



II. Second Part

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: Current theological points that inform the theological dimension of "Consecration to the Passion".

**Brief descriptive outline re. Current Theological Thought concerning the Passion and Death of the Lord ("Theology of the Cross")*

** The open perspective with the category of Paschal Mystery and other tendencies or highlights.*

1. Starting Point

The description that led to the conviction that "consecration to the Passion", the "Memoria Passionis", is enriched by these elements and at the same time the "habitus" that develops within us allows us to integrate them. 'Consecration to Passion' creates in us a predisposition to recognize these elements and at the same time develops them and enables us to live them in a peculiar way. The "consecration to the Passion" ("Memoria Passionis") becomes the "hermeneutic key" for reading-living, and understanding the Christian mystery.

This description is intended to make us aware of one of the elements or keys from which is constructed "our charismatic experience" rooted in an ecclesial reality. It is the imaginary "scaffolding" or "underpinning", conceptual-symbolic from which we reflect-we experience the confession of faith, and the "confession of Passionist faith". The description is focused on what could be called "theological-conceptual time" or vectors of reflection and paradigms of significance that today are present in it theological reflection.

I notice, first, that theological reflection in particular and the other dimensions of Christian life have lived, in an especially pointed way, after the Second Vatican Council, a new way of approaching the Holy Mystery of God and especially the consideration of the existence of Jesus and the meaning of his life, mission, and person. They rediscovered elements that had been left behind in the immediate experience and they recreated thanks to reflection and to Christian experience.

II. INTERPRETATIONS AND ASSERTIONS THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED: RECENT AND DISTANT CONTEXTS PRESENT IN OUR TIME.

One of the realities that has undergone profound questioning and development has been reflection on the Passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, in close relationship with the way of approaching the Christianity in its entirety. This is seen without going any further in the treaties of Christology, the mystery of God, sacraments and Christian life that were developed during the Second Vatican Council and from the momentum following its conclusion.

- a. On one hand, biblical exegesis, especially that done since the discovery of historical-critical methods, have raised various issues affecting the core of the meaning of the death of Jesus, its character and its significance. Some influential exegetes raised this issue with a certain virulence, establishing a rupture between what Jesus lived and the significance subsequently attributed to it by theology and the life of the Christian communities. *On the other hand*, theological hermeneutics and the incorporation of other interpretive schemes within the Christian tradition have brought about new theological systems, new syntheses and new perspectives, or at least the emergence of new interpretative keys. The paradigms of new philosophical and cultural currents, the new image of man, history and nature, ecology, the concept of salvation, the human quest for meaning and realization; the Western context of modernization and secularization, engagement with history, inter-religious context, the new contexts of inculturation as hermeneutical keys. The experience of multiculturalism that is embodied in and recreates the Christian experience has led to a wealth of perspectives



that challenge Christian revelation and in turn give rise to new incarnations and creations enriching cultures.

- b. Until then, the end of the 50s of the 20th century, in the Catholic context, we lived in a manual-oriented, fundamentally post-Tridentine tradition. This generally appropriated certain categories of theology before turning them into interpretive keys of understanding, meaning and effectiveness, concerning the death of Jesus. These, in the opinion of some authors, were far removed from core biblical and Patristic sources and other interpretations that in some cases - absolutized - distorted or inadequately oriented some of the interpretations of the Passion and Death of the Lord, its significance and its consequences. The most commonly used categories, redemption, salvation, justification, vicarious atonement, sacrificial victim today call for a new interpretative framework that needs to incorporate the resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. In the past a skewed and simplified presentation was proposed of the so-called "Anselmian theory" of satisfaction, turning it into a historical stage in the almost exclusively interpretative sense, becoming a target of criticism. The use of the more distant past or recent criticism does not seem fair.
- c. This theology nourished or created a specific devotional spirituality of atonement and sacrificial victim that without denying the significance of their orientation I accentuated unilaterally certain aspects leading to a distortion of reality to which I referred.
- d. In sacramentary theology, the centrality of reflection on the Eucharistic, for example, is understood as the "sacrifice of the cross". The practices of piety with regard to the Passion and the death of the Lord are oriented towards devotional compassion, a certain disembodied piety, although there have always existed many who attested that the love contemplated in the cross and the Crucified gave birth to a total love of charity.
- e. Given that the major traditions of Christian spirituality have come from contemplation-identification with the humanity of Christ, this has become detached from theology making it purely conceptual speculation and spirituality a matter of emotion and affectivity. Moreover, this separation is the result of a certain poverty about how to meditate and contemplate the Passion of the Lord.
- f. The sacrificial character of the Passion and the Death of Christ and in light of its meritorious and saving value, has afforded it a central place in preaching, reflection and motivation. We need to honestly question the imagery of sacrifice that underlies the theological interpretation and adaptation of other symbolic images used to express what happened in the "Passover of the Lord". We need to recognize the lack of other categories pertaining to the descending and ascending "mediation" which has existed in the person and the work of Christ.
- g. The formulation "Theology of the cross", after the Protestant Reformation remained enclosed in its theology and did not generally use the Catholic tradition. Its hermeneutic character influenced part of its theological reflection on the mystery of God and the consideration of Christian salvation. Catholic theology affirmed almost exclusivity the sacrificial dimension, speaking instead about "theology of redemption", of the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist, forgetting or not emphasizing other dimensions even in the Eucharistic anaphora. These are only a few examples of the absolute concepts that were used. Obviously, what is described here is not all of the reality of Christian life and theological reflection, but we must honestly recognize this tendency that has had some effects that we must consider.

Basically, there is a true impoverishment and segmentation in the conformation of Christian life.

These theological, spiritual or ascetic features have been and are present in our Congregational way of experiencing and preaching the "mystery of the Passion of Jesus



Christ", although it is also true that a certain original imprint has given us an experience the Passion that the Spirit gave us through St. Paul of the Cross.

II. SOME OF THE NEW THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES THAT HAVE EMERGED WITH REGARD TO THE "PASSION-DEATH-RESURRECTION OF THE LORD", THE "PASCHAL FACE OF GOD" THAT IS REVEALED TO US.

1. Recovery of the historical dimension of the death on the cross of Jesus within the space-time coordinates and religious-social-cultural. This fact has placed Christian uniqueness on the horizon of the proclamation of the reign of God present in history, as well as the originality of God that reveals, announcing and defining, Jesus himself in the religious, social and political context of Israel. It is also true that this exclusive insistence exclusive, uprooted from others, has given way to a biased and fragmentary, political or revolutionary understanding of the being and activities of Jesus that resulted in his death. The insistence on the historical-incarnational dimensions when lived in their totality has re-dimensioned the concept of following and discipleship, commitment and martyrdom, renunciation and courage in the proclamation and in the building of the Reign of God. In addition, the historical dimension has received profound meaning from the category of "*historia salutis*" understood as a revealing and saving moment open to eschatological consummation. This historical dimension involves the "God who is offered in history". In addition, the event of the cross is the action of the Triune God who reveals and offers Himself in history.
2. Resignification of the means to the Passion and Death from the plurality of New Testament theology: the theology of the Synoptics and John. For example, the category of "time", "road to Jerusalem" in relation to the mission, praxis and person of Jesus. Study of the meaning and significance from his understanding, from the categories and biblical practices that are stated in the gospel narratives and the first New Testament accounts about its meaning. A new horizon of meaning incorporating other biblical categories not used extensively in the theological-spiritual tradition: "service to the Kingdom", "pro-existence", for example. Re-reading from its beginning of the remaining categories offered by the rest of the traditions of the New Testament, in relation to the tension of continuity and originality in the Old Testament: reconciliation, atonement, sacrifice, salvation, justification, new creation. Careful attention to avoid "interpreting" these categories with foreign elements or distorting its genuine biblical sense recreated through revelation in Jesus the Lord. This re-reading is done today from the conviction that may generate new categories in relation to new contexts.
3. Underlining of the biblical unity with which Christ faced events: announcement of the Kingdom - originality of God - Praxis - Passion-Death-Resurrection.
4. Biblical hermeneutics, new theological paradigms, new social contexts have offered new interpretative keys:
 - a. Inclusion of the Christ event in the mystery of God the Father revealing the originality of revelation that occurred in it. Close relationship between Paschal and Trinitarian mystery.
 - b. Centrality of the category of "Paschal mystery" as key interpretation of the mystery of God, of the celebrative event of the Christian life and of her new existence. The so-called "Theology of the cross" had in its origin an "epistemological" and "hermeneutical" context, especially in the theology of the reformation. Today it is presented with these same interpretations, epistemological and hermeneutical, from the "Paschal mystery" formulation.
 - c. From this new context, the categories of being situated again before the Passion-Death-Resurrection of the Lord have been restated. The question about the meaning



- of existence, the quest for justice, the commitment to creation lead to a reinterpretation of the Christian treatise and to draw new life from these new "signs of the times".
- d. The recovery of the so-called "Theology of the mysteries of the life of Christ" has initiated a process that combines both exegesis and patristics and dogmatics in a new creative synthesis. It has placed the centrality of the "humanity of Christ" and the specificity of the "Passion of the Lord" or the "Lord in his Passion" in this context.
5. The recovery of the historicity of the praxis and death of Jesus has developed a formulation of "Christian praxis" in relation to the signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God and its establishment in history. It has allowed us to speak of "Jesus praxis" and commitment to justice. It is the reflection formulated on the theme of "commitment to the crucified".
- a. It has re-assumed the category of following and discipleship with new content and contexts by integrating them in the Paschal process that constitutes Christian existence in its sacramental dynamic as well as in the dynamics of the process of conversion and conformation to Christ.
 - b. The Trinitarian discourse today has deep Paschal roots. This causes us to rethink the concept of the salvation history, revelation, and mode of presence and offering of God.
 - c. The new horizon caused by the new contexts of the theology of redemption or the cross opens each of the classical categories to a new more encompassing hermeneutical meaning.
 - d. A new language that implies identification of Christ crucified with the suffering of human history, speaking about the crucified with certain theological currents, of the "crucified people".
 - e. Passion and Death is inserted into the radical nature of signs that make present the reign of God and the originality of the new offering and relationship of the Paternity of God.
 - f. The revelation that occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus is inserted into the work of the "ongoing creation", showing a new concept of being and power that springs from love. The discourse of the theodicy becomes the key element of the theology of the cross and the Paschal event.
 - g. The reference to Pneumatology becomes much more explicit both in the event of the Passion and death as well as in the new power manifested in the resurrection.
 - h. The sacramental dimension of Christian existence takes its interpretative key form the Paschal mystery.
 - i. The discourse of the Cross or the revelation of God in it presents the problem of the possibilities of human language to speak of the divine and of God. It is the paradigm of the "ontological" and "apophatic" when speaking of God.
 - j. The theology of the Cross, the revelation of Dios in the Paschal mystery opens a new space not only for the Ecumenical dialogue but for interreligious dialog.
 - k. The new cultural contexts pose the challenge of inculturation and therefore modes of experience, proclamation and presentation of the mystery of God, Christian existence, and therefore the Passionist charismatic experience. The human context of every culture claims the reality of "salvation" and expresses the uniqueness of what happened in Jesus "for us" in a particular way. What does what happened for us on the cross of Christ mean in African, Asian, Latin American and European realities? Each culture asks the cross of Christ about its meaning from its reality and



aspirations; and, at the same time, the cross of Christ is a critical and enriching demand in their reality.

The "Paschal mystery" is not only a content or an aspect, but also the interpretative key, the "hermeneutic principle" of the Trinitarian life of God, both in its being and its manifestation.

6. Christian life is found in the dynamics of the "Paschal mystery" both in liturgical and sacramental perspectives in its ethics and moral dimensions. The Pauline theology of baptism and the new creature or new creations re-dimensions the dynamics of the process of conversion with its process of asceticism, struggle and donation.

III. THE GIFT AND THE CHALLENGE OF THESE NEW HORIZONS AND PERSPECTIVES

This outline is intended to underline the richness of theological context in which we have placed, in an abbreviated form, what we call our Congregational language-- "*Passionist Charism*", "*Memory of the Passion*", "*Memoria Passionis*" or "*Consecration to the Passion*", "*Memoria Passionis on the context of the Paschal Mystery*".

We are confident that the charismatic existence - the gift of the Spirit by which it exists, enables us to integrate and recreate, and even enrich this dynamism. All these elements, both Biblical and the theological, demand of us a commitment to develop and enrich our charismatic existence. It allows us to develop or experience our *raison d'être*. Moreover, at the same time our unique experience of our charismatic existence and action are our contribution to the experience and the proclamation of the originality of God as experienced in the Passion of his Son.

APPENDIX – Brief Biography

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