

# 14

**Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality**

## **A SPIRITUAL READING OF THE 1982 CHAPTER EVENT**

**and**

## **THE SPIRIT AND THE VALUES OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS**

Costante Broveto, C.P.

## **AN ECOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE**

Sebastian MacDonald, C.P.

Rome 1983  
Passionist Generalate  
Piazza SS. Giovanni e Paolo, 13

The lectures of Costante Broveto, C.P., were originally delivered at an assembly of the Interprovincial Conference of Italian Passionists (C.I.P.I. ), held at Mascalucia., Sicily, January 8-6, 1983. They have been translated from the Italian by Norbert M. Dorsey, C.P.

The article by Sebastian MacDonald, C.P., was originally presented in Holy Cross Province (Chicago), USA.

Cum permissu: Paul M. Boyle, C.P., Sup. Gen.  
Editor, English-language series: Norbert M. Dorsey, C.P.

## **CONTENTS**

A Spiritual Reading of the 1982 Chapter Event

The Spirit and the Values of the New Constitutions

An Ecology of Religious Life

## **A SPIRITUAL READING OF THE 1982 CHAPTER EVENT**

Having ratified the new Constitutions in their final form, the 1982 General Chapter marks a truly historical moment for our Passionist Congregation. As our previous “Chapter Document”, those norms had been substantially experienced for twelve years.

The Chapter (and we ourselves) would never have dared draw up “ex novo” the basic texts of Passionist life, had it not been upheld by its faith in the activating presence of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of our Founder working in the midst of that assembly. And this was no vain trust. For it was nothing else but an act of obedience to Vatican Council II. That Council, likewise assisted by the Holy Spirit, did not wish to use its authority to fix the modality of the renewal of religious life but left the task to the Congregations themselves.

If this is true objectively speaking, it is also fair to ask how that historic Chapter was subjectively experienced as a spiritual event by those were its protagonists, and who now (this applies particularly to the major Superiors) are responsible for seeing its results lived out in the various Provinces. Most certainly this means determining the “look” of the Congregation in the few remaining years of this century, and projecting ourselves resolutely towards the year 2000 and that new “Advent” so often referred to by John Paul II.

### **a) The Daily Direction of the Chapter**

A continual recall to the spiritual dimension of the Chapter was definitely to be found in the presence of the three Moderators from the “Center for a Better World”. Fr. Max Taggi, SJ, and two Passionists (James Sweeney, CP, and Sr. Breda Eustace, CP) fulfilled that role. They did their best to prevent the discussions from degenerating into pure parliamentarianism and, rather, always helped the capitulars to maintain an attitude of listening to the Spirit both in explicit prayer and in listening to one another.

This team of moderators, themselves subject to the decisions of the elected Central Coordinating Committee (C.C.C.), were an inspiration for their tireless good will and the courtesy and humility of their interventions. This was true even when they had to point out that (contrary to their expectations) a certain amount of nitpicking and contentiousness in approving the “normative” sections caused delay in the overall timetable.

It might be said that a greater firmness in keeping to the regulations for the general assemblies could also have been a spiritual factor by preventing some weariness and irritation. Even more, this would have insured that more time (actually, the time that had been originally calendared) would have remained for developing the planning or “programming” sections, in which it was easier for everyone to take a more spiritual attitude, as did partly happen.

### **b) The “Discovery” of Our Overseas Brethren**

What probably constituted the happiest spiritual experience was the work shared in the “study groups”. These latter were organized inter-nationally, as of course were the plenary assemblies. It sometimes happened that in a group of fifteen Chapter participants, ten nations were represented. Linguistic difficulties, fairly well dealt with, did not prevent a free and

fraternal communication that brought out fully the human and spiritual qualities of each man. Unfortunately, that happens less often in the more rigid structures of the general assemblies. Beyond the various cultures; mentalities and opinions, it was easy to see that all without exception love the Passionist vocation and worked for its authentic betterment.

The outstanding times of the weekly evaluation (done in the style of a sharing-of-life) brought out how all of us realized our limitations and were grateful for the contribution of other members of the study-groups. The fact, too, that the groups were not “specialized” but all were to examine everything, helped to prevent rigidity and reticence.

### **c) Liturgy**

Obviously, the times for prayer were precious to our spiritual experience. The frequent “plenary” Eucharistic celebrations (as also the Hours prayed and sung together in the Aula) were an objective and visible sign of spiritual unity beyond language barriers. Well prepared and reflected upon, the recurring feasts enabled us to realize the spiritual treasures in our Passionist heritage.

Nevertheless, the necessarily more rigid stylization of the plenary celebrations were perhaps subjectively less moving in a spiritual way than the liturgies in the various language or study groups, where more freedom and creativity were possible.

### **d) Did We Truly Listen to the Spirit?**

However, we still have to ask ourselves seriously the complex and difficult question, to which it would be imprudent to give a categorical answer were we, as a social body, truly receptive to what the Spirit is saying today to the Church and the world? On the whole, I think we can humbly give an affirmative answer.

I would like, though, to make a distinction between the *normative* and *programming* sections of our work. At first there were some “a priori” attitudes or positions that were hardly consonant with spiritual docility, either in the demand that there should be affirmations of principle in the Constitutions that hardly bore comparison with reality, or in the sense of wanting to modify the Constitutions with the sole claim of adjusting them to factual realities. Thus it regrettably happened that some (a few) were still wrestling in a problematic way with the question of Passionist identity even toward the end of our work.

In the programming sessions it seemed to me that there was a greater sensitivity to the actual demands of the Spirit, even if, as I shall point out in further detail later, it was providentially – and even more than we realized at the time – already in the Constitutions.

### *The “Two Souls” of the Chapter*

Thinking over in a general way the existential unfolding of the Chapter, it seems important to realize above all that there surfaced constantly and fairly distinctly something like *two souls of the Congregation*, both bearers of authentic values, but inevitably in tension with each other.

We do not want to linger over the more or less hidden presence of another “spirit” in which there is little or nothing evangelical, that each may have felt in himself, but which on the whole we all tried to exorcize so that it would not damage the vast collective *discernment* that was the Chapter.

Going over the Chapter event in a spiritual key we shall now try and describe the various features of these *two souls*, pointing out, however, that different aspects in any one person could be very varied and unpredictable and were never clear-cut. What matters here, though, is to try and gather the positive aspects and boundaries of each position so as to aim at an integral synthesis. Such a synthesis will be even more sought after at the level of experience, as we go on to a deeper understanding of the *Constitutions* and their actual significance in order to put them into practice.

### **a) Realism and Asceticism**

One soul of the Chapter was *pragmatic* realism. This takes into account the factual realities that exist in the Congregation as a result of its two hundred year old history and its worldwide diffusion, especially in the Third World. It takes into account above all the good will of our religious everywhere and the fruitful results of their labors. This realism would not want the norms to limit those developments, even if very pluralistic, nor would it want them to be so rigid as to demand dispensations here, there, and everywhere so as to create discriminations between religious simply because of the different conditions under which they work.

The other soul is that of *ascetic idealism*. It believes that the stimulus deriving from demanding norms is fruitful, and that we can and should sacrifice something at the practical level. It fears that pragmatism will end up by becoming a minimal asceticism, contrary to evangelical radicalism. Idealism in this sense hardly means a lack of realism, but rather the conviction that the greatest efficacy for religious is an integral witness to their own ideal.

### **b) Identity and Relevance**

Tension can surface in another way when people concentrate, as we had to at the Chapter, on their identity or rather the forcefulness (incisiveness) of their own presence.

The soul that wants to *preserve* at all costs its identity constantly recalls the traditional formulae, even if only the nominal and literal expressions. But there is an uncertainty as to what specific content should be given to these formulae in a new cultural and practical context.

The soul that pushes for *relevance* also presupposes traditional values but rather than repeating them in worlds, tries to state their actualization for our times and in cultural adaptations that may be so daring, however, as to create a fear that their connection with tradition is too slight.

### **c) Juridicism and Project-making**

The *legalistic* soul considers norms as the principal means of furthering the good of the institute and tries to incorporate everything, even details, in them. While trying to forestall

deviant interpretations or applications, it goes on implicitly proposing the “regular” life as the community model, tending as far as possible towards a uniformity in space and time.

The *project-making* soul sees the norms rather as stimuli to creativity and as sufficiently pliable to face unexpected situations. In a way it places *programming* before norms, circumstanced but circumscribed in space and time. Implicitly it proposes the “efficient” life as a valid communitarian and apostolic model, in order to produce those specific results that are expected today from religious more committed to contact with society.

### **Summary**

What we have called the “two souls” of the Congregation can reach at least a relatively existential fusion. Whoever feels a strong tendency in himself to one of the two should try to appreciate the second, since that predominates in others. He should also try to incorporate those in-sights in an operative way in his own evaluations to make them more balanced. *Above all*, the two souls can reach a relatively *objective* fusion if they are not taken as alternative or exclusive opponents, but rather as complementary stresses. These stresses should be kept in mind in the various forms in which our Passionist life is lived.

The Chapter event itself was a good proof that the institute is not guided only by *norms*, but also by *programming*, and above all by sensitive and human *superiors* capable of placing every principle and program within reality, and doing it with love, tenacity, and attentive dialogue with everyone.

Costante Brovetto, C.P.

## THE SPIRIT AND THE VALUES OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS

A thorough analysis of the new *Constitutions* is somewhat impossible at present, and so I shall simply make a few allusions to what seems of greater interest. As has already been foreseen in the *programmation* of the General Chapter, it will undoubtedly be possible to make a deeper study of this theme when the various Provinces will have carried out their catechesis in each community and prepare to gather up the threads at the General Synod in 1984.

### a) The Old Rule and the New Constitutions

Toward the end of the Chapter something happened that has to be underlined in the very vote on the conclusion of the Constitutions, the obligatory inclusion of the ancient text of the *Rule of St. Paul of the Cross* in the editing of the Constitutions was refused. This text had been presented officially by the 1976 Chapter (in the form of the 1741 text) as the enduring “inspirational” source.

While implicitly allowing the various regions of the Congregation to include this text if they so desire (as we had done in Italy since 1970 with “chosen texts” from the older Rules), the Chapter decision may appear somewhat ambiguous to our religious if it is not well understood. There may be some who think that the Chapter members wanted to make a complete break with the past, still so holy and venerable; that they feared a direct confrontation of the new with the former texts; or that they wanted practically to “re-found” the Congregation almost from scratch. But I think the correct interpretation of that moment (soft-pedaled as it was so as not to spoil the conclusion of the Chapter, yet somewhat traumatic for many) was quite different.

No doubt the Chapter wanted to stress the irreversible and historical turning the Congregation had made – together with the whole Church – in the spirit of Vatican Council II. Likewise, they wanted to avoid any kind of cult to “the letter” of the older Rules, such that might have impeded grasping “the spirit”. In fact, one capitular remarked that our *holy Founder* himself did not hesitate to have the very first Rules burnt, which he himself had declared he had written charismatically in 1720; the new texts approved later by the Holy See had completely replaced them.

But it is true also that the new Constitutions keep a continual and explicit link with the ancient spiritual patrimony of the Congregation and tell us to refer to it, drawing, even more than on the older Rules alone, on all the written and lived teaching of St. Paul of the Cross.

Two centuries ago perhaps the opposite occurred: after the death of the Founder there was an ever-increasing predominance of the letter of the Rules, and other sources of the spirit were diminished. A typical instance was the fate of the pamphlet on *Mystical Death*. St. Paul of the Cross had wanted it to be placed among the texts for novitiate formation. Yet at the time of the canonical review of the saint’s writings it had disappeared, and only the Carmelite nuns to whom it had originally been sent could produce a copy.

### B) Explicit References to St. Paul of the Cross

For an objective confirmation of the above it is enough to run through the text of the Constitutions, noting how often they explicitly quote the *Holy Founder* and turn to his thought and examples. Henceforth no one will be able to claim to explain and apply the *Constitutions* well, unless he first takes the trouble to verify those points that refer to the Saint in order to reinforce the spirituality and action of the Passionists of today and tomorrow. The spirit of St. Paul of the Cross is taken to be very much alive, indeed, like that of the prophets. Perhaps this very day it is able to stir up in his sons things that two centuries ago the times neither demanded nor allowed, whereas today they can spring up marvelously from the charism of the Passion for the salvation of the world.

It is significant that in the 1982 Chapter these references have notably increased. Twelve of them, in fact, already in the Chapter Documents, have been taken up substantially and literally; besides this, twelve more have been newly inserted. This moving care to keep a vital link with the charismatic origin of our Congregation is also a valid indication of the indispensable creativity required to maintain this same spiritual vitality.

One concrete way of furthering this orientation would be to compile a *spiritual directory*, or commentary on the Constitutions, that would explain more fully the references we speak of. Equally useful would be an *historical directory* that makes clearer the historical evolution of the present norms, to show how these have followed the times, continually striving for recognizable continuity with the origins.

In *Appendix I* will be found the list of Constitution texts (and to be complete, the Regulations) where there are references to the Holy Founder.

### **C) Special Vow of the Passion**

The General Chapter has confirmed fully the deepest intuition of the special Chapter of 1968-1970: *the placing of the vow to promote the memory of the Passion as the specific determinant factor in our physiognomy, the very purpose of the Congregation*. I spoke of this at the pre-Chapter meeting of Italian capitulars at Monte Argentario in June 1982, (I refer you to what I said then and of which one part, still valid, will be found in *Appendix II*).

Here also, in the 1982 Chapter, other passiological tests were added to the already numerous ones in the Capitular Document, so that the concreteness of the *special vow of the Passion* became very clear-cut; especially as a contemplative radiation of our life and a greater care for the crucified people of this world. The innovations to our text will be found listed in *Appendix III*.

What we urgently need now, perhaps, is a synthesis that expresses and includes our *identity* in a concise phrase such as to leave no doubt either in other people or ourselves that we have to be consistent with this *identity*. Who are the Passionists? Men who manifest the cross as gospel, that is, good news! Men who teach how to discover God in the Crucified one and in the crucified people of this world! Men who advocate a courageous Christianity against any watering down of the cross!

### **D) Our Solicitude for the “Poor”**



Perhaps the most incisive and daring part, that is to shape the physiognomy of the Passionists advancing towards the year 2000, is probably where the new Constitutions speak of our duty “to begin with the least” (*cominciare dagli ultimi*) (to use an expression coined by the Italian episcopate as a programme for the Italian ecclesial community in the 80’s).

The many suggestions already existing in the Chapter Document were confirmed, and three new articles added (one in the Constitutions, and two in the Regulations) that are perfectly clear (see *Appendix IV*). The historical heritage that is ours is proposed anew with all its importance. St. Paul of the Cross gave himself to work with the poor of the Maremma; and we?

We cannot here go into the possible developments that will result from these stimuli. We have always been *popular missionaries* and we shall certainly be so more than ever. It is also certain that our holy Founder went in search of those not reached by ordinary pastoral care. This should be our priority and should be noted well, because many of our ministries are in fact “adjuncts” (as exceptions) to the ordinary ones of parishes today. While parishes are certainly more attentive to the needs of the people than they were two centuries ago, often they are unable to make fruitful pastoral contact with the newly-emarginated (e.g., laborers or atheistic intellectuals influenced by secularist ideologies, or drug addicts affected by psycho-social collapse, etc. ).

## **E) Unity and Collegiality of Government**

Finally, we should recall as an important spiritual value our search for a structural system that assures obedience to the Spirit (Creator of multiform charisms and of communitarian and apostolic initiatives), while also holding on to the true unity of the Congregation.

Our *Constitutions* are mainly a framework of law that, with regard to decentralization and subsidiarity, refer to *norms* and programs which the Provinces and Regional Vicariates will give themselves. On this level, collegiality is always functioning. But the fairly explicit reference to the Holy Spirit demands genuine care not to take decisions without having made a real spiritual discernment. Still more than ever before do we have to learn that procedure, and the Superiors themselves should animate the various community processes wherein the path of the Congregation matures and takes shape.

The new Constitutions have also provided for a strengthening of the unity of the social body by a juridical-spiritual reevaluation of the figure of the *Provincial* and *Local Superior*. Outside of the Provincial or General Chapter, there is, in fact, no collegial organism in the strict sense in the Congregation. Hence, there is no place for a headless or disorderly assembly-ism or “communitarianism”. The opinions or the consensus of councils and assemblies still leave the Superior his specific function in the role of decision-maker.

Especially in the new Constitutions is there a clear reinforcement of the *Father General’s* authority. This was done in a balanced way (that is, less than some had requested, but I think sufficiently). The successor of St. Paul of the Cross should in fact be able to have an authority which, while mainly engaged in caring for and promoting the charism, is also able to act efficaciously with juridical means. In *Appendix V* we give some examples of this trend.

Now we have nothing more to do than to get on with our work, full of gratitude to the Lord Who has been with us in the none too easy pilgrimage of the Congregation during these years, as we confidently await the last word on our Constitutions to be said by the *Holy See*. St. Paul of the Cross, who many times asked and obtained this supreme sanction on the various editions of the Rule during his own life, will again intercede for us and obtain *a spirit of faith and obedience* so that our lives may be totally charismatic, precisely because totally guaranteed by that discernment that only the supreme authority of the Church can give.

Costante Brovetto, C.P.

## Appendix I

### ***REFERENCES TO THE FOUNDER IN THE CONSTITUTIONS***

#### A) TEXTS ALREADY IN THE CHAPTER DOCUMENT CONFIRMED

Cons. 1 (=DC 1): The historical and charismatic mention of the origins: Compared with DC the text has been reshaped and bettered, above all with the mention of the apostolic life (ad instar apostolorum) that is our characteristic.

Cons. 2 (=DC 2): Recalls the ecclesial approval of the Founder's charism and our decision to remain faithful! (Two texts).

Cons. 13 (= DC 13): Recall of a phrase from the ancient Rule that considers poverty to be the standard of the Congregation.

Cons. 3 (= DC 23): At the beginning of the chapter on community life there is a reminder of the spiritual testament of the Founder.

Cons. 35 (= DC 40): At the beginning of the chapter on prayer there is a reminder of the example and warning of our holy Father.

Cons. 55 (=DC 62): Reminder of the penitential spirit of St. Paul of the Cross as our model.

Cons. 58 (=DC 65): At the beginning of the chapter on the apostolic life are reminders of the example and teaching of St. Paul of the Cross.

Cons. 66 (=DC 75): Recalls the traditions of missions and retreats, the ministry chosen by our Father.

Cons. 75 (=DC 95): In the chapter on formation a recall to fidelity to the charism of the Founder as a source of vocations.

Cons. 83 (=DC 120): The spirituality of the Founder should be taught to the young in formation.

Reg. 35 (=DC 75): Reminder of the missionary tradition of the Founder.

#### B) ADDED TEXTS TO THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1982 CHAPTER

Cons. 4 (=DC 4): The Constitutions to be observed in the spirit of St. Paul of the Cross!

Cons. 42 (=DC 52): Suggestion to refer to the teachings and examples of our Founder for spiritual reading.

Cons. 48 (New): Meditate on the Passion as St. Paul of the Cross did.

Cons. 57 (New): Like St. Paul of the Cross, love to receive spiritual direction.

Cons. 62 (New): Like St. Paul of the Cross, teach meditation on the Passion. Like him, give spiritual direction (twice mentioned).

Cons. 68 (New): A predilection for the poor, like St. Paul of the Cross.

Conclusion of Cons. (New): The Constitutions interpret the Rule of St. Paul of the Cross. Let us recall his final spiritual testament (twice).

Reg. 2: Honor St. Paul of the Cross among our patrons.

Reg. 8: Read every year in public the ancient Rule.

Reg. 64: Esteem the Passionist habit as our Founder did.

### **Appendix II (from lecture, June 1982)**

## ***THE GREAT TURNING POINT WITH THE CHAPTER DOCUMENT***

Before setting to work to obtain the definitive approval of our normative texts, we should glance for a moment at their origin in the Special General Chapter of 1968-70. This, most certainly, marked an historical turning point in the life of the Congregation, in a way analogous with what happened at Vatican II and in the entire Catholic Church. But it also marked the beginning of a growing crisis in the Congregation (here also within the vicissitudes of the whole Church), to the point that sometimes it was asked if the change of direction then taken had been wise? I think, however, it is historically irreversible. But I believe, too, that we are bound to examine the situation serenely and critically.

With regard to the *special vow of the Passion*, the Chapter work was clear: this has been treated in the first chapter (the fundamentals of our life), in a paragraph (Our consecration to the Passion of Jesus) placed before the chapter on the evangelical counsels and the three vows. Why was this done?

I think there were basically two reasons.

First of all, in the conciliar climate (and also because of the effects of a kind of secularizing slant), the Chapter wanted to get away from the “devotional” interpretation of this fourth vow. The affective attachment to it was universal, but equally universal was the uneasiness as to how to place it adequately in the communitarian and apostolic Passionist life.

I must say the solution was not a turning back but a very courageous act: it was felt the *special vow* should be in some way amplified, so as to give it a content that was not confined to only one sector of Passionist life (preaching) but was the very reason of the Congregation itself. Theologically and historically, this corresponds with the life as lived from the foundation. But juridically, we have to admit, it was an extended interpretation.

Always within this first motivation, the interpretation of the vow passed from the “categorical” (a precise thing to do in a given sector) to the “transcendental” (a light or horizon in which to place our whole life, and in which we would measure its authenticity). In other words, it might be said that the *special vow* now demands not an occupation but a *preoccupation*.

In this way, the question of our *identity* in the Church is beautifully resolved. Against any attempt to monopolize and against every abdication of originality, it is clear that we are distinguished, not by a “thing”, but by an existential “accentuation”.

*Another* reason for proceeding as the Chapter did (though not always realized), was the need to find an authentic unity within the ever-increasing cultural and operative pluralism with its load of tensions. Reference to the Passion seemed so weighty a criterion of unity that it was possible to tend towards such a great liberalization and decentralizing that the whole Chapter Document might take on practically the appearance of only a general framework of law, within which the real norms would be made on the Provincial level, or there would no longer exist any real and authentic law as such.

Two observations are in order here.

Theologically it is right that unity among us Passionists should be codified as a *charismatic unity*: that is precisely the only reality at the root of every other outward expression. Analogically, unity among Christians is expressed by the Spirit of Baptism: plunge in the experience of Jesus to go to the Father like him! But this very analogy also shows us that the unity among Christians remains imperfect, if we consider baptism alone, as we see very well in modern ecumenism. We need something further.

We have, then, to examine the outward and operative aspect of our Passionist unity as well. Can the Constitutions juridically remain only a law-framework? Yes, if we accept the analogy of the Constitutions, with the Magna Carta of a State, even if it has need of a Parliament (or someone chosen) to legislate precisely if it is to become operative: In fact, in practice we see how the constitution may remain a dead letter for long periods when such laws are missing. The State has an organ to verify which laws are constitutional or not; but it has no organ to oblige the making of laws to actualize the Constitution. It is interesting to observe that the constitutional court takes on an ever-increasing “political” role, that is, it judges constitutionality not merely on the basis of literal conformity, but also on the basis of the “spirit” of the laws (interpreted unfortunately in a more historical sense, but this is secondary).

I think the Chapter Document had sufficiently seen to these needs by giving the General Chapter and the Superior General also the function of verification, stimulus, and legitimization, always so as to *follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the signs of the times* (DC 134). Probably this function needs further stressing. But I do not have to go into this matter here. I want only to state clearly that we cannot accept that the *charismatic unity of our consecration to the Passion should become an alibi* for a surreptitious and effective falling apart on the operative level.

#### *The Passionist “turning-point” in Italy from 1969-1982*

While we are about to ratify the historical turning-point of the Institute we may ask if, and how far, this has been perceived by the Italian Passionists and how it has influenced life in recent years.

I should not like to be pessimistic, but I think the awareness of the real extent of the turning-point has still to be reached. Everyone’s fault more or less, but it is a fact that only now many Passionists are “discovering” the value of the Chapter Document. And resistance to it has not ceased, whether simply passive and hidden or polemical and out in the open.

Maybe this is analogous to what happened in Italy about the reception of Vatican II. When there is a desire to give more responsibility, appealing to *values* rather than *precise norms*, we risk obtaining less if there is not sufficient maturity. Think of how Friday “penance” ended. Not by accident 1971 saw the end of the “Fonti Five” publications for which a sporadic and sterile nostalgia remains. Even the success of the “Congress on the *Wisdom of the Cross*”, if it satisfied everyone, has had little influence on life.

The Italian initiatives (such as the Stauros indices) struggle on, and the international ones (the “green” pamphlets or the study sessions organized by the General Curia) are followed only marginally. Community life-style and apostolic aims have been only slightly affected by a Passiological focus.

But we do not have to be discouraged for the above-mentioned reason: it is an historical turning-point and we need time. Still, we have to insist, and also prepare instruments that will make necessary both an inward awareness and the way to exteriorize it.

Did our last 1976 General Chapter do this? Yes and no. An evaluation of its results is part of our reflections. Personally I think we should look attentively at the draft of the Chapter declaration that was not made official, because it pointed very well to the heart of the question. The published declaration also has some of its dynamic. In *Paul VI's* letter - that was made use of against the Chapter! - there is a striking mention of the influence of social healing attributed to the proclamation of the Passion.

We should therefore ask ourselves what has to be done in this next General Chapter. A scrutiny of the proposed texts, whether for Constitutions or Regulations, confirm the preoccupation to maintain and even accentuate the Passiological character of our life. But I think it would be well to observe carefully the theological aspects of the draft as well as the operative ones within the juridical texts, but, put together for approval, with some more programmatic types of documents.

#### *There is a "Passionist" theology*

To give an authentic cultural garment to the unity that the Passion theme establishes among us, we have to agree on a theology that is not merely "Passiological" but "Passionist". Indeed, the two aspects are not the same. And even if, from the point of view of being well-informed we may need to follow up all the Passiological theologies, from the existential and apostolic point of view it is of enormous importance that we be oriented in a unified fashion.

Passionist theology is not simply what can be gathered from the experience and writings of our holy Founder. His personal charism is unique and not to be repeated, as is that of every saint, and if it enriches the family it cannot express it alone. What counts is the theology "codified" in the *older Rules* confronted with that about to be "codified" in the new texts (the fruit of a variety of personal visions which must serve and not dominate the common result).

The Passionist theology of the *ancient Rule* is all based on the efficacy of contemplation of the Passion as an historical, dramatic and moving event recalled with faith as proof of the love of a "God crucified" for all men, especially sinners. Intrinsically this means that the emerging aspect of the Passion is an "epiphany" in the style of St. John the Apostle. Whoever plunges into the meditation of the Passion can no longer sin! Indeed, he *cannot not* advance rapidly towards Christian perfection!

It must be admitted, however; that the theology of the Rule is one thing and the juridical-operative structure into which it was fitted, another. To have conceived the consecration to the Passion as a vow with all its effects, led to squeezing the substance into moralistic and juridical limitations that ended by transforming the "epiphany" efficacy almost into *ex opere operato*. It is enough to remember the famous "replacement" of Passion preaching (with five Our Fathers and Hail Marys ) to see how it was reduced. So we have to rescue the theology without letting ourselves be entangled in the constitutional structure. Is the theology of the Chapter document faithful to our origins? I would say it is, even if it seems based on the style of St. Paul

the Apostle rather than St. John. Besides, the quotation from 1 Cor. 1:18, the basis of this theology, was already in the opening of the ancient Rules.

The two elements are fused in phrases such as: “By the power of the cross, the wisdom of God...” (DC 3), and the Passion of Jesus “as the revelation of the power of God” (DC 5). The juxtaposed statements I think reflect the evolution of Christian culture, much less platonic today than formerly and far more attentive to verify orthodoxy with orthopraxis. Hence, the “epiphany” aspect is no longer so much linked with moving psychological meditation as with the urge to act to “overcome the cause of human suffering” (DC 3), “to destroy the power of evil and build up the kingdom of God” (DC 5). Perhaps this conclusion is confirmed by the repeated reference to the *Word of the Cross* in the Constitutions. What is central is not simply a union of love with Christ crucified, but a harmonious union with his *mens*, and his *logic*, his way of furthering the Kingdom of God.

The consequences are not slight. The older theology could be a mere support to a static vision of life (moral, social, religious), because the Crucifix did indeed provide motive for conversion, but the ramifications were supplied by the situation (practically by authority). Whereas the new theology is the acquisition of a *forma mentis* that is opposed *sic et simpliciter* to the ratification of every *status quo* as such, and moves rather towards a life (moral, social, religious) that is integrally based on the values of the Kingdom at any cost. This moves towards an operative following of Jesus who, precisely because he made the *status quo* move towards the Kingdom, was crucified!

I think this too is substantially faithful to our origins. The anxiety of the older Rules to see that the *least* were introduced to meditation shows that quite a noteworthy operation of human promotion was being done: in substance everyone was taught to think with their own head! This is exactly what the new texts want when they speak of leading to a renewed awareness of the importance of the logic of the Cross. But now we have to be careful how we apply this theology in the juridical-moral and operative orders.

### **Appendix III**

#### *PASSIOLOGICAL TEXTS ADDED TO THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS*

Cons. 7 (DC 7): Baptism immerses us in the Paschal dynamic of the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Cons. 16 (=DC 16): Celibacy makes us participate in the kenotic “service” of Jesus.

Cons. 20 (= DC 20): Obedience manifests the liberating power of the cross.

Cons. 27 (=DC 27): Our sick brothers share in a more intense manner the Passion of Christ.

Cons. 40 (=DC 45): In the Mass we renew the sacrifice of Christ and announce his death and proclaim his resurrection.

Cons. 48 (new): We meditate frequently on the passion.

Cons. 58 (=DC 67): Our apostolate tends to make the memory of the Passion constantly lived and celebrated

Cons. 63 (new): We teach meditation on the Passion in an up-dated way.

Cons. 68 (new): We embrace the cross by struggling for justice.

Cons. 91 (new): All of us, fathers and brothers, are equally called to make memory of the Passion by following Jesus Crucified.

Cons. 151 (= DC 197): Detachment from remuneration in communicating the message of the cross.

Regulations 2: The Virgin of Sorrows is our patroness.

Reg. 26b: We will establish times and ways to express in common devotion to the Passion (cf. DC 58).

Reg. 30: Recommend votive Masses and Office of the Passion.

Reg. 31a: In our apostolate keep in mind our special vow.

Reg. 31b: In the apostolate spend ourselves as true apostles of the Cross.

Reg. 34b: Help to discover the liberating strength of the cross.

### **Appendix IV**

#### **TEXTS CONCERNING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE POOR (ADDITIONAL)**

Cons. 11 (=DC 11): Greater strictness in evaluating the commitment.

Cons. 12 (=DC 12): Reach the point of sharing the life of the poor.

Cons. 36 (=DC 39): In prayer, echo the cry of the poor.

Cons. 61 (=DC 70): Attentive to the “crucified” people of today.

Cons: 68 (new): Involvement on behalf of justice is essential.

Stat. 31D: In the apostolate prefer the poor and marginal.

Stat. 34: Ways of dedication to those more abandoned.

### **Appendix V**

#### *AUTHORITY OF THE FATHER GENERAL*

- a) The Assistancies being abolished, the Father General may chose the General Councillor he wishes to act as link with the Provinces (Reg. 88).
- b) The figure of General Regional Vicar has been instituted (Cons. 94c); thus the General is able to provide for outstanding needs concerning the foundation or development of the Congregation in specific areas (Reg. 73).



- c) In DC 175 there were some restrictions to the right of the General to ratify the decrees of the Provincial Chapters: now all Provincial Chapter decrees are fully subject to such a verification and confirmation (Cons. 132f).
- d) Before, the President of the Provincial Chapter could suspend the Chapter for the good of the Province (cf. OU 98), now he may also simply reserve to the General Curia some particular questions, besides having the preceding faculty (Cons. 140):
- e) The right of the General to cast a deliberative vote at any Provincial Chapter or assembly, etc, in which he participates, is explicated. Furthermore, if he exercises direct jurisdiction in the Provinces, it is specified that he does it with his Council (cf. Cons. 117).
- f) In DC 147 for new residences it was enough to inform the General; now the permission of the General must be obtained (at least as approval of the Provincial Chapter decision, Reg. 72b). Besides which, the General's permission is necessary to accept parishes for long and indefinite periods (Reg. 37).
- g) The removal of a Local Superior can be directly made by the General (Reg. 114).
- h) The formal erection of a Regional Conference and approval of its statutes are now the General's competence (Reg. 98).

# **AN ECOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There has been endless talk about the renewal of religious life during the years since Vatican II. No apology need be made for this in view of the prominence that this mode of life enjoys in the midst of the Christian community. The following remarks, while immediately directed to religious life, are also intended for Christian life as a whole. Hopefully religious life, patterned according to the following ideas, can serve as a model for Christian life everywhere.

### **PART 1: DEVOTION**

Devotion is a foundational attitude in the lives of religious people. It means a mind-set that is clearly ready for serving God. It is the font and source of all other genuine and authentic acts of religion. A devout person is a typical example of the truly religious person. Unfortunately devotion is susceptible to distortion within the Catholic community as much as anywhere else. This is partly due to the accumulation of devotions that so far as Catholics are concerned have multiplied to the point at times of almost unmanageable proportions. It is also partially due to the unsavory displays that so-called devout and pious people give as they go about their religious exercises. These distortions, or excesses, are to be deplored to the extent that they caricature true devotion in the lives of religious people, but in a sense distortions are barely avoidable. Precisely because devotion entails a certain amount of emotion and enthusiasm, it is liable to overflow, at least occasionally, into unacceptable expressions (1).

The devoted person is ready and even anxious to express his/her devotion. That is to acknowledge the orientation to action in the truly devout person. Action is the blossoming and fulfillment of devotion (2). There is no one action that totally satisfies its outward thrust; rather there are a variety of such actions among which is to be enumerated the profession of vow to God (3). By a happy choice of language, Catholic tradition uses the term religious to describe those who make public vows of service to God. For this reason, such religious are obvious candidates to model devotion.

To maintain its integrity, devotion must constantly focus on God (4). This focus, in its turn, depends on the way the devout person perceives God in his/her life. There are two ways in which we speak of God's presence to us: a vertical way, in which God is perceived as transcendent, and a horizontal way, in which God is recognized as Immanent. The term "revealer" is often reserved for God's vertical intervention in our lives, while the term "creator" seeks to describe God's horizontal presence in our midst.

The devoted person can function equally well with respect to either of these ways. Just so long as there is some focus on God, devotion proves to be that enthusiastic and prompt attitude for religiously serving.

### **PART 2: FREEDOM**

Freedom needs to be more closely associated with devotion. Freedom is an open stance toward an undifferentiated good, though capable of being activated toward some special aspect of

the good as occurs in the basic fundamental option for one kind of good (5). Freedom is in sympathetic liaison with devotion to the extent that it is at the heart of that readiness and alacrity for action stemming from the fullness that typifies devotion. This liaison extends to the context of the basic or fundamental option that devotion implies in its commitment to the service of God. In this context freedom's openness to action assumes the limited and restricted thrust to action associated with God.

Just as devotion, but for completely different reasons, freedom has enjoyed less than sympathetic understanding in the Catholic tradition. This difficulty is ancient, and reverts to the very beginnings of Christian faith and religion as the apostle Paul struggled with the implications of freedom in the Christian community consequent upon his obvious acceptance of its role in principle (6). Paul clearly saw that the cross of Christ represented the liberation of the believer from the restraints and constrictions of the elements of this world (7). Yet he, and every one of the great theologians since him, had to struggle with the implications of incorporating this law of freedom (8) into the mainline practice of the discipleship of Christ.

There have been obvious abuses associated with freedom as there have been with devotion. Certainly an aspect of the problems with freedom in Christian tradition has been reconciling its root understanding as complete openness to the presence of good with the kind of limitations on that openness implied in the basic or fundamental option and the subsequent series of decisions made consequent on that option.

The very root of freedom seems curtailed by the history of decision-making. The lines of conflict here may be drawn too rigidly and absolutely. Freedom, even when channeled and oriented by way of an historic basic option and series of subsequent decisions, still enjoys a wide field of choice among the ways and means of achieving the good that lies at the very root of freedom. The initial fullness in freedom urges this variety.

It is in this context that the experience of moral equivalence can be pointed to, meaning the perceived similarity of various courses of action that recommend themselves to the person bent upon the pursuit of some aspect of the good (9). So often in our Catholic tradition, in the aftermath of the historical decisions that we have already made, we have lost sight of the plurality of available choices in a way that unduly limits our freedom. To the extent this limitation of freedom is a deadening experience in our lives, it is imperative to consider the role of moral equivalence.

The person committed to devotion will appreciate this appeal to moral equivalence because it suggests the fullness and plenitude of action that is so typical of devotion. For this reason moral equivalence should prove attractive to those professionally religious people bound by vow, who should model devotion within the Christian community. A variety of ways to choose from in which to expand and express devotion recommends itself as thoroughly credible and reasonable to devoted religious.

### **PART 3: WITNESS**

The implications of moral equivalence also recommend it to religious when they reflect seriously upon their responsibility to witness. The vowed religious is a professional witness

because he or she has adopted a prophetic stance by vow, which adds an extra dimension to the alacrity and fullness that characterizes their lives of devotion. For by their calling to witness, religious are responsible not only for their own lives but for God and their peers in the world. For a religious witnesses on behalf of God to his or her peers. This is an added dimension to devotion compatible with its inherent tendency to seek broad and wide expression (10).

The witness of religious life is public, not private. Religious are signs, almost sacraments, to be made manifest and interpreted (11). They are signs by their lives and by their ministry.

As public signs they are obviously meant to be mediums of communication; they are saying something. This is what witness means. What happens in this event may unfortunately resemble a monologue where they alone do the speaking about God while others listen. At times this understanding of religious witness has prevailed within Christian tradition reflecting the then current relationship between religious and laity in the Church. In this instance religious assume the role of leader and interpret witness as monologue, with the role of the laity as one of passive listener to and receiver of this witness. But the communication involved in religious witness to God can also be dialogical. It can entail an exchange and an interchange between those who witness and those who are witnessed to, where each equally contributes to the active witness. This expanded understanding of the communication involved in witness seems more accurate. The criterion of success embraces a larger appreciation of the act of witnessing, including the effectiveness with which that witness has occurred. This entails factors characterizing not only the one who witnesses but also the one who is receiving that witness. Today this aspect of witness is sometimes referred to as mission in reserve (12). It highlights the importance of the originating partner to the witness being impacted upon and influenced by those he or she witnesses to.

The task of witnessing dialogically in an effective way, with its concern about the quality of the service being provided, corresponds to the sense of devotion within every religious. The task at hand is to proclaim the presence and role of God in the contemporary world. Traditionally this has occurred on behalf of the vertical view of God described above. God has indeed been proclaimed as intervening unpredictably in historic events in order to guide and save the human community. This intervention has implied a transcendent God at work, discontinuous with the world in which he is intervening. The devotion that has been prompt and quick to submit to the service of God viewed in this way has been expressive of a religious life that has been patterned to correspond quite closely with such a God. Its lifestyle provides long periods of time for quiet, solitude, recollection, prayer, liturgy and spiritual reading. Withdrawal from the world has been the sine qua non of the devotion intent upon communing with this transcendent.

This is an intelligible and a defensible way of satisfying one's devotion. Indeed we know from a rich and glorious past that it has been successful. But sensitive to the ongoing responsibility to witness to God in a contemporary world, devoted religious people are always willing to submit their witness to evaluation. This, of course, in turn supposed the option to do so, and the reflective ability to be in touch with the basic openness of freedom to realize the compatibility of options for satisfying the basic commitment of religious life.

On this premise some religious acknowledge that witness is not occurring in the way or to the degree that they would like, despite their wholehearted and genuine attempts on behalf of a transcendent God. The criterion of their witness as effective communication entailing a two-way

dialog has not been met. Men and women in the secular world, believers though they be, lead lives largely devoid of recognizably transcendent experiences (13). Their feedback must reach professional religious and the witness they engage in. Otherwise this defect will be a source of distress to them in their devotedness to the effective proclamation of the presence of God in the world.

Their commitment as witness to God, far from being a limitation and a curtailment, may prove to be a stimulus and a prod to reactivate their root freedom and basic option so as to discover moral equivalence for the mode of witness that they have traditionally relied upon. This search for equivalence springs both from freedom and the inner workings of a witness sensitive to the lives of those to whom the witness is being given.

#### **PART 4: STRUGGLE**

A significant contribution to this search for such equivalence is found in the contemporary struggle to survive. Survival is a multi-leveled experience, but the level of understanding here is environmental survival. The contemporary American and indeed every member of the Western world is caught in the throes of technological development that is threatening to consume once and for all basic non-renewable resources and to ineradicably pollute the atmosphere and indeed the biosphere with heat and a host of non-soluble elements. The dimensions of this struggle have been acknowledged worldwide and every intelligent person realizes that a critical point of no return lies in the not too distant future (14). The struggle, of course, while commencing in the western world extends worldwide. For every man, woman and child on this globe of ours is ultimately involved in the depletion of resources and the poisoning of our surroundings.

This appeal to the struggle that is beginning to grip the lives of alert persons joins similar appeals that have been made throughout history. The human family has had its share of struggles in the face of crises, some of which were associated with nature in the past (famine), some with plague, others with man-made catastrophes (such as wars and internecine strife). From our present point in history we know the survival capacity of the human family, though often only by dint of laborious struggle. Part of this struggle has been in coming to grips with the true God. We have traversed a long path in coming to terms with him, and would undoubtedly still be struggling in darkness and confusion were it not for the explicit interventions that God made into our midst by way of the Jewish-Christian communities. But even in these instances the community of believers has not been without its struggle, epitomized in the exodus experience of fleeing from a land of captivity into one of freedom, and in the Passion Event of flight from the law of sin and death by way of the excruciating torment of the Cross into the freedom and fullness of the risen life (15).

The environmental struggle of the human family today joins this long history of struggles. Together they represent potential for development on the part of those professional witnesses to the presence and role of God which modern religious are. If they approach this task integrally and allow themselves to be witnessed to even as they give witness, then the current struggle for survival that men and women everywhere will soon be undergoing will pass into the very heart of religious witness. Indeed this appropriation of the dynamics of this struggle will improve the quality of their witness to God and satisfy their devotedness to Him in the midst of an indifferent and disinterested world.

Willingness on the part of religious to adjust their witness to the circumstance of those to whom they witness will inevitably lead to other options for their lives. To qualify they must enjoy a moral equivalence to the significance of the transcendent God known by his historical interventions in the lives of people. Such is the perception of the immanent God operating on a horizontal dimension with men and women in the world as discovered and proclaimed by the professional religious witness. This horizontal mode of God's presence in the world begs to be discovered within the environmental struggle described above. For at every level of this struggle, both animate and inanimate, God the creator, sustainer and provider is struggling to preserve his kingdom intact. At stake here is the full-blown witness to God as father and mother, as brother and sister (16), all horizontal experiences waiting to be discovered and articulated by perceptive religious.

The environmental struggle finds God and the human person together in a mutual task and gives promise of facilitating the human person's discovery of God at his side in the struggle. Were religious to regard this as opportunity for witness, they would find adequate outlet for their devotedness to God. One result could be a new lifestyle for them. This new lifestyle compares with the other lifestyle as a moral equivalence, in much the same way as witness to the immanent God compares with witness to the transcendent God. It will not be structured to correspond to a God discontinuous with the human scene with emphasis an exercise such as withdrawal from the world of secular affairs. Relishing the liberty that they enjoy as children of God, they might seek moral equivalence in terms of that environmental struggle that they have become alerted to in the witness they have been trying to give to God. The dimensions of this struggle can be constitutive of a new lifestyle, satisfying the demands both of witness and religious devotion.

As in the past, religious practices can be focused on such traditional areas as on the quality of food; but now the context for appreciating the food on the table will be not only mortification but also environmental concerns; similarly, there will be concern about the quality of housing and living arrangements but now again environmental and ecological concerns will be influential factors, as well as poverty; similar approaches can be made to transportation, leisure and recreation, health care and especially the ministry that religious engage in, whether it be teaching or preaching the Word. In these ministries religious can articulate the presence of a God struggling with the crisis of an environment that is the product of his creative and sustaining hands. The very prayer of this religious, whether eucharistic or contemplative, can be caught up in this struggle, especially the ancient nature psalms (17). Above all, devotion to Christ on the cross will epitomize this struggle on behalf of God's Kingdom already begun on a ravaged hill of this earth (18).

## **CONCLUSION**

A religious life patterned along these lines will be in continuity and solidarity with those to whom religious witness in given. Such a life promises some guarantee of the efficacy of the witness provided by religious to their God and Lord. Religious engaged in the struggles of those to whom they witness will have greater credibility and clearer credentials. The recognition of this will provide a satisfying sense of fulfilling the demands of devotion as they exercise their basic freedom to search out some moral equivalence within their lives. Hopefully religious life lived in this way will be its own apologia in the eyes of contemporary young men and women.

Sebastian MacDonald, C.P.

Footnotes

1. Of. Thomas Aquinas, *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*, II-II, 82; 4, and responses; also, R.A. Knox, *ENTHUSIASM* (N.Y., Oxford U. Press; 1961).
2. Cf. Aquinas, II-II, 82, 3.
3. To speak more accurately Aquinas assigns both devotion and vow to the virtue of religion, with devotion described as its internal act, and vow as one of its external acts. He made these remarks by way of introduction to question 82.
4. Cf. Aquinas, II-II, 82, 2.
5. Cf. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY* (New York; Herder & Herder, 1986) p. 170.
6. Gal. Chapters 3 and 4.
7. Col. 2:9-16.
8. On this and similar phrases, cf. Ga. 5:13-16; Jas. 1.25 and 2:12; 1 Cor. 9:21.
9. This exercise in value comparison is implied in current reinterpretations of the moral principle of the two-fold effect, one name for which is the preference principle. Cf. *THE AMERICAN CATECHISM*, edited by George J. Dyer (New York, Seabury Press, 1975) pp. 178-179.
10. Of. Paul VI, "APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION ON THE RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE" ("Evangelica Exhortatio", June 29, 1971) pp. 680-707, in Austin Flannery (Editor), *VATICAN COUNCIL II: THE CONCILIAR AND POST-CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1975).
11. Cf. Vatican II, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", No. 44 (p. 404 in Flannery), and "Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life", No. 1 (p. 611 in Flannery).
12. A basic rethinking of evangelization is triggered by the remarks in Vatican II's "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity", No. 11 (Flannery, p. 825), and expansively articulated in a work such as *EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD TODAY*, edited by Norbert Greinacher and Alois Muller (New York; Seabury Press, 1979), *CONCILIUM SERIES* No. 114, *Passim*, though note remarks made at pp. 27 and 59.
13. For this reason Leonardo Boff has rethought the starting point of his theology of grace in *LIBERATING GRACE* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1979) *Passim*.
14. This was early indicated in The Club of Rome's, *THE LIMITS TO GROWTH* (New York, Universe Book, 1971).
15. This developed especially in the literature associated with liberation theology, as in G. Gutierrez's *A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1973), especially pp. 155-159 and 262-263.
16. This is an expansion of Francis of Assisi's Panygeric to the Sun and Moon, and closely reminiscent of Jesus' own words in Mk. 3:31-38; Mt. 12:46-50.
17. This refers to the psalms that regard beauty and the order of the world as evidence of divine wisdom and power i.e., 8, 19, 33, 90, 104, 136, 147.
18. Cf. S. Breton, "Soteriology or Cosmo-theology?", *Stauros Bulletin*, 1979-3, pp: 34-38.