passionists felt impelled to take a closer look at reality and so get to know it, and, just as was the case with many other religious, we found ourselves faced with things we had never even suspected. We realized that we live in a situation of social sin manifested in diverse ways in the social structures and institutions in the midst of which we live; we were faced with the scandal of the inhuman poverty in which many live, all of it a contradiction to God's plan.

We are coming to realize that this is contrary to God's plan, to the Kingdom and to the honor which is God's due. It is our opinion that the message of the Cross has been distorted and manipulated, and has been turned into a most painful and concrete scandal in nations and amongst peoples who bear the mark of christian tradition.

All this demands our conversion; we must change in order to return to the God of life. One sign of this conversion is the effort several Latin-American Passionist Communities have made to change their social locus in order to appreciate things from another vantage point and, thereby, to manage a new reading of our being and our activity here.

What has been said brought a challenge with it: to define our identity within the Church. There was a movement within religious orders, following on Vatican II, to return to one's origins, and we Passionists became engaged in an effort to rediscover the "Charism of Paul of the Cross."

As a result of that attempt, a reformulation of our Passionist charism was born: "To be and to actualize the memory" of the Passion of Jesus Christ within the evangelization process which characterizes the essential being of the Church.

This reformulation has inspired the adoption of new attitudes: "We are aware that the Passion of Christ continues in this world until He comes in glory; therefore, we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey through life toward our Father. We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected..." (Const. 3).

This has impelled a number of our Passionist Communities in Latin America toward a change of their social locus, sharing more intimately in the life of the poor, in order to actualize the Memory of the Passion in their company and making them our starting point.

Actualizing the Memory of the Passion in so far as our Passionist Communities in Latin America are concerned will only be accomplished over a long haul. There is some evidence of progress, but we are continuing to experience certain tensions related to our proper identity as Passionists here.

As we see things, it is becoming apparent that we will have to revise our life-style and the way we participate in the work of evangelization. "The power of the Cross, which is the wisdom of God, gives us strength to discern and remove the causes of human suffering. For this reason, our mission aims at evangelizing others by means of the Word of the Cross" (Const. 3).

In the spirit of our Constitutions, our Passionist Communities seek to discover our Crucified Lord Jesus in the history of our peoples, participating in the evangelizing options of the Church.

The preferential option for the poor, the option for a mode of evangelization which will foster communion and participation in communities, all these are essentially a way of corresponding to those options for which Jesus lived and died.

This participatory experience would seem to recommend a new reading of Jesus as a person, in his life and in his death, as is revealed to us in the Gospels, thus obtaining the same basic experience which motivated Jesus and the Gospels.

Jesus' existential project, by which and for which he lived, is the Kingdom of God. What this means is that the existence of Jesus, of the Evangelists and the communities they represented, was submerged in the definitive action of the Lordship of God in favor of people, especially of the most needy, in order to take them out of their situation of sin, social malaise and injustice, and establishing a form of human life fully designed according to the will of God.

If we wish to be the living image of Jesus Crucified in Latin America, then we shall have to settle for the same options Jesus took during his life on earth, and thus enter fully into the dynamism of the Kingdom. These various options of Jesus, assumed into our historical context, will afford us the experience of Jesus in the history we are living; they will place us in the mainstream of his project.

This stands out clearly in the Acts of the Apostles. That same dynamism which the early Christians experienced and within which they moved gives us the key to our Memory of the Passion.

One cannot help but feel amazed when reading the account in Acts of the cure of the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate! "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!...He started to walk (and) entered the temple with them, leaping and praising God as he went." That poor man experienced the presence of the power of Jesus in the persons of Peter and John who, faithful to the Kingdom project, placed the cured cripple in a new human situation which led to his praising God.

Peter and John reveal their personal experience: "Men of Israel, why be surprised at this? Why stare at us as if we had made this man walk by some power or godliness of our own? (cf. Acts 3:1-12). This is the new form of the presence and experience of Jesus in history and in his own person.

If we add all this data to the fact of the presence of vocations in our Passionist communities in Latin America, we see that the formation of these future Passionists poses a thorny question and the need to make a number of decisions. The formation process for many Passionists here is, for them, the concrete way of actualizing the Memory of the Passion in our formation houses. Given the fact that formation starts and is nurtured in the life of all our communities, the need to share together the actualizing of the Memory of the Passion becomes a matter of urgency if we are to satisfy our hopes as Passionists.

We shouldn't regard the formation of future Passionists as a merely pedagogical task, but rather as part of the life of all our communities, which expresses itself as invitation, questioning and participation for those young men. We need to be Gospel of the Cross for one another in such a way as to assure that the Passionist life today and tomorrow may retain its identity in the evangelization of the Latin-American Church.

To a large extent, the Passionist communities in Latin America are actualizing the Memory of the Passion as an experience of the power of God amid weakness.

Recalling the experience of St. Paul the Apostle described in 2 Cor 10-12, we are striving to discover and put into practice better ways of expressing the charism of Paul of the Cross, comparing it, through a new reading, with the process of evangelization of the Church in Latin America.

To "make Memory" by way of experiencing the power of God amid human weakness means that we accept the fact that change in our communities will be gradual...; it won't come about all of a sudden. We cannot demand a predetermined haste for the conversion process of others using as our only measure our own criteria and personal experience.

Change toward the concretization of the options of Jesus, as the voice of the Spirit is today asking of us, may come about in diverse ways and degrees, which only common dialogue can bring together and direct toward stages of better creativity.

To "make the memory of the Crucified One" means, for us, that we accept the fact that there have been mistakes, imperfections and failures, the result of our personal and institutional limitations. At the same time, however, it is possible to see born a spirituality of the poor which tells him that he is not the only faithful believer, and that human frailty can crop up anywhere.

The changes being brought about in Latin-American religious life and also within several of our communities shouldn't be viewed as passing novelties, but would rather seem to demand a spiritual effort to understand them as an experience of the power of the Spirit compelling the Church to show a cleaner face where men could the more easily discern the presence of God in the midst of history.

"To make memory" also means members of our Communities should be cognizant of the relativity of structures. When all is said and done, we are pilgrims, having no permanent abode here; rather, we are ever ready and willing to risk ourselves, even when at times we are forced to admit, in all loyalty: "And now I have no idea what is to follow!"

Frequently the ways of the Spirit of God are less understandable and more difficult to detect than a mathematical operation. They demand a common openness and dialogue in the search for unity, right disposition and continual discernment.

Finally we have the assurance Jesus gave his disciples: "Have no fear, little flock, for your Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32). God is the first one efficaciously interested in provoking us to actualize as well as be in ourselves the Memory of the Gospel of the Cross.

#### **D. OUR CHRISTIAN PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUCH A SPECIAL FEELING FOR THE CROSS AND FOR LOVE**

Their complex cultural heritage has gradually given Latin-American peoples a unique way of coping with existence and molding our culture and personality. The christian tradition made a significant mark on our history and to a good measure has shaped our very cultural traditions and their forms of expression.

Our encounter with western culture was, from the start, a mixed blessing. Today, five centuries later, we remain in a state of dependency and underdevelopment, which we neither wanted nor sought, and which is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future.

The process of social change in these latter years are above all due to a conscious awareness of the situation and of one's personal dignity in the face of the same. This has allowed a new reading of our essential being and our tradition.

Following on the missionaries' evangelizing efforts, the christian lifestyle of the peoples of Latin America has gradually developed its mold, especially with regard to the liturgy, in spite of the fact that the personal and social existence of the majority has shown a mixture of innate values and those of an incipient evangelization.

The continuous social movement of our peoples in their quest for a way out of their precarious situation has frequently found, in the christian tradition, a reading criterion applicable to their efforts and plans. These movements show a desire to have a complete evangelization which would really correspond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One can discover a concrete example of the aforementioned desire in the innumerable images of the Crucified Christ in our churches, usually known as "The Christ of... (this or that)."

It is difficult to define, even from the standpoint of religious phenomenology, the precise way in which the majority of the faithful identify with Jesus Christ. The vast mass of our people do manifest, through their devotion to Jesus Crucified and the Sorrowful Virgin, a desire to experience that which lies mysteriously hidden in those images: the Gospel of God.

Rather than a vague discharging of one's own misfortunes on somebody else, this desire reveals an awareness of what is divine in Jesus and the Virgin. Those great pilgrimages to traditional shrines show that we are dealing with a personal and collective consciousness which persists through time and expresses itself.

Our peoples actualize the Memory of the Passion particularly in the liturgical setting on festive days, at the shrines, during Holy Week, and on days when the Holy Cross is celebrated. They mesh together: the festive celebrations as symbols of something new that might yet happen, and the pilgrimages, which frequently entail great sacrifice, symbolic of a life of wretchedness one would like to suppress or overcome.

One might say that contemplating their own existence as people and aware of their misery, our people are actualizing a tense and conflictive Memory as they seek fulfillment.

Behind the cultural attire they wear to express their personal and collective devotion to Jesus Crucified, there lies a fairly clear awareness of an existential tension that is being represented before God and before themselves.

The great mass of our Christian people reflect the situation of Job. Job faces three different fields of reality: the doctrine of his friends, who repeat the traditional formulations of the Yahwistic faith; his own personal experience of pain and suffering seen as unjust; and the veiled face of a God who certainly must be just.

Our people no longer believe, as they once did, in the traditional propositions and doctrines, no matter where they emanate from, because they fail to resolve their conflictive existential situation. They no longer read themselves in those doctrines, because they realize they are not adequately reflected in them. The wisdom of the majorities is incontrovertible in this respect, because it originates in their own reality.

The people are able to visualize themselves in a diaphanous clarity, aware that the present situation cannot go on forever, and are willing to risk life and limb to see their desire come to fruition. It isn't at school that our people became aware of the injustice of their situation and how to resolve it, but through their life experience.

At the same time, they see themselves facing God, a God whose face cannot yet be distinguished clearly, but who they are certain is just, as he shows himself to be in Jesus Crucified and in the Virgin Mary.

The joy of the feast, more than over the discovery of something accomplished, is over their conviction that something new is about to happen. Our people actualize the Memory of the Passion as a necessity that the Gospel should be fully realized in their own life and situation.

Together with this reality there exists in the great mass of our people a heightened awareness of the value of an individual person, and this is manifest in their expressions of hospitality, affection and kindness. True as it may be that these qualities are receding in the big cities and among certain minorities, they are still a powerful feature in the smaller towns and countryside and amongst the majority of the people.

There exists a living conviction that a life of dignity and mutual respect can come about. There is a certainty that human life and community living can proceed along rails of mutual assistance rather than those of abuse and exploitation of one another.

Relevant to all this is the custom of sitting numerous friends and relatives around the common table on the occasion of family celebrations. There exists among our people a broad base for the manifestation of hope. It is this virtue of hope that is manifest in devotion to Jesus Crucified and the Virgin Mary. The majority of our people come to discover through their celebrations both a personal and common situation of sin which is deleterious to community existence.

Our people actualize the Memory of Jesus Crucified from the vantage point of their own conflictive existence. Here we are dealing with a tense Memory which seeks to make present and real the hope that at long last the just God will reveal himself.

The majority of our people is clamoring for the need that God's Gospel, and their own evangelization, be brought to fulfillment.

Then there is another, rather more universal dynamic factor to be considered: all of us pass through this life conditioned by very precarious circumstances, which are proper to our human historical existence. Suffering, evil and death are realities common to all humans precisely because we are that. The existence of sin only increases the anguish as we experience these human realities.

Each of us experiences a kind of existential tension rooted in all our personal manifestations. A yearning for the infinite seeks permanence and fulfillment and, like a thirst that can never be quenched, this causes a tension which is manifest as suffering.

Sickness, pain, ignorance, danger posed by someone else, the threatening world, social disorder, all these things are the voices of something deeper and continuous; they are a reminder issuing as from a fountain no finger can stop up. Every individual will respond to these with one or another of a gamut of solutions, which consciously or otherwise will clearly indicate there is no fleeing this necessary truth.

The great mass of our people resolves this situation within the sphere of christian tradition. Faced with this universal problem, our people actualize the Memory of the Passion as a desired requirement of salvation, as the necessity for redemption welling up from the very depths of our being.

## **E. THE POOR, THE SUFFERING FACE OF CHRIST TODAY**

It is a fact of life that in Latin America there are millions of people who, not because of the common destiny of all mankind described in the preceding paragraphs, but rather because of their assigned place in society have to suffer unjustly the greater part of the structural errors of our societies: these are the poor!

In a long list of the Puebla Document (31-39), we are afforded an overall view of this unjust suffering as it clearly portrays concrete situations which appear all through our society.

They, the poor, are the actualization of the Memory of the Passion and Death of Jesus, since he himself chose to be identified with them throughout all of history. The little brothers of Jesus are those who suffer from hunger and thirst, the sick, those in prison, etc. They will be a criterion for judgement for all and sundry on the day we must appear before our final judge.

We see the face of the Crucified Jesus reflected in theirs, as they beckon us to conversion and to live according to the criteria of the Kingdom of God. They are the actualization of the Memory of Jesus Crucified because he opted for them, as willed by God, in the course of his historical life at the service of the Kingdom.

The poor appear as the prophetic Memory of the Crucified One, and their lives and existence are proclaiming with a loud cry that the Cross of Jesus has been grossly manipulated to the point of scandal. They reveal to us the scandal of the Cross, because we can see in them the disfigured face of the God of life. When they are denied – not just casually or for the time being, but structurally – access to a life of dignity, then they rise up as a cry for vindication before God, the God of Jesus Crucified.

The Kingdom of God, in its Bible perspective, indicates the active lordship of God, who definitively readjusts human life, beginning where the need is greatest. The Kingdom of God

starts with them because God makes himself their defender, and this only because they are poor, the most needy and neglected in human society.

The Cross of Jesus with his death came about in order to eliminate from the face of the earth and from human society all pain and suffering, especially that pain and suffering which is not the personal responsibility of those who bear it but rather of those who have caused it through abuse. Why else would Jesus show through the story of the Passion as the just man persecuted?

As an actualization of the Memory of the Passion, the poor are insisting that a new life will appear if we but join our effort and allow ourselves to be guided by the criteria of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus rejoiced when he saw and experienced the way the little ones, those who counted for nothing in society, came to believe in the Kingdom of God which he had proclaimed. It is now quite a time since the Spirit of Jesus began moving many of Latin America's poor to stand up and be counted. They have resolved to become masters of their own destiny and have taken it upon themselves to bring this about.

Many of the poor have appropriated to themselves the Gospel of Jesus, perceiving it as focused especially on themselves, as something which in these difficult times actually belongs to them. Once again we see repeated the Gospel paradox and that which Paul treats of in First Corinthians; the poor have come to believe in the God of Jesus and are pooling their efforts as they seek to have the face of the God of life shine upon their struggles for a life of greater dignity, for human rights and for a different sort of society.

They are revealing to us the face of the liberating God. The yearning for liberation of the poor should not be interpreted as one more phenomenon amongst others. Quite the contrary. They have manifested, from a christian point of view, the real value that politics play in the construction of human society.

In fact, many of the poor are evangelizing us. They are the Word of the Cross made reality which is calling our attention and inviting us to solidarity with them, to join with them as realizers of God's plan in our societies.

This reality is a source of religious experience in history; it is an opportunity the Lord Jesus offered us to recognize him as present in our everyday lives. These people are the Memory of the Crucified One, because within them and with them, the Word of the Cross is coming to be believed and experienced as salvation.

A great number of martyrs corroborate this truth. Numerous Christians of either sex and different age and activities have been murdered by those who wield the power of authority in our societies. Through their options and violent deaths, these people manifest the supreme value of following Jesus Crucified!

With their faithfulness unto death, these men and women are revealing the power and the strength of God operating through our human weakness. It is they who confirm the truth of our christian faith, as the Gospel of God and as a particular and very concrete way of living in these lands.



The violent deaths of these Christians reveal to us in an incontrovertible manner the situation of personal and social sin present in our traditionally christian societies. This cannot be seen as a passing novelty, but rather as a clear manifestation of the fact that the Lord continues to lead Christians in our day.

## **CONCLUSION**

The effort we Passionists in Latin America are going through in order to make the Gospel of the Cross our unifying center finds in these lands a broad spectrum of reality in which to bring it about, as well as to live it and reflect on it.

The challenge consists in working out a theology of the Cross from our reality and for the benefit of the same. Because God is widely favoring it, we have been afforded a real chance of joining in with those great voices of the Memory of the Passion in Latin America.

For us, the theology of the Cross is born and grows in the light of the Memory of the Passion, lived and shared with others who already are engaged in actualizing it.

### III

#### FORMS OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

In what ways can we dispose ourselves for living the “Memory of the Passion” today as yesterday? Do we need some concrete forms that historically can help us to live this spirituality of the Crucified? Among all the elements that Christian spirituality and the spiritual teachers provided in the past, we now desire to concretize some more specific elements for ourselves as Passionists.

#### A. THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

##### 1. The Following of Christ

To follow Jesus, to be a disciple of Christ is what qualifies and identifies the Christian. The Antiochians understood it in this way, they were the first to call the followers of Christ, Christians, those that they knew from their city (cf. Acts 11:26). It was thus that the early christian community knew itself and came to identify the christian life as “The Way” (cf. Acts 9:2).

In the New Testament, following and discipleship are terms that establish a special relationship with Jesus. These are normal terms in Judaism indicating the relationship between well-known teachers (rabbi) and their students. The unique relationship of Jesus with his disciples guards the relationship of “Teacher” in relation to the tradition of the “Rabbi” (cf. the erudite and critical study of M. Hengel Following and Charism; Sal terae, Santander 1981).

It is not the disciples of Jesus who choose their teacher. They are “called” (cf. texts regarding the vocations of the apostles: Mk 1:16; 2:14; Lk 5:1ff; Jn. 1:35ff). The call to discipleship does not expire within a transitory time period, until the disciple arrives at being a teacher.

To be a disciple is a permanent reality that establishes a relationship that is tied to the destiny of The Teacher. (cf. Mt 10:24ff).

To be a disciple of Christ constitutes an integration for the post-paschal christian community (cf. Mt 23:8; Jn 8:31ff).

##### 1a. Requirements of Permanent Conversion

Jesus requires of his disciples the same that he proposes to all who draw close to him: conversion in light of the Reign of God that is to come. To leave everything and follow (Lk 4:16-27); to sell all that one has and acquire the precious treasure (cf. Mt 13:45ff) was a universal call.

These same requirements are found in the particular calls. These demands do not have to be taken as an ascetic ideal of an “elite” group. The reason for these demands of Jesus for his followers is the Kingdom of God.

To follow Jesus implies mission, destiny and new promises. It is a new reality that binds the disciple with the person of Jesus. The story of the rich young man (cf. Mk 10:17-22) illustrates this. The young man observed of the commandments, but at the moment that Jesus wished to

offer him the Kingdom (his absolute wealth) the young man allowed his call to fall into the depths of the emptiness of his human plenitude.

The task of the disciples is expressed with images of fishing: “I will make you fishers of people” (Mk 1:17; Lk 5:10). It is the work of committing oneself to all people with the Reign of God. The call does not end with the disciples as beneficiaries of the salvation of the Kingdom of God. The mission of the disciples is at the service of the Kingdom, already present in the power of the works and words of Jesus (cf. Mk 3:13-15).

(Dealing with this theme, cf. G. Bornkamm, Jesus de Nazareth, chapter VI; Sigueme, Salamanca 1982/3a. V.V. Codina, Ser cristiano de America Latina, pages 13-19.

## **Ib. Following and Religious Life**

The following of Christ, which is central to all christian spirituality, is the fundamental norm of religious life (cf. PC 1 and 2a).

Religious life is one form (among others) of being or becoming a disciple of Christ. The following of Christ is not just particular to religious life. However, it is a channel or means of accomplishing it through the three religious vows.

The Church’s magisterium insists on this uniqueness of religious life, while at the same time affirming the necessity of that common source of christian life that is the personal relationship with Jesus (cf. RC, 1969, No. 5 and 31; the preface of the Mass of religious profession in the new Roman Missal, 1970; The “Ordo professionis Religiosae,” 1970, Nos. 57 and 169; ET, 1971, No. 2 and 16; MR, 1978, No. 10; CIC, 1983, cc, 575, 600, 601, 652, #2 and 662; RD, 1984, Nos. 9 and 10, particularly 7 and 8; these two texts are very Passionistic).

The clear line of the Church’s magisterium in these last twenty years is dependent upon the Council of Vatican II, whose key text we find in LG 44. And comes to be more concretized in that which constitutes religious life.

## **2. What Does it Mean to Follow Christ**

To follow Jesus means to turn oneself towards the Lord, to change the direction of one’s life. It denotes a renunciation of Satan and his dominion and a binding of oneself to Christ. (This is the central point of the Catechumenate (renounce Satan) and of Baptism (binding of self to Christ).

This binding to Christ implies an acceptance of the Good News of Jesus, whose joyful fulfillment is in the coming of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus inaugurates through his preaching and fulfills – as initiation and promise – in his Death and Resurrection.

The Gospel holds a special place in all of religious experience. The Good News of salvation is a message filled with hope for a people radically incapable of salvation on their own (cf. Mt 7:11; Mk 7:21-23).

Against this dark background of a broken humanity shines the merciful countenance of Our God. All human pretension vanishes in the face of God (cf. Lk 17:7-10). Herein is contained the adoration, praise and the constant search for the will of God.

## 2a. The Centrality of Jesus

Religious life takes its stand and focus in its fundamental reference to the Gospel. This cannot happen without there being a centrality of the person of Jesus in the individual and communitarian life of the religious. Without the close bonds that unite Jesus to each person, the same Gospel could be reduced to just mere wise sayings. The Gospel, as message of salvation, flows through the life and faith of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom converges the reality of God and man.

Faith in Jesus does not exhaust itself in cultural praise and adoration. He is the “Way” of life in the concreteness of our faith (cf. Jn 14:6), the only true “Teacher” and guide (cf. Mt 23:8-10). All disciples are called, in diverse situations, to be with Him and to commit themselves to his mission (cf. Mk 3:13).

From there comes the necessity to recover the understanding of the closeness of Jesus, the Son of God, who “was made flesh and who lives amongst us,” in all of his historic reality.

The Gospels attest to these realities, that is, the choices, attitudes, reactions, and the way Jesus took part in the concrete circumstances of the history and human living conditions in which he found himself. The Gospels bear witness to Jesus’ faith and the manner in which he lived out his filial relationship with God.

The following of Christ demands that we have “our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection, who for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, endured the cross, disregarding the shamefulfulness of it, and is seated at the right hand of God” (Heb 12:2).

The centrality of Jesus in the life of a Christian and Religious implies:

- Knowledge of the “Praxis of Jesus” and continual advertence to it during our journey through history (For an understanding of the “praxis of Jesus,” cf. G. Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, chapter V; H. Echeagaray, La practica de Jesus, CEP, Lima 1977; A. Nolan, ¿Quien es este hombre?, Sal terrae, Santander 1981, chapters II and III.
- Identification of the criteria through which Jesus discerned the realities of his faith (cf. J. Sobrino, Cristologia desde America Latina, CRT, Mexico 1977/2a., chapter IV; J. Sobrino, Jesus en America Latina, Sal terrae, Santander 1982, chapter III; L. Boff, Jesucristo Liberador, Sal terrae, Santander 1980, chapters 3, 4 and 5).

## 2b. Jesus’ Existential Plan: The Kingdom Of God

Jesus has a projected mission: to announce and realize the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:15). The Kingdom of God enfleshes the prophetic utopia of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Is 65:17ff), the utopia of humankind reconciled with nature, between itself and God. The relation to creation (cf. Gen 1-2) is the symbolic expression of this utopia.

Jesus, from the living of his filiation, with his teaching (parables and discourses) and his gestures (signs and attitudes), was able to concretize in historic setting the contents of the Kingdom of

God in the heart of humankind. He desires one large family of brothers and sisters, who exercise their stewardship over the goods of this earth as children of God (cf. p. 322).

To follow Jesus signifies that one identifies him with the Kingship of God. It is like a treasure or pearl for which one would sell all they had to possess it (cf. Mt 13: 44-46). Love, through its reconciling power, is that which makes possible this project of fraternity.

The great risk is the power of prestige that money grants. Fraternity is built when the children of God distribute the goods and power amongst the most needy, those who are “not able” to participate in the gift of life. The “life” of humankind is the “glory” of God.

Solidarity and service are ways of life. Jesus, the Teacher, defined himself as “Servant” faithful till death, and God ratified the life that exists in this “negating of oneself” with the end result of being for others.

The theme of the “Kingdom of God” is central in commentaries from Latin America, and bibliographies abound. A good summary of this central theme can be found in the line of commentary by L. Boff, as concerns the “Our Father,” as prayer, as attitude, and as way of life (cf. L. Boff, E1 Padrenuestro, Paulinas, Madrid 1982).

## **2c. In His Journey, Jesus Is Tempted With The Triumphalistic Plan Of Seeking Glory Without The Cross**

The design of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, cannot be separated from his person. The Kingdom of God is enfleshed and personified in Jesus, and with Him it is brought closer to humankind. The style, option and form of announcing and living the Kingdom are themselves identified in Jesus with the Kingdom itself.

They have their source in God. Thus, the options of Jesus are not accidentals of the Kingdom: his preference for the simple and poor, his “compassion” for abandoned humankind, his “passion” for life and his rejection of that which oppresses humankind and destroys the countenance of his Father.

Jesus’ nature is seen in contrast to the changing hopes and desires of fascination with glory and power that conceal the human heart. Thus develops the growing opposition to Jesus, that ends in his death.

Throughout the “course” of his mission, Jesus experienced temptation. The Gospels present the temptations of Jesus at the beginning of his public life in a fabricated manner. Satan’s proposal did not address itself directly towards the realization of Jesus’ mission, but rather yet towards the means and manner of its accomplishment.

The manner proposed by Satan is congruous with human desires and the corrupt way in which society functions. It is a form of operation totally opposite to what Jesus understands through His Father.

The Gospels report Satan’s insinuations: the people, enraptured with the signs that Jesus performs, desire to make him a political leader (king). His friends beg him to go to Judea, and, through his signs and wonders, come to be known there (cf. Jn 7:4) Peter seeks to prevent Jesus from assuming the danger of going up to Jerusalem (cf. Mt 16:23). The Jews are willing to deny

their unbelief, if Jesus is able to come down from the Cross. This is the temptation of glory, that so much fills the desires of humankind, such a suffering love is not released until death.

Concerning the theme of the temptations, particularly in the Church, in the mystery and amongst the religious leadership, the beautiful commentary of C. Mesters, about the third song of the Servant of Yahweh, would be quite helpful (cf. Is 50:4-9), in Mision del Pueblo que sufre (CLAR, No.14, Perspectivas, Bogota 1983; pages 51-70).

## **2d. Radical Demands Of The Gospel**

Through knowledge of God and experience of the human reality, Jesus will impose demands on his followers, which in the Synoptics appear to be unusually radical.

The demands of renouncement (cf. Mk 8:34-38) cannot be undertaken, unless one lives them, or unless one is totally bound to the person of Jesus. "For my account," in the words of Jesus, it is necessary to deny oneself and take up the Cross.

This ideal option that Jesus gives will cause misunderstanding amongst family and friends, abandonment of goods, and lead to the understanding that the fate of the disciple will be similar to that of "The Teacher" (cf. Mt 10:24).

The demand of renunciation, of taking up the Cross, in the first place, affirms the priority of the person of Jesus. These demands affirm that before Jesus and his bond to humanity, all that has worth, even the most basic such as physical life, closest relationships and goods, all must yield their place of importance before Jesus.

This radical message of the Gospel only has meaning in the ideal of binding oneself totally and loving Jesus unconditionally.

## **3. Mary of Nazareth, Mother and Virgin, Is for Us the Example of the Faithful Follower of the Plan of God in Collaboration with Her Son Jesus**

Whoever listens to the call of Jesus, "If you wish to be my disciple, take up your Cross and follow me." Whoever after hearing these words follows in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, must then look towards Mary's words: "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2:5).

Present in the first community at Jerusalem, Mary is pointing the Way. Mary knows it, because she traveled it first. Her journey from Nazareth (=Incarnation) to Jerusalem (=Cross) is model and example for those who listen to the Word which demands renunciation, that one may be able to discover the Will of God in the midst of darkness and contradiction.

"It is natural that Faith lives in the twilight, creating light in the measure in which humankind receives and abandons itself to the plan of God. This is our Journey and this was also the narrow path that Mary followed. Faith coexists with perplexity, but it can never be substituted with doubt. Mary never doubted" (L. Boff).

On this "narrow path" three important moments in the life of Mary can be seen. They are moments of renunciation or rupture, but they are also moments in the deepening of the "yes" that she uttered in Nazareth.

### **The wedding of Cana (Jn 2:1-12)**

In the context of a wedding, sign of intimacy and alliance between God and humankind, Mary showed herself to be a woman of Faith, who, like the poor of Yahweh, awaited the coming of the Messiah.

She knew the sorrows of her people, their sufferings and the situation in which they found themselves. She realized that the Lord would bring to pass a new age of Love and joy. Even though she did not know the exact time.

Through the sign that Jesus works, he renews the Hope of those who are awaiting the Messiah, even though the “exact hour” had not yet arrived. His “hour” will be that of the Cross. Salvation draws closer.

Mary, of humble heart, ponders this “sign,” and moves from her Messianic Faith to Faith in Jesus. Jesus in his life will fulfill God’s promises to his people. At Cana of Galilee, Mary begins her following of Jesus. “She puts her Faith in that Son who makes the promises of God his own” (A. Rouet).

### **Who are my mother and my brothers? (Mk 3: 31-35)**

Jesus acknowledges a new kinship. The former, that of the Old Alliance, only has meaning in light of the New.

To belong to the family of Jesus means that one has accepted his proposal and lives according to the demands of the Kingdom. A new rupture in the life of Mary. Within the new age that Jesus heralds, faithfulness to the Word, given and received, has pre-eminence over human ties.

Mary is called to this rupture: from being Mother of Jesus she becomes “disciple of Jesus.”

### **There is your Mother (Jn 19: 25-27)**

The anticipated “hour” of Cana. The “hour” of glory. Also the hour of total surrender. Jesus “gave his Mother and his friend” (A. Rouet). Jesus pours out the new wine of Love and joy. Mary participates in this surrender, renouncing anew and handing over that which God had given her, the Son. She “dies” as mother. She who gave life to Jesus, now gives life to the new community: “There is your Son.”

### **Faithfulness**

Following and discipleship signified a Way of Faith and fidelity for Mary. “She lived Faith in the twilight.”

To be faithful was a battle that Mary fought all during her life. “We would do well to understand that the family of Nazareth was composed of people who valiantly confronted all of life’s difficulties, thanks to a total submission to the supreme will of God” (L. Boff).

In Nazareth, upon pronouncing her “yes,” without full understanding of all involved in that call, Mary placed herself at the “service” of the coming of Jesus. This “yes” changed her life. Mary did not hold back. She passed all control to God, for it was he who had been promised: the Son.

The twilight hour, time of “loneliness,” before the history of that Son begins, that will also be her own history. A history that she receives herself, but also a history that she herself molds.

Mary lived out her faith in a threefold manner:

- to the Word: She pondered these things in her heart.
- to the God of History: “Because she herself remembered the promises that God had made on the behalf of His people” (Lk 2:55).
- to Jesus: In Cana she accepted his entire plan. In Jerusalem she actuates the birth of Jesus’ new community. A community that makes itself “sign” of the presence of Jesus and his “plan.”

### **At the service of God’s Plan**

With her “yes” she put herself at the service of God’s Plan. Faith in Jesus was for her the manner in which her life and the life of her people would be given fulfillment in the promises of God. “Blessed is she who believed that the promises made by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1: 45).

The promises to which Elizabeth alludes do not only refer to the present life situation. The “promises” remind us of the Old Testament and of God’s promises to his people, which was revealed and announced through the prophets. The “yes” changes the course of history, because without it, the poor, the patient, those who cry, the pure of heart, those who hunger and thirst for justice, and the persecuted would not be called blessed.

With one ear open to the heart of her people and the other to the Word of God, she places herself at his service, always pondering these two dimensions in her act of listening and performing.

“She is the true woman of faithfulness proper to all of the greatest prophets. In the same way that she shows her faithfulness to God, she remains equally faithful to the needs of her people. Faithfulness to the one implies faithfulness to the other, since the one who is deaf to the cries of the poor is also dumb before God. Mary raises her voice and says: Praise God and intercedes for the people. Extolling the mercy of God, she begs him to manifest himself as liberator of the lowly and hungry” (L. Boff).

### **Mode of synthesis**

In the history of the Passionist Congregation, Mary is present from its roots, pointing the Way towards her Son: “Do whatever He tells you.”

We cannot examine the Crucified without taking a similar look at Mary:

She is the teacher who instructs us about how to grasp the mystery of Calvary. She teaches us how to forge the contemplative spirit and understand the wisdom of the Cross.



To remain at the foot of the Cross today with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, demands a commitment to her people and her history. The demand of “following” is found in living out that threefold fidelity to the Word, the Plan of God, and to Jesus Crucified in the people of Latin America.

Today the continent needs men and women like Mary, “who are able to assume her own sorrow and that of the people, and to convert them with the Paschal Spirit. This demands personal conversion, a source of solidarity with those who share this suffering, and a challenge to creative initiative and imagination” (Puebla 279).

## IV

### LIFE IN OUR PASSIONIST COMMUNITIES

#### **A. FRATERNAL CHARITY IS OUR OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTIC JUST AS IT IS IN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND AS IT WAS IN OUR FIRST PASSIONIST COMMUNITIES**

Religious life has always had as a prototype and an ideal in the first Christian Communities. By radically adopting the Gospel it proposed to follow the Divine Teacher by living in community in order to spread the Good News of the Kingdom.

Like so many other founders, Paul of the Cross, in proposing a style of life for the first Passionist Communities, cited quotes from the Acts of the Apostles that made reference to the Jerusalem Community: “The multitude of the faithful were of one heart and one spirit” (Acts 4, 32-35). “They were constantly praying” (Acts 1, 14). From the letters of the Apostles, Paul of the Cross recaptured elements that showed the virtues which ought to be practiced in our communities: kindness, patience, humility, mercy, of fraternal charity and union in God’s holy love which makes the members of the community united, agreeable and peaceful.

Paul gave such emphasis to fraternity in his communities that in his final testament he left his companions the following recommendations: “Above all I insistently recommend the observance of that most holy memory left by Jesus to his own: ‘In this they will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another’.”

For the Passionist, the historical following of Jesus Crucified requires the choice to life in community. This community united in the name of the Crucified One, and around the Crucified One, must be a school of love. This will be evidenced by the lived fraternal experience and the spread of this love to the rest of the brethren in the historical time and space in which the community is situated.

Community life in our Latin American reality today requires fraternal love in which each and every one of the members of the community feels and is recognized as subject of the redeeming Passion of Christ, or in other words: Remember, we can celebrate the Passion today by making present the saving deeds of God through communitarian actions. God’s saving deeds thus incarnated are the deliverance of the Continent. Through such experiences the Passionist will express them through fraternal love manifested in acceptance and mutual respect, in solidarity and participation.

Acceptance and mutual respect: In a society where the spirit of competition, lack of respect for the other and depersonalization dilute humanity in the masses, the Passionist Community must show itself as a light of hope. It must bring life to an interpersonal relationship where it will effect acceptance, respect and will give back to the individual the right of accepting himself as a person for the common good.

Solidarity in community: Passionist Community life is not based on bonds of relationship, nor is it limited to a simple coexistence of companions, but it is above all respect between mature men and women to live effectively and effectively the Gospel love expressed in acts of mutual help.

Solidarity, so absent in our society, makes us carry our daily burdens along with our brother in community, in order to extend this solidarity to the Church and to all of society (Gal 6:2). This implies overcoming one's own comfortableness, acceptance of one's own limitations and the limitations of others, and a communitarian growth by which a process of personal integration is established, fortified in faith and lived in love.

### **Acceptance, solidarity and mutual respect require:**

Faith in the other: This is a theological faith. that does not make the Passionist Religious a naive and passive person who depends only on Divine Providence. It is important that he believes that the members of a community are not just there, consequently or merely there by simple human choice, but because the Lord has a plan for them. The common life will test this faith many times. Each one of us needs the love and understanding of his brother in community, but the Passionist is convinced that Christ is present in each and every person.

Fraternal correction: This is an evangelical element of our life which implies death and resurrection. All correction, in order to have a Paschal dimension, should be addressed directly to the person that must be corrected because otherwise criticism becomes defamatory and instead of helping, it becomes an obstacle to good community relationship.

Participation: So that a climate of peace might rule in the community, it becomes necessary that the various jobs be taken on with availability and responsibility. While conveniences can hurt the community, too much activity can create physical and psychic imbalance that can damage the relationship.

Good humor: Never again can the austerity of a community be measured by the apparent cohesion of its members. True authenticity generates charity and charity generates harmony. Paul of the Cross insisted that "no one be admitted to the Congregation who was introverted, unsociable and rude in nature so that those who were admitted could be offered the guarantee of a successful and effective contribution to fraternal communion" (F. Giorgini, course on Passionist Spirituality, Ponta Grossa, 1980).

Good humor is indispensable especially when the Passionist deals with his brothers burdened by old age and suffering. Joy is contagious; when the Passionist witnesses, by his joy, that the passing of years have not taken away the generosity of his gifts.

Participation: Participation was one of the characteristics of the first Christian Community.

In the experience of our Passionist life in Latin America, participation has an extensive and an intensive sense. It embraces material and spiritual goods. It joins the members of the same community and the communities themselves. Participation unites and strengthens the various Passionist families active on the Continent: Joined with the suffering people, they want to, like them, participate in this Passion moment in which they make the resurrection present in a very real way.

Participation in the Word: Paul of the Cross recommended constant meditation of Sacred Scripture to his religious especially those texts referring to the Passion of Jesus. The word of God through lectures, study and community reflection should be undertaken not only to deepen our knowledge but above all as a means to live, in a better way, Christ's love in fraternal charity.

One aspect of our participation in the Word is by dialogue, an efficient way of relationship, which facilitates the processing of community projects and revision of life always with a goal for the common good and better service to our brother.

Sharing of the Bread: From the beginning of our Congregation the sharing of bread had as its high point, and its most excellent symbolism, the breaking of the Eucharistic bread where the Word of God wants to share his life with humanity so that all might be one with him. The sharing of bread is not limited only to a Eucharist encounter but continues twenty-four hours a day made manifest by fraternal charity.

True participation is a response of love, of solidarity to the historical reality of each age. The Christian Community celebrated this love in fellowship and divided its goods with the needy. Paul of the Cross encouraged his religious to live a life of fraternal charity and this would be lived within the context of their times. The religious pledged themselves to be in solidarity with the poor and with sinners, sharing material and spiritual goods with them. It didn't concern them that they set aside a portion of their scarce food to lessen the hunger of the least favored ones. The theological motivation which impelled Paul and his first communities was the dignity of the human person having as its basis the Incarnate Word.

Living in social circumstances in which the majority of the population is marginalized, being denied a share in the common good even to the point of being denied the fruit of its own labor, the Latin American communities want to spread their fraternal charity by living their charism among so many brothers and sisters marked by suffering. This is brought about by involvement and commitment to oppressed people, by living together with abandoned children, the hopeless, the sick and so many other personifications of human suffering in Latin America.

## **B. THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS IN LIGHT OF THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION (The Specific Passionist Vow)**

“The consecrated life, like a new and special deepening of baptismal consecration, is a joyful celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We live it as a particular testimony of the Paschal mystery with everything that it brings of serenity, of the cross and of joyful hope, or it has no meaning” (Cardinal Pironio).

The Passionist religious, as a follower of the Crucified One, takes on the consecrated life by professing the Evangelical Counsels in light of the Memory of the Passion. This option of living in community is above all a personal and conscious response to the inspiration of the Spirit that moves the heart of this man, of this woman, proposing “to make Christ's attitude his own.”

Human and religious maturity suggests that the Passionist be mindful that his act of consecration, far from being static, is something dynamic, a part of the process of life, Passion and Resurrection. It also requires that the religious take on the annihilation of the Crucified One from the self-emptying to which the Word submitted himself in his incarnation, his life and redeeming mission among humanity for the glory of the Father. The manifestation of this glory in death will bring life.

The character of the Passionist Community is outlined in the unity of its contemplative dimension in which it takes on the cross as a way of prayer and of its active expression in which the goal is to proclaim the Kingdom of God through the Crucified One. This character becomes

more legible the more we take on and live the Evangelical Counsels in light of the fourth vow, recalling the three dimensions of our religious profession: Consecration, Renunciation, and Annunciation. That is: the Passionist takes on Christ's attitude in which he gave himself unconditionally to the love of the Father (consecration); Christ lived faithful to this love to the end, emptying himself as the Son of God, taking on the human reality allowing himself to be annihilated as a man (renunciation); so that the Good News of the Kingdom would be made present to our humanity (annunciation).

## **1. The Vows: a Memory of the Scandal of the Cross**

When expressing the Theology of Religious Life we are accustomed to use a language of "perfection." Thus, it can be shocking to say that through the vows the religious is identified with the Suffering Servant, "despised and abandoned by man, a man subject to pain, familiar with infirmity, like a person from whom all hide their face" (Isaiah 53:3).

Furthermore, for the follower of Christ Crucified the vows he professed have this as their first meaning. They are the concrete way of profoundly becoming incarnate like Jesus, in a world of sin, in the reverse of history.

To take on oneself the misery of the world, as your own, is a long way from certain types of renewal that are proposed as ways to "personal fulfillment."

The celibate offers his heart in order to gather there the pain of loneliness and isolation in which so many of his brothers and sisters live, for example, the frustration of so many broken marriages, the humiliation of beaten and raped women. It is the painful experience of evil which the Lord went through that made Him so sensitive to persons like Magdalene.

The poor man offers his life in order that through it there might pass the poverty, prostration and marginalization which affects the immense majority of people and entire countries. He takes them on like a scandal, like something that ought not to be. Moreover, he freely enters into the world. He descends to the underworld of poverty because that is the place where Jesus became flesh for those who follow him.

Obedience accepts the condition of slavery, not in the figurative sense, but in the real sense of slavery from which wide sectors of humanity suffer. The obedient one offers his personal story as a place of a painful experience where he is inhibited to decide for himself. He is in fraternal solidarity with those who always see their own legitimate aspirations being postponed and with those who lack a voice in the ordering of society.

The religious is a man of the underworld. This is the environment to which he was invited by his Lord when He said: "If you want to be my disciple you must take up your cross every day, deny yourself and follow Me."

The gesture of Paul of the Cross in kissing the sore of a poor man who crossed his path is a gesture of profound incarnation; it is a prophetic and testimonial gesture. The religious is the one who kisses the everyday sores of the world, the wounds of history. He does not approve of these wounds but he kisses them, because that is where God is incarnated and from where his wisdom and power spring up.

## **2. The Vows: a Memory of Contradiction**

Through religious vows we take on the sin of the world, but without approving the sin of the world. Because to take on is not to approve. Religious life is a criticism of the world, it is a living denunciation of evil in all of its forms. It is opposition to idolatries, to the big idolatries that tend to separate God from the breast of history.

The celibate is an existential prophecy against the idolatry of sex that dehumanizes and breaks interpersonal communion.

The poor man proposes to be a testimony of the true worth of the goods of this world, upsetting society in which the unjust distribution of riches is one of the main sources of division, hate and suffering (Const. 3).

The obedient man takes on the mission of resisting in his own life the idolatry of power that is the cause for the existence of the powerful and the oppressed.

## **3. The Vows: a Memory of the Paschal Meaning**

Baptism submerges us in the Paschal dynamic of the death and resurrection of Jesus and consecrates us. By this consecration we reaffirm and live more fully the profession of religious life (Const. 7).

If the vows are not lived with a Paschal dynamism, they do not answer the Evangelical Counsels. If the process against sin in the world, in the heart of the religious, does not give “new wine” then the vows do not constitute a memorial of Jesus’ Passion.

The Paschal dimension of the cross is effectively remembered when the religious uproots the bad experiences that gather in his life. A bitter, resentful, self sufficient religious can never be a memorial of the Passion.

If the vows do not show the path from death to life, they do not have any significant message for the “crucified” of the world. They would be more a manifestation of the cross of history but not the cross of history taken on by Jesus.

The experience of the vows ought to be a testimony of the defeat of the cross. It should be a testimony that the power of God is greater than the power of the cross (2 Cor 4:7-18).

(This part on the vows, scandal, contradiction and the Paschal meaning of the cross were taken from the “Memoria Passionis” in the Constitutions by Eugene Delaney, C.P.)

## **C. PRAYER: A MEETING WITH GOD AS ABSOLUTE LOVE**

Being disciples and teachers of prayer is what unifies our life and makes the feelings and attitudes of Jesus our own.

St. Paul of the Cross chose this life because of his experience of God. Absorbed by the experience of being profoundly loved by him, he decided to dedicate himself totally to the Lord. He formed a Congregation where prayer occupied the central place. Prayer can be experienced in

a very particular way; it is a listening to God and to his designs in our life and in all of history. It is the discovery of the person of Christ as the unifying beginning of all and to feel this divine person to be really important for our existence. Therefore we meet with this divine person in an “I - Thou” relationship.

Prayer has an eminent value, that is an intimacy with God as our one and only Lord. Such intimacy is indispensable in order to obtain our personal liberation, which is a condition necessary to bring about liberation in history through our commitment to evangelization. Today more than ever, we are being asked to demonstrate the absoluteness of God in our life. However, in order that there be such a demonstration, we should have truly encountered and experienced God as absolute love. This is the point of departure, and the point of arrival, of our journey, as it was for Christ. It is Jesus who joins our life and shapes us to make his feelings our own. This happens in our moments of prayer and contemplation. Prayer is an experience of God, be it in the silence of a meeting with the Lord, be it in communion and participation in community prayer, or be it in listening and participation in the life of our people.

In this way prayer becomes a welcoming of God’s love as the absolute who conquers the Passionist’s existential being. The definitive and ultimate sense of our life is not in us, in our past efforts, in our projects and wishes, but it is in him who called us through Christ: God is then experienced as an absolute. “Only He, Christ is the stable, principle and fixed center of the mission that God Himself has entrusted to man in a world of opposition”(Redemptor Hominis, #11).

Our Passionist vocation emphasizes how urgent it is that we be men of prayer centered on the contemplation of Christ Crucified. The process “remembering” with its many meanings – scandal, contradiction and resurrection – constitutes for us, as for Paul of the Cross, the fundamental basis of all our experience of God. It is in the contemplation of Christ Crucified, the model and teacher of prayer, that the Passionist once again becomes the disciple and teacher of prayer. In this light prayer is then conceived as being formed by the thoughts and attitudes of Christ. This is a never-ending task. In this way, the Passionist is always a disciple of prayer. The “Christification” of our time will only be completed in the resurrection. Meanwhile, the area of prayer is all encompassing. Paul of the Cross dedicated approximately five hours a day to this task. His experience consisted of filling himself with God in order to bring God to humanity and to bring humankind to God. The person of intense prayer lets himself “flow to God” through his life.

The individual experience of God’s will also has its communitarian dimension. Passionist life, as Paul of the Cross conceived it, has this strong characteristic. Moments of prayer are precisely moments of relationship in which the religious participate in the most profound moment of religious life: spiritual intimacy with God.

This relationship facet is important because it strengthens the bonds of friendship, of reciprocal trust, it promotes reconciliation, deepens faith, helps the community spirit to grow, maintains the community in a state of continual conversion, is a renewing element for each person and for everyone as it is found in its environment. The spirit of the Lord will bring each one, and the entire community, to strong moments of prayer around the Word and the Eucharist. Such moments give life to the community and its ministry. The Passionist Community, a school of prayer, must also have persons who are dedicated to prayer.

Our houses ought to be a place where people can experience God. The people who seek us out ought to learn to enter into the process of listening to God and of opening oneself to the influence of God who passes through the life of each and every Christian. "It is part of the liberating evangelization to help people, the poor, to advance in prayer" (Segundo Galilea).

A praying community is one in which the religious live with a personal openness to God and to their brothers through an attentive and assiduous reading of Sacred Scripture, through the signs of the times and by giving testimony about the Paschal Mystery through a committed life in solidarity with the needs of the poor and needy.

Whether personal or communitarian, prayer looks for the most profound meaning of life and sees its events as beginning with God. In a continent like ours, where humanly speaking there exists little reason to have hope, prayer gives us a certainty of faith, a sense of the resurrection, it is the announcement of God's fidelity. It is not prayer that makes us trust in ourselves, but it leads us "to involve ourselves in real life and in the real life experience of reality" (Puebla 727).

Love for our neighbor, found in the experience of God, brings us to consider our brothers' situation. Praying is not fleeing from the world, but it is the process of entering into the reality in which we live. In this way we continue discovering the face of the Lord in the heart of humankind, the manifestations of his love in the middle of life's happenings.

It is important to experience prayer as an evangelical happening in our community. Prayer which dialogues with the Father and with the reality of the world perceives many causes of suffering: personal, social and structural. Prayer brings us to solidarity, to a commitment to fight and annihilate the causes that produce such pain. The man of prayer has a cause for which it is worth giving up his life; it is the cause of the Kingdom. Prayer brings about the Kingdom of God and its justice knowing that the rest will come on its own. The one who prays knows how to risk his life for the Kingdom. To pray is to listen to the cry of humanity that suffers and to be committed to it. Prayer is the process of listening to God, to discover God's will, and to give one's life for Jesus and his cause.

In our I-Thou relationship with Christ, this "Thou" receives a concrete face in the poor, the marginalized and the crucified of today. So it has a praxis of charity in a personal relationship with God. This is biblically based on the preference of God for the poor and above all in the identification that Jesus in his person makes with them by taking on himself everything that people, knowingly or not, did to the little ones (Matt 25). The poor person, then, becomes the sacrament of God, that is, a sign of the meeting of humanity with God and of God with humanity.

The systems of human coexistence are created by the freedom of social groups and maintained by those who generate situations of poverty, of exploitation, and of marginalization, which are in complete opposition to God's plan for humanity. Therefore, they are an experience of the suffering and sometimes agonized God. The experience of God, beginning with the oppressed of Latin America, is not one that enjoys gentleness and the sweet tranquility of a prepared peace. On the contrary it frequently takes on the shape of anger, exploitation, indignation, sufferings, and the impotence of weakness before the power that oppresses. It is an experience which is contrary to a very common spiritual tradition that has reduced the experience of God to one of peace, joy and order.



The experience of God by the exploited poor becomes for us a source of restlessness and of sufferings of passion before destructive and powerful structures. It is like the experience of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, the martyr of the agony and of the cross, who fought to the end for his mission of announcing the Kingdom. It is therefore a typical Passionist experience.

#### **D. PENITENCE AS A RESOURCE FOR PERSEVERING IN A COMMITMENT WITH OTHERS**

##### **As a road of Reconciliation**

##### **As a permanent Conversion**

Life in our communities, as the following of Jesus and the mystery of the cross, supposes the acceptance of an unconditional fidelity to one's call, even to the final consequences.

Today having overcome some dualistic manichaeistic and masochistic christian asceticism, it seems obsolete to talk about ascetic exercises, penitential practices and mortification. Still, there is not, and there will never be, overcome the need for evangelical self-denial. "The law of renunciation belongs to the same essence of the Christian life, and in a special way to the vocation united to the profession of the Evangelical Counsels" (Redemptionis Donum 10). One must try to find a new praxis of a vital and mature asceticism that responds to the new circumstances of the human and Christian life.

The end purpose of asceticism is to open us ever more to God and to our neighbor by overcoming our egotism. Exercise and discipline require more than just perfection, but rather the opening and constant availability in one's commitment to others. It is a road that offers us the possibility of dying little by little so that others may have life as Jesus did. It is a renunciation of ourselves fully in Christ Crucified and Resurrected; and this requires us to contemplate this Christ who becomes Redeemer from the first moment of his incarnation until His death on the cross, in his experience of annihilation. He humbles himself by taking on the condition of a slave, of a marginalized person, being despised by all. It is inevitable that we who serve this Christ renounce ourselves and take up our cross each day (Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34).

It is necessary to allow ourselves to get involved in this annihilation of Christ, thereby entering into his life and his death. It is this process that ought to be normal on the journey of conversion. This should be included in the life of the Passionist. This process bears the fruits of the Spirit which are contrary to those of the flesh, and it assumes renunciation, denial, effort, struggle, and asceticism, in short we overcome the egocentric reality that exists among us. "Those who belong to Jesus Christ crucify the flesh with its passions and appetites" (Gal 5:24).

Faced with overcoming ancient ascetical models and with the evangelical urgency of this same asceticism, we ask ourselves where and how to find new solutions that respond to today's world. Above all, we need a new vision that does not deny the past but is open to the changes of the present, and is willing to be challenged by differences that this vision necessarily brings with it. All human creativity brings with it a note of precariousness. "It is the Crucified One who questions us, who appeals to us and invites us to permanent conversion" (Curitiba, 1982, page 14).

Community life in itself asks a continual conversion of us from individualism and egotism to openness to others and this requires of us a continual asceticism. Sincere and selfless apostolic

service also brings with it a great deal of resignation, denial and suffering. We must try to implant the Kingdom of God with its values and demands into the social structures by struggling against all that is death for humanity and by promoting all that is life.

For us living in Latin America, the existence of entire populations and miserable individuals is an insistent appeal to bring about a conversion of thought and of behavior through our living in solidarity with marginalized groups. Such a conversion is not authentic if it does not gradually bring us to a solidarity that makes us participate in their struggles and hopes. Try to find concrete individual and communitarian ascetical practices that allow all of us to participate in the life of those that live permanently in devastating conditions.

Our Congregation has always been held as a Congregation of great austerity, a Penitential Congregation. With the passing of time it has lost a little of this characteristic, and this appears to have happened because the real reasons for our doing penance were not given. What can make us return to the values of penitence will be the consideration of age old practices of the Church that always bring us to look for a greater conversion through acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We should see how Albert Beckhauser presents such practices in his book, Celebrating the Christian Life (Ed. Vozes, Brazil, 1985, second edition).

The Ash Wednesday liturgy which opens the Lenten Season announces the Gospel in which Our Lord talks about alms, prayer and fasting (Matt 6:1-8, 16-18). In short, this text presents us with a program of conversion. And it is in this context of conversion in which the rites of praying, fasting and almsgiving are put since they form the principle relationships of humanity:

- Relationship with God (children - obedience - faith);
- Relationship with one's neighbor (brothers and sisters, - poverty - hope);
- Relationship with creation (Lord - Chastity - Charity).

## **1. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER**

Our entire life ought to be a prayer, that is, a communication of the Divine in us. Prayer constitutes an opening to God, to one's neighbor and to the world; a yes of welcome, of joy and of conformity. In the theological virtue of faith we say "yes" to the Father in obedience; we always try to situate ourselves within our vocation and our mission. It is in prayer that man better develops his relationship as that of a child with God, who reveals himself as Father.

The Church calls the faithful to pray fervently so that their whole life may be transformed into a prayer. Recalling Christ who prays to the Father in the desert, the Church becomes the extension of Christ praying among men. In this way the Church lives in a penitential attitude, since prayer constitutes the greatest expression of conversion. For this reason, Paul of the Cross insists on the practice of prayer.

## **2. THE PRACTICE OF FASTING**

If prayer touches man's relationship with God, fasting celebrates his relationship with creation in the virtue of hope. In his relationship with nature man is called to be free, to be lord of creation. However, many times nature is enslaved. Because of this the Church invites man to achieve an expression of freedom and of respect in relation to the creative goods through fasting. The custom of fasting has no meaning in itself but in what it signifies. In the action of eating and

drinking, the individual possesses and takes things. Many times, by possessing them he becomes a slave to them. Because of this, food and drink become a symbol of all that surrounds man.

To fast is to abstain from a little food or drink. It is to establish the correct relationship of the person with nature. The attitude of freedom and respect before food becomes a symbol of freedom and respect for all that it involves and from that which is able to enslave us: material goods, qualities, opinions, ideas, attachments and so on.

Fasting means to make room for God, the neighbor and lasting values. The Christian is called to live in an attitude of harmony with nature, using goods for his growth in God.

### **3. THE PRACTICE OF ALMSGIVING**

Almsgiving celebrates the relationship of man with his neighbor in the theological virtue of charity. Almsgiving means to give freely, to give without interest in receiving, to give without egotism, without asking for recompense, in an attitude of compassion. In this he imitates God himself in the mystery of creation and Jesus Christ in the mystery of redemption.

Man has received everything from his Creator. Now if God gives freely, and if man has been created in the likeness of God, and if Christ gave totally then he will also be capable of giving freely.

So when the Church calls the faithful to give alms, she commemorates the one who practiced almsgiving par excellence: Jesus Christ. The Church invites man to the attitude of opening up to one's neighbor with generosity and unselfishness. When this occurs alms begin to signify this attitude of free gift. This is true not only of material goods but time, interest, qualities, welcome, and acceptance. By the celebration of alms, the Church commemorates Christ's generosity who gave his life for his friends and makes Christ present giving himself to his own brothers and sisters, who form his body.

So, when the Church invites the faithful to practice almsgiving, it knows very well that it is not in the giving of the alms itself that she is going to resolve social problems and bring about the advancement of humanity, but rather she knows that it is by what the alms signifies that she is going to bring about a true advancement for humanity.

We then discover that in the practice of almsgiving the attitude of conversion is contained in relationship to one's neighbor.

### **E. SOLITUDE: AS AN OPPORTUNITY OF MEETING WITH THE CRUCIFIED**

#### **As a Prophetic Distance**

#### **As an Ability to Serve the Brethren**

Solitude as a spiritual state becomes necessary for any type of spirituality. Being an evil in itself (if we take into account the social nature of man) solitude finds its meaning in as far as it allows man to encounter the absolute and himself.

By sketching the trinomial, life of prayer, life of solitude and apostolic life, Paul of the Cross defined the physiognomy of the Passionist Community as being active and contemplative. This

then did not come from theory, but from a life experience that protected him as a great apostle and mystic of his age.

From solitude, Paul of the Cross comes to recapture the richness of his experience of God, with himself and with his brother. In it the founder lived the experience of his encounter with the Crucified and from it received strength and guidance for his apostolic mission and took the basic principles to live the brotherhood.

Our Latin American Passionist Communities, following the steps of Paul of the Cross, understand that solitude, in order to have meaning, needs solid motivation. So one is not able to seek only an exterior setting (place), but needs to be bound by the interior setting (state of spirit). This means that the Passionist takes on solitude as something that would permit his meeting with Christ Crucified; it would give him prophetic distance and qualify him more for his brother's service.

### **As an opportunity of meeting with the Crucified**

For the Passionist, solitude is not simply withdrawing from the world, but a personal or intimate encounter with the Crucified to whom he is consecrated in the service of the Kingdom. In solitude, the Passionist, strips himself of whatever right and preconceived ideas, and places his "rationality" in the "reason" of the Crucified in order to get the "wisdom" that comes from the cross.

With such nakedness, the Passionist takes on the attitude of the first Christians, who not looking for miracles, nor the wisdom of men, lived the folly of the cross, putting their faith and hope in the resurrection. It is in solitude that he lives the powerful moments of the contemplative dimensions of his existence, and that in the person of the Crucified achieves his encounter with the Father and the Holy Spirit, drawing light and strength, so that bravely and in solidarity he can act together with his brothers in community and with the entire people of God.

### **Prophetic Distance**

Paul of the Cross was not an isolated person, but a man of the Church of his time. He served as a model for those who were ready to grasp and understand God's voice that comes from the silence of the Crucified and must be announced to the people.

It is without a doubt that in solitude the Passionist finds the condition and the time to discern the will of God. Here it is time to decide the road to be taken so that the life of the people be incarnated in his prayer, and his prayer be the life of the people projected in the life of God. In this sense, solitude becomes an indispensable condition for our life to be consistent and efficacious in the Church. Paul of the Cross considered it indispensable that Passionists mature in the message of the cross by prolonged stays at the foot of the Crucified. Our solitude in the retreats would be sterile if it did not produce a critical distance "to appraise more objectively secular trends and standards" (Const. 54) which makes the maturation of the prophetic word in preaching possible.

### **Service of One's Brother**

In order to have depth, communication should be the result of one solitude communicating to another, or in other words, communication is only possible if the speaker and listener talk out of interior abundance in order to mutually enrich themselves.

In our Latin American reality, the one who speaks in the name of God, should necessarily have the abundance of the Spirit to commit himself seriously to the suffering and oppressed individual, and in solidarity with suffering humanity to live the experience of death in hope of the resurrection.

The Passionist in his life of solidarity with his brothers in community and the rest of his brothers and sisters, especially the most needy, needs to live out the resulting synthesis of man facing God and of God preexisting humanity in order to measure better the seriousness of sin and the social injustice with which we coexist.

For the Passionist, solitude becomes a meeting with God and with the transforming action of the Spirit. It is the richness of, and co-participation in community life, and in the apostolic works, in the denunciation of the unrealized will of God and in the announcement of the truth that brings justice and peace. In this solitude, in the light of the Crucified, the Passionist likewise reads the history he himself is making and experiencing, and owes himself to be interpellated by the demands of the Gospel. He allows the voice of God that is to be carried to man grow in himself. These two movements are not isolated, but form a synthesis in which they seek to complete the Passion of Christ in the Passion of Man, and the discovery of the suffering face of Christ in the face of the brother, in order to make the Resurrection present in the unfolding process of life.

## THE PASSION CONSIDERED IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### A. UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS OF JESUS

- Negative aspect (death)
- Affirmation of life

The Cross of Christ is the very core of the Paschal Mystery. Christ raised high on the Cross draws to himself the people of all times. Though he died ignominiously on the Cross, he was raised up through the power of the resurrection, wherein God's might was displayed in all its magnitude, and so became the unique path to salvation for all individuals.

The Cross viewed down through history in this aspect of salvation is the axis around which turns the whole plan of salvation. Through his death upon the Cross, Jesus restores to mankind the birthright of freedom and grace lost through the sin of the first man, at the moment he made the decision to take his destiny into his own hands independent of his creator. Through the mystery of the Cross man once again can accept the invitation God ever holds out to him to share the riches of his liberality.

From the very moment Jesus assumed the risk of carrying the Cross, that moment in which he freely submitted to the will of the Father to show his infinite love, he becomes the absolute Saviour of all humanity, and so becomes the path to salvation for all mankind.

It is necessary to understand the Cross in its total dimensions, not only as a symbol of life, but also of death. It is a symbol of death insofar as it looks to all those things that shackle man and prevent him from responding affirmatively to God's holy love. It is a symbol of life insofar as it manifests the power of God, whose greatest expression is found in the resurrection of Christ, tragically put to death on a tree. Viewed thus, it is not possible to consider the Cross apart from the resurrection as two separate entities. By these we can define, firstly, the poverty of man's condition which, weighed down by sin and its consequences, finds in the Suffering and Crucified Christ a meaning for its misery and impotence, accepted by him who was desirous of shouldering the sins of all; and, secondly, the glorious manifestation of the power of God who raises up his Son and makes him Deliverer and Redeemer.

In this twofold dimension of death and resurrection we find the key to the entire mystery of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, in the broad context of the history of salvation, the Cross has come to be a synonym for suffering, abandonment and desolation. It has also become a symbol of contradiction, a denial of the legitimate aspirations of man to find and enjoy happiness in his unending search for what he sees as good. The Cross has been presented on many occasions as a serious obstacle to the enjoyment of life. In view of its twofold dimension, one must affirm not only that the Cross is a human invention, an instrument of torture wherein men found a way to be freed of the Nazarene, but also, and above all, it is the way the Father has chosen to make known, even more, to communicate his love to us. Through it God has desired to make us sharers in his very own life. Through it he has desired that we should have the opportunity to regain our lost freedom. (1)

This man named Jesus of Nazareth, together with all that his life, his personality and his death on the Cross imply, though counted as but one of many who ended life on a cross, has become the *raison d'être* for the existence of many who have followed him and have recognized in him the point of contact where God touches man through the whole of salvation history. (2) This is why Christ on the Cross has become the principal axis around which turns all of salvation history, involving all people of all times. The Cross of Jesus, through a long process of development, brings light to bear upon the obscurity, at times mysterious, that surrounds the fundamental principles of the Christian life. It becomes the symbol of life restored by Jesus through his death, and in which Christians share through their faith in the Son of God. (3)

## **1. DEATH OF CHRIST THE ENCOUNTER WITH LIFE**

God's revealing action can in no way be considered apart from the context of revelation itself. The Cross of Christ is that privileged instrument God chose to reveal his love to us. It brings into reality the universal plan of salvation projected throughout the Old Testament. Christ raised up on the Cross draws all men to himself (Jn 12: 32), and in this way rescues mankind fallen into sin and reduced to the sad state of slavery. (4)

The mystery of Christ become man to save mankind, appearing as the Suffering Messiah, reveals the depths of the wisdom of God. Here is a loving God, who does not wish the final death of the sinner, nor his eternal perdition, but, on the contrary, wishes to make him holy, and above all to redeem him from his shameful burden of sin. (5) Hence the Cross has become the power of God, chosen by him and accepted by Jesus Christ willingly as the efficacious instrument of salvation.

Throughout the totality of the mystery of Christ, the mystery of salvation *par excellence*, God has traced his plan of redemption, whose chief purpose is complete freedom of man from the domination of sin and its consequences, including final death and perdition.

Christ, together with his entire life pattern, together with his experience of suffering and his death upon the Cross, has been glorified by his Father. His resurrection inaugurates a new creation for all humanity, a new creation based upon truth, freedom and man's ability to respond affirmatively to God's love. In this way man receives a great capability for living ever in harmony with his God and with his brothers. He recovers his divine inheritance with the possibility of never losing it again, an inheritance which enables him to draw ever tighter the bonds of unity and fraternity with his brothers.

The enduring proclamation of the mystery of the Cross is the determining factor with regard to salvation. But the Cross cannot be separated from the Resurrection, which demonstrates how, in the Cross of Christ and in his death, the power of God is an act of love and of obedience. The Cross becomes an absurdity for all who reject God's salvation, but for those who accept Jesus and enter upon this path to salvation, it is the power of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:18).

The death of Christ becomes the point of contact where man meets that life, which is restored to him through the gratuitous love of the Father, who sends his own Son, firstborn among many, to save all without exception. Thus is set in motion the complete redemption of the human race, on the one hand, and, on the other, the perfect glorification of God.

“This work of human redemption and the perfect glorification of God, anticipated in the Old Testament in the wonders God worked in the people of the Old Covenant, Christ the Lord

brought about principally through the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and glorious ascension. Through this mystery, his death destroyed our death and his resurrection restored life to us.” (6)

## **2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CROSS AND DEATH OF CHRIST**

In the various attempts in our day to reconstruct the trial and death of Christ, authors ask just what sort of meaning would Christ have given to his death. It seems to us that the answer to this question is found in Jesus’ words during the long hours of agony on the Cross before handing over his soul to his Father.

We get the impression that it is only upon the Cross that Jesus becomes perfectly aware that his death is imminent and inevitable. His heart-rending cry to the Father is an unmistakable sign of his disillusionment and great frustration (cf. Lk 23:36), while at the same time it is the expression of a perfect interior disposition of abandonment into the hands of the Father.

What did Jesus expect after this bitter experience that ended tragically on the Cross? Before we can answer this question, we must first stop and consider several points. Following logically from our conclusion upon reading the Gospels, Jesus did not go naively to his death, but rather that He accepted it and freely embraced it (cf. Jn 18:1-11).

### **a. Through His Life and Preaching Jesus Proclaims God’s Kingdom.**

When Jesus proclaims that his presence marks the inauguration of the eagerly awaited Kingdom, this cannot be considered as an announcement of himself, for what he wishes to establish first of all is the presence of God’s Kingdom. God’s power and his lordship over all are the signs that the Kingdom has arrived. Its presence is evidenced through Christ’s miracles, through his life of service, and above all through his glorious resurrection.

God’s plan to send his Son to save the world included the Sacrifice of the Cross. In this sacrifice God gives mankind the greatest demonstration of love ever seen, a mystery that is so unsettling to all our plans and projects. (7)

Thus the Cross becomes the rostrum from which Christ proclaims his new way of life. At the same time it becomes the surest sign of the presence of this Kingdom extending to man the chance to be free from all oppression.

The Cross embraces all man’s sufferings and limitations. Their presence reveals the reality of the Cross foreshadowed in Christ himself when he cures the sick, restores sight, hearing, movement, etc., when he raises the dead and gives hope to the poor through the proclamation of the Good News (cf. Lk 7:19-23).

Likewise he proclaims the beatitudes to those who are not scandalized in Him, for God’s testimony lies in that he has given us eternal life, which is in his Son. He who possesses the Son, possesses life; he who rejects the Son rejects life. The life, death and resurrection of Christ are the starting point of Christian existence, indeed of all Christian thought. The Cross, therefore, is not only redemption, it is revelation, since from the Cross Christ reveals to us the Kingdom of God.



**b. The Kingdom Is At Hand. It is Among Us.**

In Mark 1:15 we see Jesus travelling the roads of Galilee, proclaiming that the Kingdom is near at hand. The only requirement for being accepted into the Kingdom is conversion and repentance. Christ's sacrifice has as its aim to offer every person of good will a new way of life, which will enable him to live a lifelong reconciliation with God, and at the same time free him from all that binds him and keeps him from being free. In preaching sorrow and conversion, Jesus is inviting all to accept this way of life which he offers gratuitously, namely, the Kingdom of God.

In addition, Luke 17:21 points out that the Kingdom of God is already among us, and exists in every person who has received and accepted Jesus' invitation to follow him as the way that leads to salvation. The Kingdom, therefore, is not limited to a given place. On the contrary, it is to be found wherever there is someone receptive to God's love and to Christ, the revealer of that love. The determining factor in the establishment of the Kingdom lies in each person's willingness to receive and accept it.

**c. Jesus Proclaims Himself the Bearer and Fulfillment of This Marvelous News.**

The miracles and prodigies Christ performed are proof positive that the Kingdom is at hand. Indeed, it has already arrived for those who are privileged to be present for such wonders (cf. Lk. 11:20), for it gives all who witness them a greater sense of closeness to the person of Jesus.

All this reinforces one's confidence and desire to follow this marvelous man who, through the power of God, takes pity on mankind's sufferings and even shares them. Further, he does away with them, as in the case of the sick who were healed, showing that in his person the Kingdom is both proclaimed and brought into being, through his dedication and readiness to serve all those who accompany and surround Him.

**d. The Historical Jesus Develops in the Same Cultural Surroundings as His Contemporaries.**

The texts of Mk 14:25 and Lk 22:15-19 have a Eucharistic context, thus showing that the Last Supper has an eschatological meaning, symbolizing and proclaiming God's great banquet in the new order of things (the Kingdom).

The bread and wine symbolize the banquet in the Kingdom, and Jesus experiences the exaltation of the imminent coming of the Kingdom. When he finds, instead of the Kingdom, that death is at hand, he experiences the feeling of abandonment by his Father. Still he maintains faith and fidelity to the Father.

**e. In Spite Of All Jesus Fears The Great Temptation of Infidelity.**

Christ knows perfectly well that the Messiah will be persecuted, and that he will be made to suffer cruelly, but that in the end, at the height of his sorrowful ordeal, God will intervene to rescue him and inaugurate the Kingdom. Christ is fully aware that he is in the hands of his Father, and he commends himself to the Father for help to surmount his trials.

On the Cross he understands that the Father wills his death. Nevertheless his cry at the end shows the depths of his painful ordeal. The words of Lk 23:46 and Jn 19:30 reveal Jesus' abandonment.

It is to be noted, however, that it is an abandonment which has nothing in common with resignation, but rather one that is spontaneous in the hands of the Father. Jesus' complete confidence and hope in the Father can only be understood in the light of his despair.

## **B. UNDERSTANDING THE PASSION OF JESUS CONTINUED IN THE PASSION OF MANKIND.**

Christ's death was not a banal, useless act. He did not seek death naively. He neither sought it nor wanted it. However, being a just man, he showed himself ever ready and disposed to sacrifice his life in order to give witness to the truth. It is this truth that keeps him faithful to the Father, even though it involves great risks and grave dangers, which he freely embraces. Christ hands himself over to the Father, for the sake of all peoples and for the glory of God, even though his desperation bursts out at the end.

Certainly the entire life of Christ possesses a redemptive character, and his death is the culmination of a life lived with a view to others and for others. His death is the culmination of a life of service, and the moment of death in no way minimizes the heroism and redemptive intent which animated him.

Jesus never ceases to be the thread binding God and mankind. The suffering send up their laments to God, and God reaches out to them through his Son, who is our Liberator, our Deliverer from all our evils, Liberator from evil in all its forms.

### **1. JESUS THE DELIVERER TAKES OUR INFIRMITIES UPON HIMSELF**

The episodes narrated in Mt 9:18-34 have an obvious ecclesial context. Jesus heals all the sick who are brought to him and casts out devils, all this is in order to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (cf. Mt 8:16; Is 53:4).

Matthew identifies Jesus with the figure of the Servant in Isaiah, showing us a messianism very different from that which Jesus' contemporaries expected. The actual picture of Christ presented by

Matthew has the characteristics of humility and poverty displayed by the Servant of Jahweh. Matthew shows us a Jesus clothed in the majesty of poverty and humility, the royal garb of the Crucified.

The very miracles narrated appear as the fruit of the obedience and humility of Jesus, almost as an anticipation of his glorification by the Father, since they are performed by the power of God, that same power which will raise him up gloriously.

Christ viewed in this manner is not just the Master ever teaching the multitudes, much less the judge who will come on the last day to judge every man according to his deeds. Rather he is first and foremost Emmanuel, God-with-us (Mt 1:23), who is ever present among his people until the end of time. He remains among us in order to share his destiny and his glory with all people of all times.

### **2. JESUS DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE FROM THE EVILS WHICH AFFLICT THEM**

The first place where Jesus is presented as the Deliverer from evil and Believer of the people comes in the so-called Proto-Evangelium (Gen 3:5). This is the first announcement with a

universal messianic character. At the same time it has a clear eschatological meaning. The profound significance of this text lies in that it contrasts the complexity of a single moment with the everlasting struggle to the death between the serpent and the woman. This never ending enmity directed against her will be transferred to all her children, to all who come after her.

Invariably, the messianic meaning given this text is inferred from its eschatological character, which sees “offspring” as a clear allusion to Christ. The majority of theologians see Christ in the one who through his death (the sting of the serpent) redeems the human race (the crushing of its head). This interpretation is well supported by Sacred Scripture, since later prophecies speaking of the seed of Abraham are to be understood, according to St. Paul (cf. Gal 3:16), as referring to the Messiah.

Hebrew sapiential understanding, guided by revelation, developed the conviction that God, in his goodness, created man without sin, but that man of his own will upset God’s infinitely wise plan when he first failed to reject the evil which tempted him and brought him to ruin. Nevertheless, Divine mercy waited patiently for the precise moment to redeem him from evil. Thus God showed his love for mankind in the very instant that man first rejected him, and what is even greater, gave him a promise that he would redeem him intrinsically.

The thread of messianic soteriology running through the entire Old Testament has its beginnings precisely here in this pronouncement, foretelling that “the offspring of the woman” will be the source of deliverance from evil.

From the beginning, Christian tradition has identified Christ as the Servant of Jahweh, for Christ in all his prophecies concerning his Passion displays a clear understanding of the fate that awaits him, and identifies himself with the text of Isaiah 53. The life he surrenders on the Cross is the same life which He gave to his disciples at the Last Supper, where he also uses expressions from Isaiah 53, as for example: “the blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Attributions of Jesus to the Servant are also present in Acts (3:13-26; 4:27-30; 8:32). This theme is also found in the hymns of the primitive Church (Phil 2:7; 1 Pet 2:15-21).

### **3. JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF WITH THOSE WHO SUFFER**

As we draw closer to the reality which is Jesus, it becomes perfectly clear that all that takes place on and near the Cross is for the sake of sinners who seek to be reconciled to God. Thus it is precisely at the moment of Christ’s death that the Love of God comes into contact with sin, for it is in the crime of the Crucifixion that man has greatest need of redemption.

The Father and the Son offer themselves to mankind at the very moment of its rebellion and rejection of divine love. Thus it can truly be said that sinful man has a privileged role in God’s plan to deliver him from sin, although sin with all its disastrous consequences of both a personal and a social nature can never be the object of God’s pleasure or predilection.

In actuality, one way of looking at the Passion of Christ, God’s specially privileged people are the victims of the world’s unjust human structures. (8) However, far from denying a priority in favor of the victims of injustice in all its multiple manifestations: underdevelopment, marginality, poverty, misery, sickness, etc, it is very important to point out that this is not the typical meaning given the death of Christ. Rather on the Cross he fulfills the mandate given him by the Father, whose will is to bring to man his love and his grace.

He who suffers becomes a truly privileged person, not in the negative sense that his suffering takes on a value before God, but rather in the sense that man, weak and oppressed as he is, must be converted into a driving force, a center of love and energy directed toward the cause of his suffering. Over and beyond being considered on the level of liberation theology, the Cross inculcates rather a theology of generosity directed toward the most difficult obstacle of all, the struggle of man against man.

St. Paul, who is extremely aware of this fact and has a clear understanding of what it means to be an ambassador of Christ, prays in Christ's name that men may be reconciled with God and, therefore, among themselves (2 Cor 5:20). The glorified Lord promises to be present where men are reconciled with each other. In the witness of the community the same glorified Lord is present through the Spirit. We should add that the Christian community is identified by Christ's words: "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt 18:20).

We find a similar promise of Christ's presence in the powerful image given us in Mt 25:31-46, where he speaks of the world's judge on the last day: "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." In this moving account, the judge of the world is present in those who are weakest, poorest, sickest and most abandoned, namely the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the sick, the prisoners, the exploited, etc. The community which experiences the presence of Jesus Christ is truly the mystery of the presence of the Son, and Him humiliated and glorified. The very community achieves the truth of Christ, as long as it lives in brotherhood with him in communion with all the faithful, above all the least and most needy.

It must be a community made up of those who love and those who are without love, of those who are free and of those who are deprived of freedom, of those who are happy and those who have lost that happiness, of those who have possessions and those who have none. This community of the Church with Christ and with all his brothers, of necessity teaches us the special love which Christ has for all in the world who suffer.

#### **4. THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS TAKEN FROM THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE**

##### **a. Passiological Review of People's Life and Conflicts in the Light of God's Word**

It is a well-established fact that man recognizes himself in the figure of Christ Suffering. For this very reason he feels a sense of solidarity with him in his sorrow and suffering. It is a motive for solidarity, kinship and sympathy which Jesus himself has established between himself and man and this, as we have already seen, is especially true of man who suffers. In the natural world sorrow is very often an isolating factor, but for Jesus it is the point of contact and unity with all people. (9)

As man makes his way toward the Father in company with all his brothers, he comes in contact with many categories of individuals who are weighed down by suffering: sinners, the persecuted, the world of labor, the unlettered, the oppressed, the marginalized, those suffering from various illnesses, etc. The categories are endless and would take us too far afield; suffice it to mention just a few.

In the category of the innocent we can place the staggering number of children who have been abandoned, exploited, abused, due to the selfishness of their elders. All the children who are denied the right to be born; all those who have reached birth but are denied adequate human resources to achieve a normal human growth and development. Society has discovered thousands of situations where children and young people suffer in a state of marginalization, lacking a home and the serenity which make it possible for human life to grow and develop fully. The Lord who sees all and understands all exacts a price of us for the suffering of the innocent, which he does not ask in the case of others. (10)

In the category of sinners, we come upon culpable suffering, the suffering that we bring upon ourselves through our indifference and lack of love. This suffering finds its reflection in mankind, in the complex, desolate panorama of injustice, hatred, violence, exploitation of man by his fellow man, terrorism, marginality, etc.

The out and out selfishness we find in our world is clearly reflected in the terrible weight of the burden man places on his own shoulders, the human miseries which refuse to be redeemed through the Cross of Jesus Christ. These culpable sufferings serve as the punishment we deserve for our sins and failings. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that the passion of Christ mercifully opens wide before all these sufferings, as noted by St. Paul of the Cross, when he stated that the frequent remembrance of the passion contained the solution to all the world's evils.

Another important aspect of the present point is the persecution to which so many persons are subjected. On the world stage there have always been obscure forces at work resulting in the subjection of many men in situations of real persecution. Many are the methods of repression, political or religious, with the excuse that a false national security is at stake, at the cost of sacrificing individual or collective freedoms, and which are the source of much suffering.

There are men without number who find themselves in a situation where their human rights are trampled under foot, are unknown and violated, who have no say whatever, not even the slightest possibility of free expression on political, social, economic or religious questions. There are many places in our world where human life is continually under threat, or simply exists in a climate of tension and fear.

All these different situations lead man to seek solidarity with his brother, because sharing with one another the meaning of the Cross, as reflected in all these situations and as a sign of solidarity with all men, takes for granted that a road to hope is opened up to all those who have it not.

### **b. In An Authentically Prophetic As Well As Cultic Way**

The fact that we know we have been redeemed by Christ through sharing in his Cross necessarily leads us to share the lot of our brother, no matter what the situation. Logically, this means that the brother who is well takes his place at the side of his brother who is ill; that beside the prisoner there is the support of one who is free; beside the sorrowful stands the person who possesses joy, and so on, until every misery redeemed by the Cross of Christ has been covered.

Christ's glory is manifested in his triumph over the Cross, and is reflected in every man who is free, healthy, peaceful, happy and satisfied, etc. And this glory must always be shared with and

communicated to those who are burdened with sorrow and carry the Cross of their sufferings in the hope of one day being free.

It is in the hope of someday finding the unequivocal redemption from their sufferings that is centered the profound devotion and the deep feeling which Latin American communities exhibit toward the Crucified; in their Passion-based devotions that accompany them on their way of the cross, in their sufferings, as well as in their hopes, which projected toward the Crucified can someday find their deliverance in him. Thus in its consideration of the mystery of Christ on the Cross, the faith of the people is not reduced simply to a few ordinary cultic practices, but rather has a far more sweeping projection, based on the hope of a future far greater than the present. It is this that gives so much meaning to its daily struggle and to its living crucifixion which identifies it with Christ himself.

Man feels the attraction of the Cross of Christ, and at the same time is moved in his celebrations to share the cross of his brother. He feels an obligation to seek a solidarity with him whose suffering he feels in some way responsible. Our peoples look upon the suffering figure of Christ Crucified and see him present in all the world's sorrows, and this serves as a profound motivation for examining candidly his attitudes, for these are very intimately tied to his great hopes. (11)

The face of Christ appears, then, in all the poor and suffering. Christians discover this face when they come in direct contact with the Gospel and discover that Christ was a man with a history very similar to their own, marked by the same conflicts and important decisions. Thus they discover the similarity between the struggles and conflicts which Jesus had to face and the struggles and conflicts in the world of today, that is, in all that interferes with man's right to life, expression and organization. (12)

### **C. RECALL THE WITNESS OF OUR MARTYRS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY WHICH IMPELS US TO FOLLOW CHRIST CRUCIFIED IN LATIN AMERICA.**

All our reflections up to now concerning Christ Crucified, absolute Liberator of all men of all times, should lead us automatically to regain the values contained in all those lives, from the beginning of Christianity down to our days, of all the men who have been immolated on the altars of that witness that springs from the Cross.

The martyrdom consummated on the wood of the Cross is the proto-type for every martyrdom that has its inspiration in the cause of the Crucified: offering one's life for others. Christ gave his life for the noblest of causes, that of redeeming humanity from its plight of sin and slavery. Whoever, possessed of the same sentiments as Christ, sacrifices his life for the cause of freedom and redemption shares fully in the martyrdom of Christ.

To give one's life for his brother, as Jesus did, is the motive which pushes the faithful imitator of Christ to persevere in his struggle and even go so far as to shed his blood for a cause as noble as that of Christ. Many are the individuals in our present circumstances of sorrow, oppression and suffering, who have become the flag-bearers of our people, and have offered their lives, in order that the people's lament might reach the ears of God.

One fact that we can't forget, much less deny, is that Christianity from the very beginning has grown at the cost of sacrifice. The blood poured out in the name of the Crucified has ever been

the guarantee that new seeds of Christian life will spring forth. The beginnings of Christianity are spattered with the blood of many men who, in their desire to follow the Master, have sacrificed their very lives.

## **1. MARTYRDOM AND WITNESS**

The following of Christ has always implied the fundamental obligation of carrying the Cross, including the obligation of denying oneself and all one's attachments.

In the broad context of the passion, following Jesus is equivalent to having the disposition to hand over one's life. Thus the conclusion, that it is impossible to serve Christ except by way of the Cross (cf. Jn 12-26). Here again the prospect of sharing with Christ in his glory is presented to the disciple, the follower of Christ. To die with Christ is to live with him. To suffer with him is to reign with him. Witnessing to the death of Christ implies running the risk of losing one's life for the cause of Christ. Throughout Christian history it is precisely this that has motivated so many to hand over their lives, even to the shedding of their blood.

Above all, martyrdom is the proof that God's strength is manifested in those who are weak. Martyrdom is a witness to the victory of Christ over evil and death, a terrible power indeed. Every martyr who gives up his life knows that he is getting it back, for life, the crown of immortality, will be his. It is very important to remember that in the martyr's combat it is Christ himself who struggles, suffers and overcomes. He who gives his life for Christ not merely resembles Christ in his passion; Christ is actually present and acting once again in his martyr.

Martyrdom is a grace which cannot be sought, only accepted, for in every martyrdom it is not the martyr who is giving witness through his words and actions, rather it is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are giving witness. This is why the Church takes the witness of so many martyrs as the witness of Christ.

In this way the martyrs become witnesses to the resurrection of the Son of God, whose power is manifested in and through them. Thus the Christian martyr, by his suffering and death, becomes an authentic witness to the resurrection of the body, by the very fact that Christ testifies, in him and through his body, to the power that conquers death.

## **2. GIVING UP LIFE IN ORDER TO SHARE LIFE**

We know that the Father's love is unique and that we share in it through Christ, crucified, resurrected and glorified. What the Cross of Christ proclaims is that it is not man who builds charity with his plans and projects, but that he can only build it when he is intimately united to Jesus Christ. (13) Of necessity one must look to the Cross, still more one must contemplate it through the eyes of Jesus, who voluntarily submits himself to the Father out of his immense longing to liberate mankind.

We see this clearly in the text of Jn 13:1: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." This full extent is the key to the understanding of the immensity of Christ's love. In an admirable way it ties in the transformation of the human family with the reconstruction of the Kingdom of God in which we are all called to share on equal terms as citizens (Eph 2:19) with mutual responsibilities.

Our common vocation as humans and Christians helps us to walk closely united with Christ and united with all men for whom the sacrifice of the Cross has been efficacious. The principal purpose of this sacrifice was to reunite that which has been dispersed, to gather all men in a union of love. This love which goes to the very roots of life itself is what has aroused in the souls of so many individuals the desire to help their brother, their people, and identifies them and unites them in their struggle to implement Christ's liberating plan.

This plan is brought to realization in the little ones of this world, the poor, the needy, the forgotten, those who hunger and thirst after justice. Only when life is given in deliverance is this hunger and this thirst alleviated. This is precisely what those many men have done, those whose lives have been wrenched from them to become the seed of new life.

There are uncounted martyrs among our Latin American people, some unknown, others well-known, who have irrigated the fields with their blood. They have given their lives generously in order to change the sinful structures of injustice and violence, so that others may be truly receptive to the hopes for the future that animate our people: the coming of God's Kingdom.

**D. THESE REFLECTIONS AID US IN THE RE-EVALUATION OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE PART OF OUR LIVES AND IMPEL US TO UNDERTAKE THE EVANGELIZING MISSION WHICH IS OURS.**

The constant reading of the Passion of Christ in the history of our Congregation, both past and present, and the passion in our people and in the world at large ought to lead us to a consideration of the importance of the mission the Church has entrusted to us Passionists.

The people need evangelization, which is our commitment. Even more, we are proclaimers of the Gospel of the Cross, and it is that which gives us our place in the Church and identifies us with the history in which we live. This carries with it a strong commitment toward the crucified in the world, and toward so many of our brothers who live in circumstances of crucifixion around our Passionist foundations. Our commitment to the people comes from our desire to be witnesses and proclaimers of the mystery of the Cross.

Our Passionist life is framed within the limits of the Passion and Cross of Jesus Christ, but we must admit that the Passion, with all Christ's sorrow and suffering, was not an accidental thing, nor outside the provisions of the divine plan. Jesus suffered freely and voluntarily, because he wished it, to take upon his shoulders the tragedies of humanity, and his sacrifice has motivated many to expiation and immolation. This sacrifice is above all an act of love and heroism which identifies with all human suffering, in order to transform it and elevate it to a unique and sublime level, that of the cost of our redemption.

Committed to this saving plan of Christ, our Passionist life finds its center of gravity in the Crucified, the object of our contemplation. From him we learn the lessons of sacrifice and generosity which will enable us today, just as yesterday and always, to comprehend and enter into this plan to which we are bound by a special vocation.

Through the contemplation of the mystery of the Cross we discover the vital significance of the Cross for all those who are called to share in the suffering of others, and to identify ourselves with the cross of humanity which is none other but the Cross of Christ, bearer of hope and glory.



## NOTES

1. D. Mongillo, *La croce di Gesu Cristo, fondazione di vita morale*, in *SCO*, 1 (Torino 1976), p. 27.
2. W. Kurth, *La croce simbolo e realtà*, in *SCO*, 3, p. 245.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
4. Cf. LG 3; DV 47; VR 11.
5. Cf. E.L. Bode, *La follia della croce*, 1 Cor 1:17-25, in *Bibor* 12, (1972), p. 262.
6. Cf. SC 5.
7. Cf. Jn 15:13.
8. G. Mattai, *Theologia crucis e giustizia sociale*, in *RiTeoMor*, n. 6, 1974 , p. 583.
9. Paul VI, *Osservatore Romano*, April 14, 1974.
10. *Ibid.*
11. M. Caprioli, *La croce nel magistero di Paolo VI*, in *SCO*, 1, p. 241.
12. Various Authors, *El seguimiento de Cristo Crucificado* (Mexico 1985), 174.
13. D. Mongilo, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

## VI

### THE PASSIONIST'S EVANGELIZING MISSION

#### INTRODUCTION

Jesus of Nazareth was totally dedicated to God, his Father, and to people in their special category as brothers and sisters with their concrete human needs, so that he might share with them the Kingdom he himself possessed.

Thus he brought them the message of salvation by his words, confirmed by his deeds, and authenticated by his miracles. Aware of his impending death, Jesus devised a plan to leave behind him two groups to carry on his saving work: one was called "apostles" (Mt 10:1-6) and the other "disciples" (Lk 10:1-16).

The Church, as the Body of Christ and the People of God, actualizes in each succeeding age the Lord's saving plan by announcing the Good News and authenticating for people the signs of salvation in an up-to-date form.

Paul of the Cross never wavered in his dedication to God and to the Crucified, impelled as he was by the Holy Spirit. He stood out also as an apostle, bearing the message of the Cross to the poor abandoned places.

Aware that he was unable to carry out such an enterprise alone, Paul gathered companions into a community not unlike that of the apostles to announce the Good News wherever possible.

Upon the completion of their pastoral efforts, they returned to their Passionist communities, there to rest and revitalize their energies through mutual edification, brotherhood and prayer at the feet of Christ Crucified.

Today, we Passionists, wherever we find ourselves, must carry on this mission of evangelization in our own time and age. Passionist apostles, in order to carry out an efficacious, coherent apostolate that 'answers' the needs of today's people, must analyze and understand the social, psychological, historical, political and religious dimensions of today's people.

The apostolate is an essential part of Christian life (AA 2 & 6), and more essential in the religious life which is apostolic of its very nature (LG 12; PC 5 & 8). Christian and religious life are dedicated to living a Life of Love in word and deed.

Every Passionist community must evaluate its apostolate in the light of Jesus the Evangelizer to test the authenticity of its apostolic activity, to affirm the presence of God's Kingdom or identify the obstacles that stand in its way.

It would appear that Paul of the Cross was not the originator of any new apostolic methods. Rather he adapted those already in existence, infusing into them a new spirit born of his personal conviction of the efficacy and saving power of the Cross.

The Passionist apostolate does not wear itself out maintaining pastoral structures. It expresses itself in various ways: the quiet intimate apostolate such as Mary standing near the Cross of Jesus, then the effective action that gives witness, and, finally, the explicit preaching of the Crucified to all the corners of the world.

Passionist activities in the Church pertain to the pilgrim aspect of the People of God. The missionary dimension becomes clear not so much in its instrumental and organizational make up, but in the prophetic character of its preaching the Kingdom from the standpoint of the Crucified, and decrying the social obstacles which stand in its way.

The Gospel of the Cross is directed to all who participate in pastoral work, above all the faithful believers, and even the unbelievers. The Passionist missionary character does not invalidate its itinerant commitment that has as its object the formation or renovation of Christian communities.

The concrete forms taken by the Passionist apostolate are related to the origins of each part of the Congregation. They must be consonant with the spirituality of the Crucified, as well as adapted to the concrete opportunities presented to our communities in Latin America. Each day should find great interaction between spirituality and apostolate.

The pastoral activities of the Passionist family in Latin America are very diverse. They include missions among the indigenous, and among farm workers, parishes and shrines, basic ecclesial communities, schools and social centers, seminaries and hospitals.

We can ask ourselves whether these forms of apostolate reflect the ideas of our Founders, or the needs of the local communities.

## **A. EXPLICIT PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL OF THE CROSS AS DONE BY OUR HOLY FOUNDER**

### **1. WHAT DID PAUL OF THE CROSS DO?**

From among many alternatives, Paul opted for a particular and explicit method of preaching. Undoubtedly he made his decision after considering the social and religious circumstances in which he lived; the decadence and stagnation of the Italian Church in the 18th century; almost complete ignorance of religion and the lack of evangelization; the social and pastoral abandonment of the Tuscan Marshes due to yellow fever, floods, plagues, drought and epidemics.

To these historical factors, we must also add the situation of those who worked for the Church: bishops, priests and religious with deficient intellectual training and neglected moral formation.

All these factors required an enormous and intensive missionary enterprise among the people.

For forty years Paul dedicated himself to the preaching of these “popular missions.” He began at Talamona in 1730 at age thirty-six. His mission “campaign” embraced the period from Christmas to Lent, from after Easter to the Feast of St. John the Baptist, and from September 16 to Advent.

He would not permit his religious to preach the famous “Lenten Courses,” sermons bereft of any evangelizing virtue due to the rivalry among preachers. One quickly realizes the advantages to be found in blending community life with missionary campaigns.

Paul’s written sermons which have come down to us are mediocre works lacking in originality, taken from other books of sermons, as was the custom of the time, and written in a somewhat apologetic style.

He demands that his religious use a simple style, plain, with crystal clear explanations which the most unlearned could understand. In his Rules and Constitutions of 1741, he expressly states: “It shall not be allowed that any member of this least Congregation should adopt so lofty and elegant a preaching style that he becomes obscure to the poor, ordinary people. Rather they should break the bread of God’s Word in a way so clear and devout that it will more easily penetrate hearts, and so promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”

The mission method common in the 18th century made excessive use of sacred choreography, itinerant statues and atmospheric phenomena calculated to take listeners by surprise and move them to go to confession.

It appears that Paul made frequent use of the Bible as a source of inspiration. His quotes from the Bible are very accurate and to the point, and not in the form of a sermon or to prove a point being made by the preacher, as was the custom of the time. Paul was the servant of the Word of God.

## **2. TWO STAGES IN PAUL’S LIFE**

During the first stage of Paul’s missionary career, which lasted about twelve years, he placed some importance on externals: pictures, processions, etc., attention-getting devices geared to promoting a massive response. Sermons to inspire fear. A God of fear who chastises certain sins only, so as to condemn later on. All fear placed at the service of the Gospel of Love.

The second stage, wherein interiorization predominates, began at the age of forty-eight. The mystery is introduced to the people and the listener in an ever more efficacious manner. Thus a canon friend attested: “The first time the Servant of God came to Sutri to preach a mission, I noted the great wisdom and common sense which he displayed. He did not organize procession which, to some, are a waste of time, nor did he produce devotional or fear-inspiring pictures.”

The theology underlying his sermons is that of a God of Love who loves each of us insanely, as the Passion of his beloved Son demonstrates. A compassionate God who had left nothing undone to win over his sinful children.

Paul had the heart of a missionary toward the farm workers and the poor. In the same Rules of 1741, Paul writes in burning words: “Let them accept everything with great patience and tranquility of spirit, recognizing that these souls belong to God and not to themselves.” And again: “With all possible patience and charity let them instruct the poor ordinary people in the principal mysteries of our holy Faith.”

In the Rule of 1741 he also ordered his religious: “Never seek to preach missions in cities, rather show... a preference for poor needy places, places far off the beaten path, the swamps, the

islands, and other places deprived of apostolic ministries. The members of our Congregation should look upon these places as their special legacy.”

Paul of the Cross left us this insight into his spirit: “My burning desire is to be allowed to die some day during a mission, while I am embracing the Crucifix during the meditation on the Passion.” Here we see the yearning to be identified with the “kenosis” of Jesus Crucified, the martyr’s yearning for an apostle’s death. It exhibits the identification between the subject preached - Jesus - and the preacher - Paul of the Cross.

## **B. GUIDING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES:**

### **1. TO DISCOVER THE PASCHAL MYSTERY IN THE CROSS, RESTORING TO OUR APOSTOLATES THE DIMENSION OF HOPE, JOY AND SENSE OF THE FUTURE**

Jesus Christ dedicated a large part of his public life to announcing and denouncing, with a view to salvation. We follow in the prophetic ministry of Christ as his spokesman (AA 6).

The essential element in preaching the Gospel of the Cross lies in communicating the message of salvation, making adequate use of technique and communication. We are convinced that the mystery of the Cross is not the exclusive prerogative of one Christian body, but rather belongs to the People of God (cf. N. Ae. 4).

However, the interior spirit which our Founder dedicated to it in his original inspiration and the mission officially entrusted by the Church to our Congregation constitute us specialists in proclaiming the salvation of the Cross with a strength, a dynamism and an urgency involving all our being.

The Paschal Mystery is the center of our lives, our communities, of our being and our work, that is, the following of Jesus Crucified and the proclaiming of his Passion and Resurrection.

Our missionary commitment is that of promoting with the strength of a specific vow the Memory of the Passion of Jesus in the hearts of the faithful, both by word and work; and then, that of preserving the Memory of the Passion which continues today among peoples.

#### **a. Countering the forgetfulness of men**

We must proclaim with urgency the “radical and saving memory” of Gospel values, and especially the Cross, for there are de-christianized groups in the developed, materialized countries that have forgotten them.

The first world has become secularized and needs re-evangelizing.

#### **b. As a remedy for the world’s great ills**

Our mission is that of evangelization through the ministry of the Word, and is as urgent today as in Paul’s time. It is an immensely urgent task of the Church in the third world. “The Passion of Jesus contains the remedy for all the world’s ills” was the conviction of Paul of the Cross. For

this reason, the institutional injustices brought about in Latin America must find a concrete response in our life and apostolate.

“The Passion of Jesus is the greatest proof of God’s love,” said Paul. The Church was instituted for the purpose of doing away with evil and building up the Kingdom of God; bringing that Kingdom to the people of today; sowing it in the midst of all peoples.

It is urgent to sow in Latin America the values of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus of Nazareth lived them, proclaimed them and died for them. We must proclaim Love lived in brotherhood, Justice despite the cost, a dynamic Peace, Life in the midst of so much unjust death, Truth amidst so much hypocrisy:

because we belong to a Passionist community; we are representatives of the Congregation of the Passion, an existential sign expressive of the life we live;

because the object of our preaching, ratified by a specific vow, is Christ on the Cross;

because our life is centered around meditating upon, reflecting upon and living the mystery of the Cross, and we have been established in the Church and before men as proclaimers of this central truth of the liberating Gospel of Jesus.

### **c. The Paschal Mystery and the Saviors’s Passion today**

In addition to other better known areas, present day theology enriches our reflections upon our Passionist apostolate in the following two areas:

The Paschal Mystery commemorates the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 4:25) , for Christ Crucified has risen (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). Love must not only look back (to the cross and the tomb), but also ahead to the Lord risen from the dead in joy and hope of a better future. This theology gives our life a sense of joy and hope.

The Passion of the Lord today rests on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ who suffers now in his afflicted members and in his persecuted and tortured brothers (cf. Mt 25; Acts 9:4-6). The trials of life (physical and moral sufferings, anguish, failures, etc.), as well as specialized sufferings (social injustices, poverty, discriminations, unjust oppression), all form part of Christ’s Passion today.

Thus the Passionist preaches the historical Passion of Jesus and the present day sufferings of his brothers, that is to say, he takes cognizance of the personal and communal sufferings of men in the light of the Resurrection.

The Paschal Mystery is the source of Hope, based upon God’s fidelity and that of his Son’s. Paschal Hope gives strength to withstand problems which arise; helps one to persevere in the everyday struggle; seeks out alternative means of solving conflicts; even in times of crisis provides a serenity and joy, optimism and sense of humor.

## **2. TO PURIFY A ONE-DIMENSIONAL VIEW OF THE CROSS OF JESUS AND DISCOVER ITS TRUE MEANING**

To preach the Passion of Jesus to the people of Latin America means to help it discover the traces of the Cross of Christ in its own sorrowful experience. For centuries the Cross has been manipulated in religious circles. Social, political and ecclesiastical structures have turned the Cross into a sign of resignation and passivity. Sorrow has been mythologized through a false spirituality of fatalism. Bourgeois ideology has manipulated the Cross, converting it into a necessity without remedy, in a personalistic and individualistic scheme of things.

Through our pastoral approach we Passionists must do our part to restore the Cross as the essential element of Jesus of Nazareth who, historically, died “damned” up on it. We must restore to the Cross its unifying, communitarian and liberating force.

Our people need a pastoral approach which will enable them to see more than Good Friday: When they contemplate the Crucified, let them not forget the Resurrection, which gives meaning to the Cross and death.

Reflecting upon the options ahead of Jesus Crucified and the theological meaning of his death, we must come to understand ourselves, and lead our Latin American people to understand: the massive, cruel phenomenon of millions of human beings living in extreme poverty; the meaning that conflict and persecution can have for those who carry their christian commitment as far as Jesus did; the urgent need for hope in the midst of all that the people are enduring; the need for a spirituality of Love in the midst of so many acts of violence and unjust death “before its time”; the phenomenon of materialistic secularism and its solutions to world problems; the comprehension of a popular religiosity; the aspirations of youth anxious to change a world of unjust structures, etc.

The Passionist mission to evangelize not only means announcing the Passion of the Crucified, but also denouncing the passion which the “crucified ones of today” are forced to undergo. This mission has two aspects:

First, the following of the historical Jesus holds for Passionists all the concrete demands of the spirit of the Beatitudes. Jesus was crucified by the men and by the structures of a society opposed to seeing a Kingdom of God burst forth upon the world. That is why they eliminated the Prophet of Freedom, Justice and Love. They were unwilling to be converted.

In addition, the Passionist commitment to the Crucified, as an historical event in the past, now demands that we proclaim his Passion and Death as a reality present and operating in people’s lives today. Today as well there are those “crucified by injustice, by the misunderstanding of the meaning of human existence, and the hunger for peace, truth and life.”

This relation between the Crucified and the crucified ones is not foreign to Paul of the Cross, for he tells us that he saw “the name of Jesus etched on the foreheads of the poor.” Here in Latin America the pastoral relation between the suffering face of Christ the Lord and the concrete human faces of men suffering here and now has been brought out inspiringly by the Bishops at Puebla (cf. nos. 31-39).

This reflection is a fountain of meditation for Passionists so that we may undertake, here and now, daring, concrete enterprises aimed at overcoming the causes of human suffering. For we are very conscious of the fact that the Passion of Christ will continue in the world until he returns.

Our people of Latin America resemble the Servant of Jahweh as announced by the Prophet Isaias in his Songs of the Servant (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53, 1-12): People without face and without dignity; who humbly sow light and justice; actively rejected, oppressed and persecuted. They know they are God's chosen ones for salvation passes through them. Their one hope is in the God of the poor, for the powerful have completely abandoned them, etc.

### **3. TO LEARN TO "MEDITATE" ON THE PASSION OF JESUS**

Paul of the Cross' stroke of genius was to include meditation on the Passion of Christ in all his apostolic work. In the current of inspiration flowing from our roots this is his distinguishing mark.

How inspiring are the Rules and Constitutions of 1741: "The Brothers of this least Congregation, who may be considered fit, must endeavor, as well during Missions as in other pious exercises, to teach the people by word of mouth to meditate on the mysteries of the most holy Passion and Death of Jesus, "our true Good."

In another chapter of the same Rule, speaking about the method of preaching, Paul says: "...they shall not only give the meditation on the Passion of Christ, as has been said above, but they shall also teach the people in the simplest and easiest manner how to do it." Again, "to the end that every class of persons may take up the practice of holy meditation, a means at once powerful and efficacious for rooting out sin and advancing souls in holiness."

Meditation's unique role lies in that it interiorizes the mystery of Christ in each person and in every people. It is a simple and apt method of evangelizing all peoples. It sweeps away a fleeting sentimentalism.

There is also an underlying theology in the methodology of meditation. God draws near the person and inspires confidence. The transcendent God condescends to come down to each person with the gift of his Son, crucified, the greatest proof of love.

Meditation is like a promotion in status for the laity. It raises simple folk to the point that it can think upon itself, capable of reflection and surmounting the initial stages of fear in the face of a God of Love who so loves man, even to the insane length of delivering over to them his Son to be crucified. "God so loved the world that he gave it his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (Jn 3:16-17).

The pastoral practice of teaching meditation to the people was quickly accepted as a means of fulfilling our particular Passionist vow.

In his "Accounts of 1768" Paul of the Cross thus expresses himself regarding the missionary commitment: "Whether on missions, preaching catechetical sermons, meditation, spiritual exercises, or whatever kind of apostolic ministry, (we should) give the people a meditation on the Passion of Jesus...and explain to them how to meditate gradually on the sufferings of the Redeemer."

This method progressively brings about the identification between the contemplative (people, Christian) and the object contemplated (Jesus Crucified).



## **C. SOLIDARITY WITH OUR SUFFERING PEOPLE IS REQUIRED:**

### **1. TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES AND PERSONS TO BECOME SUBJECTS OF THEIR OWN HISTORY**

The social sensibility of individuals towards solidarity has stood out noticeably in recent decades.

In his own way Paul of the Cross desired that his communities should be based upon a broad sense of mutual responsibility, especially in the case of those who were to serve the rest. He wished that each one should be concerned about all the others. He demanded that each brother actively participate in the life of the community, even to the extent of wiping out class distinctions and differences between brothers and clerics.

Even more, Paul of the Cross sought to overcome hatreds and divisions among the people to whom he ministered and to bring about reconciliation and mercy. The preaching of the Passion of Jesus should remedy the spiritual and social ills that develop from living together. It should free men from the clashes that hinder their approach to God.

Where the present world suffers for lack of brotherhood among peoples, the Church seeks to promote humanization and solidarity.

Brotherhood demands solidarity, where the rich nations help the poor nations attain integral development. It demands social justice, in the correction of existing unjust structures. It demands a universal charity that promotes a more human world for all.

The demand for solidarity among people is urgent and necessary. Christians have developed the conviction that there must be a more acute sense of solidarity evidenced in mutual relations. In addition, international solidarity must allow all peoples to become the builders of their own destiny (cf. PP 44, 48, 64, 65).

The Documents of Puebla affirm that solidarity is born from the sharing of the mystery of God, that through Christ Jesus we share in the life of God (P. 211-214). In this respect the poor give us an example in their organizing to demand their rights.

The theological reason lies in that “God has ‘solidarized’ with us in Christ Jesus in transforming our work and our history, making us co-protagonists in building up human coexistence” (P. 213).

On the other hand, modern society maintains paternalistic mechanisms to manipulate the people and not permit them to develop as persons. Passionist communities should keep this in mind in their pastoral work and seek to promote the dignity of peoples and to help them overcome oppressive structures in governments.

The Latin American Passionist family spirit has increased notably in recent years and it must continue on this road of exchanging reflections and action criteria, in order to give a response, as Passionists, to the challenges of our subcontinent.

The Passionists' evangelizing task in Latin America makes certain demands which we can describe thus: We shall strive to have men "know the truth that will make them free" (Jn 8: 36).

The spirituality of liberation which we seek to live will impel us to awaken the conscience of our people in a critical way to the light of God's Word. In our apostolic programs we will include the integral promotion of our men who demand a transformation of every category of life.

Again I must repeat that the evangelizing mission demanded by Passionist spirituality includes two inseparable elements: Announcing the Good News of Salvation which God offers; and denouncing everything that opposes God's plan:

## **2. TO HELP THOSE WHO SUFFER DISCOVER THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE SUFFERING**

It is easy to see the various kinds of human suffering that exist: physical, psychic or moral, and social, depending on the causes which bring them about.

In the suffering of Jesus we can likewise determine three kinds of "Passion": the physical, external, bodily Passion; the psychic or moral Passion deriving from a feeling of rejection, and the uselessness of life; the social Passion, since all social forces were in league against Jesus. The authorities (priests, sadducees, pharisees, herodians and the representatives of the Roman Empire) tried to isolate Jesus, excommunicate him from the synagogue and persecute him. They threatened and finally condemned him.

On the other hand, we notice in society an enormous apathy to the problem of pain. It is hidden, dissimulated or camouflaged in every way possible as though it did not exist. There is also a general indifference to suffering. The means of social communication use subtle techniques to anaesthetize our consciences. Politics increase the social apathy of peoples diverting man's memory.

Theology and catechesis have preached a helplessness in the face of suffering advocating conformist techniques in asceticism and mysticism, and counseling an unconditional resignation to a tyrannical God who takes delight in the pain of his children; sorrow for the pain whose purpose is fatalistic, passive resignation; a God too far away from our history and too perfect to be worried about our insignificant problems; suffering interpreted with a theological sadism as though desired by God as punishment from the Most High.

In this conception, God is spirit, impassible, unchangeable, apathetic toward man, his creature of predilection.

In Latin America we come up against so much personal and collective suffering! Is this a privileged moment for us Passionists?

Our pastoral approach to suffering will help us bring our people from a suffering that is mute, destructive, solitary, grounded in personal experience, toward a sorrow that makes itself known, more conscious and communicative, and arriving finally at a suffering that is reasoned, organized and in solidarity with other suffering men and women, in order to struggle against it.

From the initial stage, through a sorrow that evokes submission, helplessness and a fatalistic resignation, we will lead our people to the stage where it is conscious of the oppression, where it

is aware of the passion and accepts the sorrow with understanding, arriving finally at a third stage where suffering has been transformed. This is to say, where solidarity is the key element in the struggle against suffering, and where the aim is to overcome it through new structures which will not permit unjust suffering.

Suffering without meaning destroys man. Suffering should be a help in a person's maturation. It should teach one how to live and how to struggle.

Mankind's memory of suffering must become the critical conscience of society, so that certain injustices will not be repeated. The Passionist's commitment to the apostolate demands the suffering that will bring forth a new humanity, a new person in Latin America.

Love is stronger than sorrow's misfortune. This is the secret of the Christian mystics (Eckart, Tauler and others). Love is the secret that gives meaning to suffering. Only he can truly love who knows how to suffer.

This is how Jesus understood his triple Passion, physical, psychic and social: "One can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). For Jesus loved his own "and loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). And he left behind as his commandment and testament: "Love each other as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12).

The Stoics maintain an attitude of passivity, scorn and estrangement in the face of suffering. The disciple of the Crucified knows how to accept suffering, transform it, and give it a redemptive purpose.

### **3. TO ACCOMPANY THE PEOPLE ESPECIALLY IN MOMENTS OF CONFLICT**

Our people of Latin America are carrying their cross. Passionists, priests and ministers, who are near the people to serve "must take up their cross and follow Jesus (cf. Mk 8:34).

To take up the cross is to walk with it, not stand around in sterile laments. It means to strive to transform that cross. We are to take up the cross consciously and freely. We must struggle actively against all crosses in the measure of our capabilities.

God does not seek suffering for suffering's sake, but rather that man should be freed from his suffering (cf. Ex 3:7-8; Wis 11:26). God is the Lord who loves life. Paul the Apostle rings out the conviction: "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" (Rom 8:39).

To every community and people come moments of conflict for the sake of justice and the Kingdom of God. In the third world we experience this in a concrete historical way. In moments of conflict, when the sheep are being oppressed, it is the duty of the shepherd to be the door; to lead the sheep to good pastures and living waters; to call each by name; to go before the sheep and be prepared to give his life for his people (cf. Jn 10:1-30).

Paul of the Cross had a burning desire to give his life for the people during a mission, while giving the meditation on the Passion of Jesus and embracing the Crucifix. In this he gave evidence of a man disposed to give his life for the People of God. This is how Paul of the Cross understood, overcame and transformed his own suffering and that of others, until he became "a living crucifix for his contemporaries of the 18th century," as Paul VI called him.

In the face of testimony such as this, man learns how to be more of a man and live with the dignity of the children of God. Suffering should be solidarity-forming, that is, suffering with those who suffer, weeping with those who weep.

The suffering of the people of today remind us of the Innocent One who died on a Cross.

Undoubtedly, as Passionists we must possess a greater sensitivity toward the sufferings of others. We must help them in the struggle against historical suffering: Being disciples of the Crucified requires of us fidelity in accepting the consequences, including that of giving our lives for those we love (cf. Jn 15:13).

Passionist spirituality requires a passover from death to life. The Paschal Mystery of - Death-Resurrection which we celebrate each day in our communities obliges us to be witnesses and well springs of life among men.

#### **4. TO MAKE OUR OWN THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AND THE YOUNG AS DID THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH AT PUEBLA**

##### **a. Pastoral option for the poor**

Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed the Good News of Isaia in his own synagogue: freedom and liberty for the oppressed; year of grace of the Lord (61: 1ff). Then the Master gave an exegesis of the text: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:14-30). This is Jesus' preferential option.

The evangelizing of all peoples constitutes at once the essential mission of the Church and its positive identification. For Passionists, evangelizing "the poor in the most abandoned areas" is the reason for our existence in the Church; it proclaims our "preference." We have already analyzed the missionary activity of Paul of the Cross, and such is the genuine tradition of the Congregation.

The doctrinal richness of Puebla concerning the poor and poverty, the concrete pastoral recommendations and the decisions made by the bishops there (cf. especially P. 1134-1165) have profound overtones for our Congregation.

The unjust distribution of wealth in our world is one of the causes of hatred, division and suffering among peoples. All this obligates us Passionists to protest, in word and in deed, against a consumer society that places things above persons.

Along with absolute power over the rights of others, absolute wealth has become one of the idols which must be destroyed. The economy must serve the people, and not the reverse (cf. PP 34; GS 35; and especially P. 492-497).

The preaching of the Crucified brings about a discernment process because it unmask those men who are not genuine; because it confirms the commitment of those who opt for the preferred poor of the Kingdom of God. It makes a critical statement to the Church that forgets the Crucified and the crucified of our own times.

As Paul the Apostle toiled (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-2:5), as Paul of the Cross received his original inspiration in the 18th century, so we here and now.

### **b. Preferential option for the young**

Here we are concerned with “presenting to youth a living Christ, as their unique Saviour, so that once evangelized they may evangelize and contribute, through their loving response to Christ, to the integral liberation of man and society, by their lives of communion and participation” (P. 1166).

The Document of Puebla gives an analysis of the situation of youth in society and in the Church. It develops corresponding pastoral criteria. It also makes a preferential option toward a Latin American pastoral approach, with a view to communion and participation, together with some concrete applications to the pastoral care of youth (cf. P. 1167-1205).

These texts are very inspirational for our pastoral planning, above all for those Congregations dedicated to the education of children and youth.

### **CONCLUSION**

- The apostolic purpose of Paul of the Cross and his Congregation is: To proclaim and preach the Passion of Christ, which is the greatest handiwork of God’s love.
- The purpose intended by Paul of the Cross: To bring all Christians to share actively in the love of this Passion of Christ.
- The means used by Paul of the Cross in the apostolate: Meditation on the Passion of Jesus, above all and in all; popular missions, retreats, spiritual exercises, spiritual direction, catechesis.
- The unifying and driving force supporting the Passionist in his mission of evangelizing: a specific Passionist vow which illumines the other evangelical counsels and brings out their ultimate consequences.
- The urgent need for those Passionists who are in the initial stages of formation to undertake a concrete pastoral praxis and activity in that historical situation deemed most adequate. There must be a blend of theoretical studies and apostolic praxis.