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Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE PASSION

Flavio di Bernardo, C.P.

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Translation of the text by Basil Rice, C.P.

Cum permissu:
Paul M. Boyle, C.P.

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THE MYSTIQUE OF THE PASSION

INTRODUCTION

Christian spirituality has its place in the divine plan of salvation because of the Passion and Death of Christ. The cross and salvation are co-relative terms which are linked in the notions of redemption and christian sanctification. The Christian knows that it was not suffering as such that saved him, but the love of God; he knows, too, that the Father's love was revealed and communicated to him through the Passion of His Son. (1 Jn 4:9-10; cf. Jn 3:16; 15:12; Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; Apoc 1:5).

To avoid ambiguity and possible confusion, certain points must be made clear now: 1) the christocentric character of the spirituality of the Passion cannot be separated from the experience of Christ Himself; 2) the presence of the cross in the mystical experience is only possible within the framework of the central mystery, in which the death of Christ leads up to the glorious Resurrection; 3) the mystique (the word is used in the broader sense as having a particular appeal) of the Passion cannot be separated from the sacramental and ecclesial experience. Keeping these perspectives in view, it is possible to observe certain priorities in Our Lord's actions, and to avoid the danger of allowing imitation of His sufferings to degenerate into suffering for its own sake (R. Moretti, *La Passione di Cristo nell'esperienza mistica* in "La Sapienza della croce oggi. Atti del Congresso Internazionale," V.II, Turin, 1976, p.165-180).

It may be clearly stated, however, that the mystique of the Passion is a form of christian spirituality (the fruit of multiform grace) characterized by deep contemplation of Our Lord's sufferings, and a loving participation in them, reaching to mystical communion in His Passion. This communion may be all the more intense as the mystery of Divine Love revealed on the cross is unfathomable. The Early Church discovered the formula for introducing the Christian to the understanding of this mystery and participation in it: "Rejoice that you participate in Christ's sufferings, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed"(1 Pet 4:13).

It is against this background that the mystique of the Passion and suffering meet. The importance as far as mystique is concerned is not whether joy or sorrow is experienced, but whether everything is oriented towards God: in this orientation, participation becomes as approach to union, an "affective category of the supernatural". Imitation, which is indeed necessary, cannot be evaluated merely by gestures and groans; it demands union of minds. In this context, "union with Christ, considered as "practical knowledge" achieved by the spirit, is the way to union with God. As Bonaventure so rightly says in the prologue to "Itinerarium mentis ad Deum": *Via non est nisi per ardentissimum amorem Crucifixi*; (cf. S. Breton, *La Mystique de la Passion*, Tournai, 1962, p.20-25).

I. THE PASSION IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture gives several reasons, theological and spiritual, why the follower of Christ should meditate carefully on what the cross means to him. It inculcates in particular union with the Passion and Death of Christ by Baptism: (Rom 6,3-6; Col 2,12); participation in His sufferings, (2 Cor 1,5; 4,5; 4,10; Gal 6,17; 1 Pet 4,13; constant reference to His example (1 Pet 2,19-24; 4,1-2), the necessary of having to face trials and contradictions, in order to witness to the Gospel

(Acts 9,16; 20,18-24) and to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14,21; 17,3), following the Lamb (Apoc. 14,4).

As for the Old Testament, it cannot be said that it reveals the authentic meaning of the Passion, even though the Gospels refer back to Old Testament prophecies about it. This is proved by the Apostles lack of comprehension when Our Lord spoke about His impending Passion. The sacred writers before Our Lord's time are less concerned with the mystique of a future Passion than with the conditions of their own world, in which God intervenes to guide His People, and to test and purify it (Deut 30,19); 2 Sam 7,14; Job 1, 9-12; 2,4-6; 36,15; Prov. 3, 11-12; Is. 45,7; Jerem. 32; etc. The enigma of the just man who has to suffer was only resolved at a later date in the light of the fate of the prophet and martyrs in the Hellenistic period. (*Editor's note)

(* Editor's note: Here, and in eleven other places throughout the article, Fr. Flavio added a paragraph or more of bibliography pertinent to the section. The references are principally to books in German, French, Italian and Spanish and dated from 1965 to 1980.

A. The spiritual experience of Jesus in His Passion

1. The Sources: the Gospel accounts of the Passion

The Christian must base his spiritual experience on that of Jesus: he must therefore give his attention to the primary sources of Christ's experience, namely the Gospel accounts of the Passion. Theologians and Scripture scholars agree that these are of primary importance in the structure of the Gospels. They see in them the "crowning" of the life and message of Christ (X. Leon-Dufour), the "moment of significance" in the Christian experience (H. U. von Balthasar), "the event" which throws lights on all other (P. Tillich). In St Mark's Gospel, especially, some authors maintain that we have "an account of the Passion preceded by a long introduction". (M. Kahler, O Dibelius, H Shlier). For a fuller treatment of the subject see X. Leon-Dufour, art. "Passion, DBS t.6, 1960, col. 1420-92.

Those mystics who concentrated on the Passion have raised no critical questions about the Gospel narratives. They were able to penetrate the meaning, and laid stress, as if by instinct, on particulars which scholars have only begun to insist on more or less recently: the disciples failure to understand, the loneliness of Jesus, the reasons for His agony and prayer in Gethsemane, the abandonment by the Father, the mysterious thirst on the cross, the spiritual motherhood of Our Lady, and the wound in the side.

2. Basic attitudes

The Gospel accounts allow us to perceive the basic attitudes of Christ in the experience of His Passion. They are also the attitudes that Passion mystics have tried to make their own. They may be reduced to three:

a. Love which is obedient unto death.

Jesus reached the supreme degree of obedience and, consequently, of love of His Father during His passion (Jn 4,34; 5,30; 6,38; 14,31; 17,4; 19,30; Mk 14,32-42 et par; Phil 2,8). In fact there is a direct relationship between His obedience and His Passion since "He learnt obedience by the things He suffered" (Heb 5,8); from His birth, conformity to the Will of God was the prelude to the Passion (Heb 10,5-10). The Father wished to give His Son on the cross for the

salvation of the world (Jn 3,15-16); and Jesus, in his turn, chose the Passion to conform Himself to His Father's will. So he gives an intrinsic value to His offering: it is an act of obedient love. Perfect conformity is realized in the total gift of oneself. This readiness to be obedient even unto death is the culminating point in the Christian life, and, at the same time, the source and summit of all spiritual experience. That is where the mysticism of the cross has always found its initial inspiration.

b. Love for others, solidarity, even to the point of sacrifice

The Gospel accounts of the Passion begin with the symbolic gesture of the washing of the feet (Jn 13,1-17) to show that everything that follows is not simply a gesture like any other on Our Lord's part, but the decisive gesture in the service of His brothers. The idea of service inspires the whole Gospel (Mk 9,35; Matt 7,12; Lk 6,27-28; 12,37). The first service Jesus renders to men is to reveal to them the Father's love (Jn 1,18). Men understood this when "he gives his life for them" on the cross (1 Jn 3,16). Hence, service, as he himself explains, includes the gift of oneself (Jn 17,19; cf. Eph 5,25; Gal 2,20). To be one with his brothers means "Loving them right to the end" (Jn 13,1), in making His own their miserable and mortal condition. In embracing the cross, Jesus drank of the bitter chalice of humanity so that men in their turn would be able to drink from the sweet chalice of grace. His whole life is a gift for the redemption of His brothers (Matt 20,28; 26,28; Mk 10,45; 14,24; Lk 22,19-20; 1 Tim 2,6). It was on the cross, however, that the definitive sacrifice was accomplished and that His love for others reached the highest degree, it was "the greatest love". (Jn 10,11,15,17,18; 15,13).

c. Humiliation that goes as far as the cross

In the Gospel accounts of the Passion, the kenosis is presented as a consequence of love's choice. Humiliation, already obvious in the adoption of the state of service ("taking the condition of a slave"), reaches its radical completeness when Jesus offers Himself as a victim to His Father on behalf of His brothers, "having become like them" and "becoming obedient, even unto death on the cross" (Phil 2,7-8; cf. Rom 5,19; 8,3; 2 Cor 8,9; Heb 12,2). This kenosis takes place, obviously, with a view to leading them with him into glory, because He is exalted for His obedient and brotherly love (Phil. 2,9). Consequently, the Passion gives meaning, not only to the life of Jesus, but also to human suffering, since it gives value to suffering as a particular requirement of love. This love logically demands self-abasement as a condition sine qua non of exaltation (Matt 23,12; Mk 10,43; Lk 14,11; 18,14; 22,26; Eph 1,20-23; Phil 2,9).

3. The experience of Gethsemane

Popular piety has always concentrated on the Passion scenes described in the Gospels, attributing more importance to the obvious physical suffering of Our Lord. Mystical theology, on the other hand, especially from the 16th to the 18th century, was more attracted by the mental and spiritual sufferings of Christ. The Passion mystics preferred to concentrate on two scenes at the beginning and end of the tragedy – Gethsemane and Calvary.

a. The mysterious agony. Only the Synoptics have left us a description of Our Lord's agony in the Garden of Olives. For the first time, Jesus is confronted by His "Hour" (cf. G. Ferraro, art. "Il termine Ora nei Vangeli sinnotici," in *Rivista Biblica*, t.21,1973, p. 383-400). He begs His Father to deliver Him from "this hour". (Mk 14,35). He reproaches Simon for not being able "to watch one hour" (Mk 14,37). To the chosen disciples he says: "It is enough; the hour has come" (Mk 14,41). He thus indicated that the moment is particularly important and that he is suffering in order to fulfill the decisive choice of his obedient and strong love.

In Gethsemane, everything becomes meaningful, even the sleeping and the incomprehension of the disciples, who left the Master in tragic isolation. That is why the mystics of the Passion have never ceased to meditate on the scene of the agony. In this, and in harmony with contemporary exegesis, they reflect less on the dread brought on by immanent death; their meditations are rather on the connection between the intensity of the inner sorrow and the immensity of the love which causes it (A. Feuillet, *II significato fondamentale dell'agonia del Getsemani*, in *La sapienza della croce oggi*, t. I, Turin, 1976, p. 69-85).

b. Abandonment to the Will of the Father. For Jesus, the hour of Gethsemane is the hour of testing (*peirasmós*). So he must watch and pray (Mt. 26,41). Our Savior's prayer is reported in a special way by the evangelists: the three-fold entreaty is followed each time by the reiterated faithfulness to the Father's will; Gethsemane is the privileged spot where the colloquy between the Father and the Son takes place (Mk 14,32-42; Mt 26,36-46). Jesus abandons himself to the will of His Father, and invites His followers to do the same.

A comparison between the prayer in Gethsemane and that bequeathed by Christ to His disciples is an important theme both for exegesis and the spiritual life. The words of the "Our Father" are very similar to the prayer of Our Lord in the Garden (Matt 6,9-13; Lk 11,2-4), especially in their affirmation of complete conformity to the Father's will: "Thy will be done" (Matt 6,10; 26,42). This conformity constitutes, as has been seen, the summit of the spiritual experience of the Word Incarnate. It also constitutes the summit of Christian perfection. The Passion mystics recognized in the "fiat" of Gethsemane the highest expression of love that can be formulated on this earth. Like Jesus, they learnt how to give precedence to abandonment, especially when union with God involved the acceptance of suffering.

4. The experience of Golgotha

Our Lord offered two prayers full of anguish during His Passion. In Gethsemane, He begged His Father to let the chalice pass (Matt 26,40); and on the cross He cried out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mk 15,34). What is the meaning and significance of this "abandonment"?

Theology, like exegesis, has treated this problem (cf. art. "Mort," *Jesus devant sa mort*, *DS* t. 10, col. 1752-54). For the mystics who are constantly concerned with the fundamental attitudes of Christ, this momentary abandonment represents the supreme point of the salvific mission of Christ on earth: it constitutes the summit, at the same time, of suffering and the revelation of love. Our Lord reveals His love just when He reaches the nadir of humiliation. He reveals the Father's mercy to men at the very moment He says He is abandoned by Him. (P. Lamarche, "L'Humiliation du Christ," in *Christus*, t.26, 1979, p. 461-470).

a. The offering of Christ to His Father, and His gift for His brethren.

Christ on the cross offered His prayer to His Father (Mk 15,34, Lk 23,46), and remained faithful to Him to the very end. He offered Himself to God, putting into effect the "fiat" of Gethsemane. Moreover, by "commending His spirit" to His Father, (Jn 19,30) He communicated life to men. The thirst of Our Lord on the Cross is rightly linked by the exegetes to the parallel passages in John 4, 13-15; 6,34; 7, 37-38. It expresses the desire of Our Lord to make a gift of His Spirit, "the living water" (Jn 4,10-14), and the water flowing from his side (Jn 19,34) reveal the thirst of Christ to communicate His grace, as He had hinted on the day of the Feast of

Tabernacles: “If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink...” (Jn 7,37-38; cf. I. de la Potterie, “La sete di Gesu morente e l’interpretazione giovannea della sua morte,” in *La sapienza della croce oggi*, t.I, p. 33-49).

The blood and water which flowed from our Lord’s side has also a symbolic meaning: Jesus gives His life by His death; His life, governed by the fundamental attitude of service, is not only a promise of salvation – it is “offered” to God for His brethren. This offering constitutes the essential link between the life and death of Jesus. His life “must” be offered in His death. That is why God glorifies Him, because He “gives his life in His death” (Jn 10,17), and “gives” His death in a communion of love and of life (Jn 3,14; 8,28; 12,32).

b. The revelation of the true God and of His merciful love. It appears clearly from the accounts of the Passion that the end to which Christ’s journey on earth tends is to do and say whatever makes His Father known. The words, “It is finished” (Jn 19,30) signify that His whole earthly existence has now found its fulfillment just as the promises made in the Old Testament have found theirs.

This is doubtless the reason which urged John to recall so often the fulfillment of the Scriptures, (Jn 19,24,28,36,37), and made the Synoptics base the events of Calvary on the foundation of Old Testament references (Mk. 15:24, 29,34,36,38; Ps. 21,19; 21,8; 68,22; 21,2; Ez. 10:4,18,19; 11,23; etc). When Mark (15,38) states that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, he shows that Our Lord’s death pulled down whatever held the mystery of the Triune God hidden from men (cf. P. Lamarche, “La mort de Jesus et le voile du temple selon Marc,” NTR, t,106, 1974, p, 583-589): God the Father allowed His Son to die in order to give us the Holy Spirit,. It was only when Our Lord had breathed His last, when the veil of the temple was torn down, that the centurion, flooded with light, uttered his act of faith (Mk 15,39).

The death of Christ in this epiphanic context, before being an expiatory for sin, is the revealing light of the Spirit and love of God for men. It is a revealing light, because God humbled Himself to make Himself understood; it a testimony of love, because love on this earth always demands self-sacrifice. The mystique of the Passion includes all of that. Instead of emphasizing the expiatory and satisfactory character of Christ’s sufferings, it has always accentuated the incomparable proof of love which He has given us by His death on the cross.

B. The Passion in early Christian Experience

1. The “sequela Crucis”

Considered as an expression of living faith, the accounts of the Passion show how the early Christians understood the mystery of the cross, relying directly on the way Christ Himself had intended. Recognized scripture scholars have pointed out a progressive approach in the mystery of Our Lord in the different accounts (cf. C.M. Martini, “Vangelo della passione ed esperienza mistica nella tradizione sinottica e giovannea”, in *Mistica e Misticismo oggi*, Semaine d’Etudes de Lucques, 8-13 Sept. 1978, Rome, 1979, p. 191-201). Mark’s account gives the follower of Christ a simple proclamation of the kerygma accustoming him to see the revelation of God in the tragedy of Calvary. Matthew’s account familiarizes him with an ecclesial context, and teaches abandonment to the will of the Father with Our Lord (Matt 6,9-13; 26,39-42). Luke’s testimony goes a step further, reminding the disciple of Christ that Our Lord’s Passion is continued in the Church (Lk 22,36-37; Acts 7, 54-60). John, in his Gospel, demands that the disciple be ready to

follow unreservedly the way opened by his Master to intimate union with God. His account presents the Passion as the radiance of the divine glory.

The different interpretations given during the past few years to the “sequela Crucis” (Matt 16,24 et paral) leave untouched the one that says following Jesus means, above all, associating oneself with His life and destiny while carrying the cross with Him (cf. X. Leon-Dufour, “Perdre sa vie selon l'Evangile” in *Etudes*, 1979, p. 395-409). Rather than insist on the painful aspect of the cross, it is important to emphasize the necessity of being associated with and conformed to Jesus Crucified. To follow Christ means making one’s own the fundamental attitudes of His experiences: to be ready to place oneself totally at the service of God and one’s brethren, even to the point of giving one’s life for them (Jn 12,26). The disciples, like Jesus, must carry his cross “every day” (Lk 9;23). This suggests a type of martyrdom which lasts all through life, without necessarily entailing anything heroic.

Following Christ also means imitating Him. The whole plan of the Gospels aims at accentuating not only Our Lord’s oral teaching, but also, and especially, the example which he left to His disciples. At the outset of the Passion there is the serious recommendation of Our Lord to His apostles: “I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13,15). This injunction has a special significance, because it is linked to what is about to happen, from Gethsemane to Calvary. The apostles must place themselves at the service of their brethren even to sacrificing their own lives (Jn 15, 12-13). The new commandment is not limited to the instruction: “love one another”. It comprises also imitation: “...as I have loved you”; that is, be ready to give your life, to the extent that Christian love demands (1 Jn 3,16). Cf., *DS*, art. “Imitation du Christ,” t. 7, col 1536-62.

Following Christ comprises, too, the choice of “remaining with Christ” (Jn 1, 35-51), and, consequently, the duty of collaborating in His mission by *participating in His Passion*: The Master wishes to celebrate the Pasch “with His disciples.” (Mk 14,14-15). He shares with them the Eucharist meal, the memorial of His Passion, and in the sacramental act makes them participate in His own life, “which will be given for them.” In the others words, one cannot be with Christ without participating spiritually and physically in his Passion. The episode of the Cyrenean is very enlightening “a certain Simon,” says St. Luke (23,26) as if he wanted to designate every individual, one of us. St. Luke’s mention of this is too significant to think that it was written by chance. It is not enough to follow Christ; one must “carry the cross behind him,” and be nailed to it with Him (Lk 9,23; 14,27; Cf. Gal 2,20).

2. The Passion of Christ in St. Paul’s experience

There is no point in trying to establish whether St. Paul was a mystic in the sense we use it today. One thing, however, is a certain: Christ crucified is *at the center of all his teaching*. But the cross is not so much an instrument of torture as “the power and wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1, 18-25), at work in the life of grace. Nevertheless the “corpus” of St. Paul has always been the starting point for those who have written systematically about the mystique of the cross. Indeed, the cross and grace stand out as fundamental facts for St. Paul in his theological and spiritual reflections. The expression “the power of God” is usually applied to the Risen Christ. But in 1 Cor 1,18, the sense is different: the power of God is applied to Christ Crucified (v. 22) as having been chosen by God Himself, wishing to reveal Himself and give salvation to mankind (cf. Rom 3,25; 5,8; 8,32; 1 Cor 15,3; Eph 1,7; S. Virgulin, art “La Croce come potenza di Dio in 12 Cor 1, 18-24” in *La sapienza della Croce oggi*, t.l. p. 144-150).

In emphasizing the two-fold theme of “cross and grace,” St. Paul arrives at one of the most fruitful intuitions in his spiritual experience as a disciple of Christ. It is in virtue of this two-fold theme that he is able to speak of the mystical conformation of the Christian to the suffering Christ. The disciple lives “in Jesus,” and Jesus “lives in him.” They suffer and rejoice together to the point where they reach a sort of mystical union in which the crucifixion of the Master and that of the disciple become one (2 Cor 1,5; Phil 1,29; Col 1,24). It is only after he says “I am crucified with Christ,” that Paul can add: “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2,19-20). He gives real meaning to his own crucifixion. Mystical identification is reached only after an arduous apprenticeship, described in the letter to the Galatians. The contents of this letter may well serve as an introductory manual to the mystique of the Passion (Gal 3,1; 4,19; 6,17; 5,24; 6,2).

In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul touches on a special theme: *participation in the sufferings of Our Lord*, as an apostle continuing his mission – sufferings caused him by the infant community at Corinth (2 Cor 5,17; 10,2; 11,19-20; 12,20-21); by false apostles (11, 3-4; 13-15); by his missionary activity (6, 4-5; 11,23); and by what he calls “the sting of the flesh” (12,7). The sufferings he experience are everyone’s and everyone’s; sufferings, united with those of Christ in His Church, work together for sanctification (1,6; 4,10-12; cf. Rom 8,17-18; Phil. 3,10-11; Col 1,24). Thanks to the faith which unites him to Christ, the apostle can overcome suffering, and proceed from reliance on himself to total abandonment to God “who raises the dead to life” (2 Cor 1,9; 4,7). His trials, therefore, lead to glory, since they have their place, along with those of Christ, in the economy of salvation (4,8-9). In suffering, as in joy, the disciple shares in the fate of His Master (1,5); “the sting of the flesh” is something that accompanies life (4,12). Paul does not say that his sufferings are identical with those of Our Lord in His Passion. Yet, he calls them “Christ’s,” because they are the fruit of communion with Christ.

II. THE PASSION IN THE WRITINGS OF THE FATHERS

The Fathers of the Church dealt at length with the subject of the Passion. In their commentaries on the accounts of it in the Gospels, they do not confine themselves merely to repeating the teaching of the New Testament; they endeavour to explain it. The most ancient among them, like Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp, possess a spirituality of the Passion which recalls very closely that of the New Testament. Other writers of the second century, mostly of Eastern tradition, like Meliton of Sardes, witness to the interest in passion (*pathos*) and compassion (*sympatheia*). The apologists, anxious to make Christianity acceptable on the plane of reason, are driven to pass over the Passion in silence, and to give the cross above all a symbolic sense (Justin, 1 Apol. 55, PG6, 412-413; Tertullian, Apolog. 16,6, CCL 1, p.115-116; Ad nationes 1, 12, p.31-32; Minucius Felix, Octavuis 29,6-8, CSEL 2, p.43).

A. The Passion of Christ, mystery of salvation

Leo the Great in one phrase sums up the teaching of the Fathers with reference to Our Savior’s Passion: “Passio Christi salutis nostrae continet sacramentum” (*Serm.* 55,1, CCL 138A, p. 323).

1. The Passion of Christ opens the soul to Divine Revelation

Owing to the fact that it contains a mystery which is beyond the powers of all created intelligence, the Passion is a wonderful work of God, the wisdom of God which baffles our understanding (Leo the Great, *Serm.* 62,1, CCL 138A, p.376-377). The Fathers draw inspiration from St. Paul's statement (Eph 3,18-19), in which he declares the "scientia crucis" superior to all other knowledge, so that it is impossible to measure its length, breadth, height or depth (cf. Greg. of Nyssa, *In Christ resur* 1, PG 46, 621-624; Oratio catechetica 32, PG 45, 80-81; Rufin of Aquilea, Exp. Symboli 12-26, CCL 20, p. 149-151; Jerome, *In Ep. ad Eph.* 2,3 PL26, 522-523). Ignatius of Antioch sees in "the mystery of the Passion" the masterpiece of the divine Wisdom. Every Christian, by adopting "the spirit of the cross" and becoming "a victim of the cross," sacrifices his own way of thinking to what is "a stumbling block to unbelievers," but to those who believe is "eternal life and salvation" (Ad Eph. 18,1-2; SC 10,4th. Ed; 1969, p. 72-74; cf. To Diognetes 8,6-8; SC 33 bis, 1965, P.70-72). It is on this basis that Tertullian refutes Marcion who, along with other Gnostics, denied that Christ could have suffered (*De carne Christi* 5,3, CCL 2, p. 880-881).

The relationship between the Passion and the revelation on God's love is especially emphasized by St. Leo; he sees the mystery of the cross as a mystery of love. God shows His greatness in creation, but even more so in the "recreation," because it is in the redemption that His love is demonstrated in a way that cannot be comprehended (*Serm.* 54,1, CCL 138A, p. 317; 62,1, p.376). The Fathers are convinced that without the Passion of the Son, we should never have known the Father's love. That is why they exhort the faithful not to neglect the infinite mercy that comes to us in Christ Crucified (Basil, *De Baptismo*, 1, 2, PG31, 1576-1577; Salvian of Marseilles, *Ad Ecclesiam* 2,4, SC 176, 1971, p. 178; Augustine, *Serm.* 23a, 2, CCL 41. p. 321-322). The plenitude of divine Love, vouched for by the blood of the Son, is recalled by Clement of Rome (Ad Cor. 49, 6, SC 167, 1971, p.180) and the Ad Diognetes (7,5 and 9,2, SC 33 bis, 68 and 74); its fullness, bringing hope to the world, is emphasized by Irenaeus (Adv. Hear. v, 1,1, SC 153, p. 19).

2. The Passion, manifestation of the salvific power of grace

Accepting St. Paul's themes of the cross-and-grace, and the cross-and power, the Fathers try to explain how the sufferings of Our Lord are transformed into salvific power. To designate the Passion and the cross, they resort to a series of images: "ladder," "key," "medicine," etc. (Ignatius of Antioch Ad. Eph 9,1, SC 10, p. 64; Leo, *Serm.* 59, 7, CCL 138A, p. 323; Gregory of Nazianzea, Or 29,20, PG 36, 101b. Theodoret of Cyr, *De incarn. Domini* 28, PG75, 1468b; Ambrose *De poenit* II 3,18, SC 179, 1971, p. 144). They also affirm that the Lord "in his great mercy, wanted to endure the suffering of our mortal condition with a view to healing it" (Leo, *Serm* 58,4, CCL 138A, p.346-347); cf. Gregory of Nazianzea, Or. 45,22, PG36, 653b).

The Passion, therefore, becomes "a wonderful power for salvation" which blazes at the very moment of Our Savior's death and shoots out into the world when the veil of the Temple is torn down, in order to give access to the Holy of Holies (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 13,3, PG 33, 773b; Jn Chrys., *In Matth.* 54,4 PG 58, 336-337; Leo, *Serm.* 59,7, CCL 138A, p.357). In other words, Our Lord did not confront suffering merely to endure it, but to overcome it (Pseudo-Hyppolite, *In S. Pascha* 1 and 55, SC 27, 1950, p. 119 and 181-183; Pseudicyprian, *De idol. Vanitae* 14, CSEL 3/1, p. 30-31). By this death he has overcome ours, and by His suffering He has cast out ours. The Passion, on this plane, uses a three-fold liberating force against the three enemies of man: the devil, sin and death (Origen, *In Rom.* 61,1, PG14 1056c; Pacien of

Barcelona, *De Bapt.* 4-7, PL 13, 1092-94; John Demascene, *De Fide Orth.* 4,Z1, PG 94, 1130bc).

3. The Passion, source of sanctifying grace

It was from the Passion that the sacraments flowed (*Epistle of Barnabas* 11,1-10, SC 172, 1971, P.158-166); from the side of Jesus, opened by the lance, the Church came forth, just as from Adam's side Eve was born (Jn Chrys. Catech. 3,13-19, SC 50, 1957, p. 174-177; Augustine, *In John.* 120, 2-3). The blood and water which flowed from our Lord's open side recall the sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism. Through them, the Passion is the source of life from which flow the "two rivers" which carry it over the whole world (Theodoret, *De incarn.* 27, PG75, 1468a). Baptism has its source in the Passion, and the sign of anointing "marks the seal of the Passion" (Ambrose, *De sacramentis* 2,6,11; Pseudo-Denis, *Eccles. Heir.* 4,10; PG3, 483b).

B. Christ crucified in the spiritual life

1. The necessity of meditating on the sufferings of Christ

Clement of Rome states that the Christian of Corinth "have their sufferings facing them," and "must have their eyes fixed on the blood of Christ in order to merit the grace of conversion and salvation" (*Ad. Cor.* 2,1, SC 167, p.101; 7,4, p. 111; cf. Chromatics of Aquila, *Serm.* ,20, CCL 9A, p. 95). He then suggests a good example of biblical meditation on the theme of the Passion (16, p.124-128), as other authors were to do in the second century, for instance, Irenaeus (*Demonstration* 68-82, SC62, p.134-149). For St. Augustine, the Passion represents life on this earth; and the resurrection, life in heaven. The most suitable time for meditating on the Passion is Lent, better than any other time to weep for our sins as we watch the scenes of the Passion (*Serm* 254,4 PL38, 1184b).

The Fathers, then, meditate on the sufferings of Our Lord referring to the gospel accounts (Jn Chrys. *In Matth.* hom 83-88, PG58, 745-773; *In Joh.* hom 83-85 PG59, 447-467; Augustine, *In Joh.* 60, 1-5). This meditation gradually becomes more interior, since Christ Crucified is contemplated "with the eyes of the heart" (Leo, *Serm.* 66,2 CCL 138A, p.403). It becomes authentic prayer, following the example of Christ, who begged for forgiveness for his enemies (Greg. the Gt. *Moralia in Job* XIII, 22, CCL 143A, p682; *Regula past.* 3,12, PL77, 69c).

2. The necessity of imitating Christ Crucified

The imitation of Christ refers especially to His Passion. The Christian may take as models "lives form the Gospel." However, if he does not imitate "the sufferings of Christ, His cross and His death, he will not be saved" (Basil, *De Spirit Sancto* 15,35 PG32, 128-129). Ignatius of Antioch asks the faithful in Rome, "let me imitate (mimetes) the passion of my God" (*Ad. Rom.* 6,3, SC10, p. 115; cf. *Ad. Philad.* 7,2 and 8,2 p. 126; *Ad. Eph.* 3,1, p. 60; *Ad Magn.* 5,2 p.82; cf. Polycarpe, *Ad Phil.* 8,2. SC10 p. 186; *Martyrium Polycarpi* 17,3, p. 232). "The Passion of Christ only helps those who follow in his footsteps" (Augustine, *Serm.* 304,2, PL 38, 1396a; cf. Greg of Naz., *Or* 45,23-24, pG36, 656-657; Andrew of Crete, *Serm* 9, PG97, 9936; Cyprian, *De Dom Orat.* 14-17, CSEL 3/1, p.276-279).

C. The "Anthropology of the Cross" in the catechesis of the Fathers

1. The Passion of Christ gives meaning to the sufferings of mankind and transforms them into means of sanctification.

To consider them simply as troublesome consequences of the human condition is to reduce the cross and suffering to something negative. No one can actually desire them, much less God who is good. However, in so far as they are accepted in Christ, they become instruments of salvation and a source of glory for the Christian. Through them, man makes reparation - as much as he can - for the disastrous consequences of his sin (Iren. *Adv. Haer.* III 18,7 SC211, p. 364-370; Greg. the Gt., *Moralia in Job* III, 9, CCL143, p.124).

The Christian, by suffering, gives value to the present time and “purchases for himself eternal life” (Greg. the Gt. *Regula past.* 3,12, PL77, 660); he masters his passions and conquers temptation (Chromatics of Aquilea, *In Matt.* 25,1 CCL 9A, p. 315). He eliminates vice (Leo, *Serm* 72,5, CCL 138A, p. 446) and destroys sin. He revives charity in the soul (Isaiah of Guza, *Or* 21, PG40, 1165a). Suffering helps him to live according to the Gospel (Ps: - Augustine, *Serm.* 207, 3, PL39, 2129), and makes it easier to practice asceticism in the spiritual life (*Apoph Patrum*, Jean Colobos 34, PG65, 215bc). Jesus has taken upon Himself our sufferings and death to help us overcome them. But to do *so*, each one of us must be assimilated to Him in His Passion. The Passion is therefore for every Christian a necessary choice (Tertullian, *De Carne Chr.* 5,3, CCL2, p. 880-881; Greg. of Nyssa, *Or cath.* 32, PG54, 80-81; *In Demascene*, *De Fide Orth.* 4,11, PG94, 1130a).

The cross thus becomes the sign which separates believers from unbelievers (Clem. of Alex., *Excerpta ex libris Theodoti* 42, SC23, 1948, p. 148). The Fathers of the second century, therefore, opposed vigorously the teachings of the Gnostics, who denied the reality of the Passion and made human suffering meaningless (Ignatius, *Ad. Smyrn.* 1,2, SC10, p.132-134; Polycarp, *Ad. Phil.* 7,1, p. 186; Iren. *Adv. Haer.* III 18, 1-7, SC211, p. 342-370; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 25, SC132, 1967, p. 352-354).

2. The Christian must carry his cross with Christ

This viewpoint is linked to the Pauline doctrine of the Body of Christ: the members of the Body, like their Head, must go through the Passion in order to arrive at the Resurrection (Ureliton of Sardes, *Peri Pasha* 47-58, SC123, p. 84-92; Pseudo-Macarius, *Hom.* 12,5, PG34, 560c). Only those will be saved who carry the cross, like the Cyrenean, and are crucified with Christ (Leo. *Serm.* 59,5, CCL 138A, p. 355). On the theme of “concrucifixion” see also Origen, *In Rom.* 5,9; *In Joh.* 19,5; *Ad Mart.* 12; Basil, *De Bapt.* 1,2; Augustine, *Serm.* 3 2-3; etc.

As can be seen, the Fathers sketch the principles of a mysticism of the Passion: Under the old covenant, men offered things and animals to God; in the new, they offer themselves in “sacrifice” with Jesus (Origen, *In Num.* 24,2, SC29, p.462-467). Hilary suggests an interpretation of the prayer in Gethsemane. It is debatable from an exegetical point of view, but suggested from a spiritual one; Jesus does not ask that He may be spared the chalice, but that “it may pass also to others” (*In Matt.* 31,7, PL9, 1068-1069). Augustine, starting from the supposition that the glorified Christ is incapable of further suffering, speaks of the suffering of His Body which is the Church: the Passion of Christ works in the Church like leaven. The Church’s passion gives to the “total Christ” the possibility of growing. Augustine sees in the sweat of blood oozing from His “whole body” in Gethsemane an image of the martyrdom of the Church (*Enar.* in Ps. 140, 4, CCL 40, p. 2028; cf. Salvian of Marseilles, *Ad Eccles.* 2,4, SC176, p. 178). Christ in His Passion assumed the sufferings of everyone (Andrew of Crete, *Serm.* 9, PG97, 1016b).

III. THE PASSION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

A. The earliest Period (1st to 8th cent)

Participation in the Passion has assumed different forms in the course of history. The earliest period had two: martyrdom and monastic asceticism.

1. Mystique of the Cross and martyrdom

The relationship between martyrdom and Christ Crucified is too obvious to need further discussion (cf. *DS*, t. 7, Col. 1565-1567; t.10, 718-737). St. Luke early on knew something of the mystique of martyrdom when he likened Stephen's death to that of Christ (*Acts*. 7,59-60; Lk. 23,34-36). The mystique of the Passion, centered on martyrdom, was already developed in the second century with Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp (cf. *DS*, t.7, Col. 1262-1264). The virgin Blandina went to martyrdom "like a guest at the wedding banquet" (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* v,1,55; SC41, 1955, p.21). In her torture she is "intimately united to Christ," whose image she imitates as she is bound to the stake with outstretched arms (41, p.17).

2. Sacrificial aspect and participation in the Passion, in monastic asceticism

In its origins, monastic life was based on the very conception of martyrdom. The martyr who "gives his life" is replaced by the ascetic who sacrifices his "every day" (Lk. 9,23). That is why the Fathers call the monks "peace-time martyrs" (Hilary of Arles, *Life of St. Honorat*, 57,3, SC235, p. 170). The mortification practiced daily in the desert obtains the merit of martyrdom (Athanas. *Vita Antonii* 46, PG26, 911b). The consecrated virgins are compared to the martyrs: "Non solum effusio sanguinis, sed devotae quoque mentis servitus immaculata quotidianum martyrium est" (Jerome, *Ep.* 108,31, PL22, 905c; cf. Ambrose, *De virg.* 1,3,10, PL16, 202a).

Henceforth "not only the strong and glorious martyrs participate in the Passion of Christ," but all those who by their lives give daily witness of the truth, especially the monks who, by consecrating themselves to God, proceed to a mystical death (Pseudo-Denis, *Eccles. Hier.* 3,9,8,6,3, PG3, 437c and 536a). The ascetics are therefore called "disciples of the cross," "crucified with Christ" (Ephrem. *Comment sur l'Evangile concordant* 15,4, SC121, p.266; Dorothy of Gaza, *Instr.* 1,11 and 13, SC92, p. 164-166). They are those "who have crucified their flesh" (Basil, *Ep.* 207,2,PG32, 761c); "who carry in their bodies the Passion of Christ" (*Ep.* 223,2,824c); "who carry the cross and are dead to the world" (Isidore of Seville, *Sent.* 2,2, PL83, 602a); "who are crucified with Christ; put to death with Him; buried with Him," in order to be drawn to glory by his grace (Greg. of Naz., *Or* 38,18, PG36, 333a; cf. *Or* 7,23 PG35, 785b; *Poem.* I,2,565-567, pG37; 623a). It is the same for consecrated virgins (Jerome, *Adv Jovinianum* 1,4: 12-13, PL23, 225c, 239b-242a).

Cassian holds that only the ascetic can attain to pure prayer, the summit of perfection. Indeed, by *mortification* he conforms his life to that of Christ Crucified (*Institutions* 4,34-35, SC109, p. 172-174). This mortification leads necessarily to mystical death, to a martyrdom which "does not differ from physical martyrdom" (Entychius of Constantinople, *De pasch. et euchar.* 5, PG86/2, 2397a). It is not a means of coming to God, but rather a consequence of the link which unites the ascetic to Christ (Cassian, *Conferences* XXIV, SC64, p.169-206). The high Middle Ages preserved this heritage. Columban, for example, who died in 615, suggests the imitation of Christ as the best way to arrive at contemplation: "The real disciples of Christ crucified follow Him on the cross... All the mysteries of salvation are hidden there" (*Ep.* 4, *Opera.* ed. G.S. Walker, Dublin 1957, p.30-32).

B. Passion spirituality from the 9th to the 11th centuries

1. The humanity of Christ and His Passion in the monasticism of the high Middle Ages. (See, *DS*, t.7, col. 1056-63.)

2. The “contemplatio dominicae passionis”

The monastic reforms of the 10th and 11th centuries stress the orientation toward the humanity and the Passion of Christ, especially the movement at Cluny (J Leclercq, *Sur la devotion a l’humanite du Christ*, R. Ben., t 63, 1953, p. 128-130). Contemplation itself, rather than taking for its object the Divine Essence, contents itself with Christ suffering. The mystique of the Passion, after being compared to martyrdom and to the mortification of the ascetics, finds a new expression in “the contemplation of the Passion of Our Lord,” Jean de Fecamp, d. 1078, (see, A. Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels et textes devots du M.A*, Paris, 1932, repr. 1971; *DS*, t. 8, Col. 510, concerning the dates and authorship of his works) lingers over the scenes of the Passion, in which Christ Crucified shows him the greatness of God’s love, and offers him the one way to bridge the abyss between the soul and its creator. He begs Our Lord to “wound with darts blazing with His love” the soul that seeks Him, desiring to be spiritually united with Him on the Cross together with Our Blessed Lady (*Medit.* 7-8, PL 40, 906-908; 37, 935d; *Manuale* 21-33, 960-961). Anselm of Canterbury displays a mystical attraction to Christ Suffering, joined with union of compassion. He contemplates the wound in the side so as to have his soul “transpierced with the most acute pain” (*Orat.* 20, PL158, 903c). He would like to carry the cross on his shoulders to feel “the weigh of boundless charity” (*Medit.* 9, PL158, 758-761).

C. The age of St. Bernard and St. Francis, 12th and 13th centuries

1. St. Bernard adds new elements to the mystique of the Passion. He teaches that the soul, through meditation and the imitation of Christ Crucified, reaches intimate and personal union with the Incarnate Word. The “schola caritatis” is the “schola Christi” (*in schola Christi sumus*). The Passion of Christ is not only a witness to love, but also a request for love. Charity goes beyond the plane of simple reason. Against human knowledge, based on reason, Bernard places wisdom, which is learnt by meditating on the life and Passion of Our Lord: *Haec mea sublimior interim philosophia, scribere Jesum et hunc crucifixum* (*in Cant.* 44,1, PL182, 666b; cf. *De dilig. Deo* 3,7-8, 978b, 979a). Crucified Love penetrates the soul, and burns and consumes it till it makes it die to itself. It is this interior martyrdom which leads to mystical union between Christ and the soul in search of God (cf. *DS*, t.1. Col. 1483-85).

William of Saint-Thierry thinks that the Passion, “the insults, the spittle, the blows, the death on the cross,” speak the language of charity. Jesus makes us understand what love consists in when He gives His life for us, loving us to the end (*De ciontemplando deo* 9-11, SC61, 1959, p. 90-96). Meditation on the Passion is the equivalent of a spiritual communion, since the Eucharist is called the *memoria a passionis* and intimate union with Christ (*Ep ad fratres the Monte Dei* 115, SC223, 1975, p. 234).

In the same vein, Eckbert of Schonau (d. 1184) thinks the Passion of Christ the *Stimulus amoris seu dilectionis* (PL184, 953-966). His sister Elizabeth (d. 1164) was one of the first mystics to re-live, in Holy Week 1154, the tragedy of the Passion (*Vita*, written by Eckbert, J,53-56, PL195, 147-149; cf. *DS* t.4 Col. 586-588). Hildegard of Bingend (d.1179 - *DS*, t.7, Col.

505-21) also re-lived the Passion, but in an ecclesial and sacramental context (Scivias, 2,6,17, CCM43, p.232, 244; *Lib. divin. oper.* 3,10,34, PL197, 1034c).

Cistercian mysticism was particularly concerned with the interior aspect of the mystery of Christ Crucified. The outstanding example is Lutgarde of Aywieres (1182-1246) who, in a vision of Christ Crucified with His Heart pierced (*AS juin*, t.4, p.193), experienced the grace of *Exchange of hearts* (cf. *DS* t.2, Col. 1046-51). A similar grace was granted to: Sybil of Gages, Elizabeth of Wans, and Bertha of Marbais, contemporaries of Lutgarde, and members of the same monastery; also Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewjich and the mystics of Helfta, Mechtilda of Magdebourg the Great. The spirituality of the Passion also appears in the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx (*Medit.* 16, among those of St. Anselm, PL158, 789-791) and Guerric of Igny (*Serm in Annuntiatione* 3,4, SC202, Z973, p. 154-156; *In Dom. Palm.* 4, p.202-214).

During the same period there appears the impulse to pure love on the foundation of the Passion and Death of Christ, following St. Bernard and the school of Saint Victor. Abelard, in his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* (PL178, 891) sees in the cross only an example of disinterested, unreserved love. Ives, on the other hand, in the *Epistle to Severin*, sees in it the “extreme” and “vehement” influence of a love which conquers all. God Himself allows Himself to be “conquered” by it, much more so will it conquer souls (2-3; ed: G. Dumeige, Paris, 1955, p.46-49; cf. Richard of Saint Victor, “The four degrees of ardent charity” same ed., p. 127-177).

2. Scriptural renewal, evangelical poverty and the mystique of the cross

Between the Gregorian age and the beginning of the 12th century, Christendom performed a great examination of conscience by confronting the Gospel. There, it was noticed that Our Lord was born poor, lived as a poor man and died poor and naked on the cross. The patristic tradition was therefore resumed. It had always seen a link between the *sequela crucis* and the practice of poverty (cf: art. “Nudite,” *DS*, t. 11, col. 509-513). It was the monks and not the lay movements or the mendicant orders who rediscovered the relationship between religious poverty and the cross.

Stephen of Muret (d. 1124) desires his monk-hermits to espouse radical poverty, “seeing that Christ chose poverty as the better part” (*Liber de doctrina, concl.* GCM 8, 1968, p. 61). The same conviction is to be found among other monastic reformers of the 12th century, for instance, Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1117), Bernard of Tiron (d. 1109), Saint Norbert (d. 1134), and Fulcus of Neuilly (d. 1201). Odon of Morimond (d. 1161) emphasized that Christ prepared for death by leaving everything He had on earth: His purse He gave to the traitor, His Church to Peter, His body to the disciples in the Blessed Sacrament, His disciples to God, His clothes to the soldiers, His mortal body to those who nailed Him to the cross. His last possession, His Mother, he gave to men. (*Dos Homilias de O. de M.*, ed. 7. Canal, in “Sacris Erudiri,” t. 13, 1962, p. 432-433.)

3. Saint Francis, the “new figure of the Crucified”

Few men have had such an intense and prolonged experience of the Passion as the Poverello. The first impulse came to him from the “voice of the Crucified in the church of Saint Daniam: “from then on, he had the memory of the Lord’s Passion deeply imprinted on his heart” (Thomas de Celano, *Tract de miraculis* 2,2, in “Analecta Franciscana,” t. 10 ed. Quaracchi, 1941, p. 272-273). The complete “renunciation” puts him in pursuit of the bare cross; his kiss for the leper (an image of Christ’s body covered with wounds) changes “all bitterness into sweetness.”

His longing for martyrdom develops in him the ardent desire to die on the cross with Christ. Finally, he receives the gift of the stigmata, in which some see the new and extraordinary event of the age. Crucified with Christ, his sacrifice of love is consumed in mystical union. If the Crucified was once for him the “book,” the “school,” the “model,” now He “dwells in his heart like a bunch of myrrh,” and Francis desires to be transformed into Him through over-flowing love” (Bonaventure, *Legenda maior* 9,2, in Opera, ed. Quaracchi, t.8, 1898, p. 530). Francis is the image of Christ Suffering, but a living image, brought to life by grace. “Nailed to the cross in body and spirit,” for the last two years of his life he had himself carried from place to place “to encourage others to carry the cross” (cf. 14,1, p.545; cf. *DS*, t.5, Col: 1279-81).

The Franciscan Order follows in the footsteps of St. Francis. Clare of Assisi says that her one desire is to be on the cross with Christ in his poverty: His “embrace brings endless happiness” (*Letters to Agnes of Bohemia* 1, AFH, t.17, 1924, p. 513). The first companions of St. Francis were convinced that only he who strips himself of all earthly things and “is raised on the cross with Christ” (cf. Dante, *Paradiso* XI, 70) can hope for mystical union with the Incarnate Word. Bonaventure has left a series of mystical works on the Passion of very great worth. Anthony of Padua desires to follow the way of the cross to the bitter end “with feet of love” (cf. *Sermones dominicales et festive*, 3 vol., Padua, 1979).

D. The 14th Century

The mystics of the 14th century, especially the women, re-lived the Passion with “graphic sensitivity.” Angela of Foligno (d. 1309), in her visions (cf. *Autobiografia* 1,7-15; 4,1-7), experienced the tragedy of the Passion and described the scenes with detailed realism. No doubt, she was inspired by the words of Christ which she heard several times, “I suffered it all for you.” Then she wept with such love that “the tears burnt her cheeks.” She offers herself as a sacrifice, and “wishes to die,” with Our Lord (cf. L. Lecleve, *S.A. de F SA vie, ses oeuvres*, Paris 1936). The same realism is found in the visions of St. Bridget of Sweden (d: 1373), especially the vision she had in the church of the Passion in Jerusalem, on a pilgrimage there (*Revel.* 7,15; cf. *DS*, t.1, Col. 1943-58). Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) experienced such great compassion for Our Lord in His Passion that “she often felt strange pain in her body” (*Vita S. Clarae de Cruce*, Vatican, 1944, p. 14-15). In the north, near the mystics of the Rhineland, there was also a flowering of love for Jesus Crucified. We can cite, Christine (d. 1356) and Marguerite Ebner (d. 1351) (*DS*, f.10, Col. 338-40), also Elizabeth Stagel (d. 1360), Dominican nuns close in thought to Henry of Suso, who has often been accused of dolorism (the teaching that accepts the value of suffering in itself). Even the spirituality of the “Friends of God” with which Marguerite Ebner is connected through her director, Henry of Nordlingen, and which is influenced by Ruysbrock, sees in compassion a source of holy sadness, genuinely Christian because it is based on love (cf: *Das Buch vom geistlicher Armut* 2,82, ed. H. Denifle, Munich, 1877, p. 218),

The spiritual journey of St. Catherine of Siena, (d. 1380) is directed to Christ Crucified, to whom she comes by the three famous “ladders”. The first leads to His “pierced feet,” the second to the “open side,” and the third to His “mouth, where the gall has left its bitterness.” Then the soul takes its rest on the cross, “full of happiness and sorrow” (*Il Dialogo* 49-76, ed. G. Cavallini, Rome 1968, p. 110-180).

Why did these mystics evidence such vivid sensitivity? Some authors believe that they can explain the language of the mystics of the 14th century and the spread of devotion to Christ

Crucified towards the end of the Middle Ages as a reaction to a collective fear about the problem of salvation (J. Delumeau, *Naissance et affirmation de la Reforme*, Paris 1973, p. 55). Others, however, have said that this explanation is too simple. In fact, devotion to Christ Crucified began much earlier with the Cistercians and Franciscans. It is better to suppose a harmonious development of factors which were already in existence in western Christianity (F. Rupp. *L'Eglise et la vie religieuse en Occidente a la fine du Moyen Age*, Paris 1971, p. 147). One must not forget what is already stated in Scripture, the source of inspiration for the piety of the Middle Ages. The scriptures attributes to the wounds of Our Saviour and to His Precious Blood a live-giving power (1 Pet 2,24; Heb 9,13-14; etc).

E. The “*Meditatio vitae et passionis Christi*”

1. Following Bernard and Francis, christian mysticism makes meditation on the life and Passion of Christ, as *mysteria of salvation*, the foundation of the spiritual life. The renewed interest in the Bible in the 12th century was directly centered on two themes: the “*Historia salutis*” and the “*Vita Christi*”. The books of devotion are written around these two themes which eventually meet in the Passion considered as the mystery of salvation. The “*Vita Christi*”, being rooted in the mystery of the Trinity and stretching up to the Resurrection and glorious Ascension, represents the principal way by which the christian of the Middle Ages may come to an understanding of the Paschal Mystery (cf. art “*Mysteres de la vie du Christ*,” *DS* t.10, Col. 1784-86).

The most ancient writing is a short treatise by a Cistercian monk about 1150, the “*Pseudo-Bede*” (*De medit. passionis Domini per septem diei horas*, PL 94, 561-568). It is one of the few examples in which the Passion theme, meditated on while reciting the Divine office, is presented outside the normal context of the “*Vita Christi*”.

For Bonaventure, following St. Francis, Christ becomes the “book” par excellence, written inside and outside (cf. Apoc. 5,1), in which “God the Father has included all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Lignum vitae* 46, *Opera*, ed. Quaracchi, t. 8, 1898, p. 84; *Vitis mystica* 24,2, p. 188). The “*Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*” (Venice, 1485; re-ed. Turin, 1961), by Ubertain of Casale, is in the same vein. The “*Stimulus amoris*” by James of Milan (*DS*, t.8, Col. 48-49) is almost exclusively affective in tone.

2. Meditation on the Passion according to the Gospels

From the beginning of the 14th century, the devotional works keep to the Gospel accounts of the Passion, especially. The pseudo-Bonaventure “*Meditationes vitae Christi*” (cf. *DS*, t. 1. Col. 1848-53; t.8, Col. 324-26) do indeed include elements borrowed from the apocrypha, or from private revelations, according to popular taste. The “*Vita Jesu Christi*” by Ludolph of Saxe (*DS*, t.9., Col: 1333-38) simply follows the words of the Gospel, the commentaries of the Fathers and those of the monastic orders. There is one significant detail: the book is divided into two parts, joined together by the event at Caesarea Philippi, where Our Lord, for the first time, foretells His Passion and warns His prospective followers that they must be ready to carry the cross after Him.

3. The Passion of Jesus and methodical prayer

The “*Devotio moderna*” is obviously directed toward meditation on, and imitation of, the life and passion of Our Lord. The “*Chronicon Windeshemense*” by Jean Busch gives a method of

meditation called *Epistola de vita et de passione Domini* (*DS* t.4, Col. 1926; ed K. Graube, Halle, 1886, p. 226-224; ed M. Medlund, Leyde, 1975).

Gerard of Zutphen follows the line of thought introduced by St. Bonaventure, and states that meditation on the Passion draws the spirit to the summit of contemplation (*De spirit. ascensionibus*, in *Maxima Bibl. Patrum*, t.26, Lyon, 1677, p. 237-289). Thomas a Kempis has a series of meditations and prayers on the life and Passion of Christ (*Opera*, ed. M. J. Pohl, t. 5, Fribourg, 1905). As far as method and subject matter are concerned the following write in a vein similar to the two writers just mentioned: Jean Mombaer, Philip of Zwolle, Nicolas Kempb, and Jean Wessel. To these may be added others who were influenced by the “Devotio,” the “Modus Meditandi” by Ludovico Barbo, and the “Exercitatorium vitae spiritualis” by Garcia de Cisneros (d. 1510).

The “Spiritual Exercises” of St. Ignatius of Loyola present the subject in a very personal way. In the “Exercises” lasting a month, three weeks are spent in meditation on the life of Christ, one of them devoted to the Passion. The mystery of the life of Christ had never before been produced in such orderly fashion. It was only after taking his place firmly under the standard of Christ and enrolling as a follower of Christ that the retreatant was offered the Passion for his meditation. Like Christ, the disciple would pass from the Passion to the glory of the Resurrection.

From the 16th to the 18th century, books of meditation were inspired more and more by the subject of the Passion. The following may be cited as examples: the treatises of Thomas o Jesus, John Baptist of Crema, Peter de Lucques, Luis de la Palma, and Gaetano di Bergamo (d. 1753) (*Pensieri ed affetti sopra la Passione... per ogni giorno dell'anno*, 2 Vol., Bergamo 1733, cf, *DS*, t.6, Col. 49). The Jesuit, Gaspar Loarte (d. 1578), gives the following reason for the growth of books on the Passion: the Passion constitutes a “recapitulation” of the whole life of Christ. It is like an “abbreviated story” containing all the wisdom of the Gospel (*Esercizio della vita christiana*, Rome, 1571, F. 21r.).

F. From John of the Cross to Paul of the Cross (16th-18th century)

From the end of the Middle Ages, participation in the sufferings of Christ gradually assumes new forms. Physical martyrdom, ascetic mortifications, the deprivation demanded by total poverty – these give way more and more to martyrdom of the heart and will. Jesus is contemplated not only on Calvary but also in Gethsemane.

I. The martyrdom of the Heart of Christ and the mystics

Some authors of the 14th century, for instance, Ubertain of Casale, had already spoken of the invisible sacrifice offered by Jesus “in the infinite temple of His heart.” This view would be explained more fully with regard to devotion to the Sacred Heart. At the beginning of the 16th century, our Savior’s interior martyrdom had become the subject of meditation to the point where the mystics made His interior suffering the principal subject of their contemplation and meditation. Catherine of Genoa (d. 1510) sees in the Crucified Christ a “great wound of love” which is found in her own heart like “an intimate wound” of the same intensity. Osanna Andreassi (d. 1505) (*DS*, t. 11, Col. 1008-09), in her ecstasies, speaks especially of “the sorrow of the heart”; and Camilla Battista Varano (d. 1524) is the author of the work which might be called the masterpiece of the genre: *I dolori mentali di Gesu nella sua passione* (Ed. G.

Boccanera, *Jesi*, 1958). Mary Magdalene of Pazzi (d. 1604), in her turn, states that in His Passion Our Lord suffered more in His mind than in His Body (cf. *DS*, t.10, Col. 583).

2. The martyrdom of the will and the mystique of the “fiat”

It is in the wake of the mystical experiences of these holy souls that Achille Gagliardi (d. 1607) (*DS*, t.6, Col. 53-64) can speak of the mysterious love that united the Son’s wounded Heart to the wounding Will of the Father. The privileged spot where Jesus showed this obedient love was Gethsemane. In His “fiat”, spoken in the Garden, Jesus attained the summit both of suffering and of love (*Breve compendio*, ed M. Bandiscioli, Florence, 1952, p. 99-100). The spirituality of Berulle follows, to a large extent, the same line of thought. Before suffering at the hands of the Jews, Jesus suffered the wounds of love, inflicted by the Father “through the holy, divine and sorrowful actions which God performed in His soul” (quoted by F.G. Preckler, *Berulle aujourd’hui. Pour une spiritualité de l’humanité du Christ*, Paris 1978, p. 97; cf. p. 59-67).

The mysticism of the “fiat” or abandonment to the Divine Will aroused particular interest in France in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially among those described as writers about pure love. *La Croix de Jesus* by Louis Chardon (d. 1651) (*DS*, t.2, Col. 498-503) remains one of the most interesting texts for an understanding of the mysterious details concerning the participation in sanctifying grace through devotion to the cross. Alexandre Piny (d. 1709) and others insist on the complete abasement of the will and speak of absolute sacrifice. Fenelon sees in this the last hope of freeing the soul from every vestige of selfishness. On the psychological level, the soul renounces eternal happiness and expires with Christ on the cross in “the most complete abandonment,” “almost in despair.” Pascal has left Christian spirituality one of the most beautiful meditations on Gethsemane and on the “non-human sufferings” of Our Lord (*Pensees*, ed. L. Braunschweig, n. 553: *Le mystère de Jesus*).

3. “Knowledge of the Cross” and mysticism of the Passion

John of the Cross describes the dark night as a real crucifixion of the spirit. The soul, deprived of all support, even spiritual, reaches Calvary, is raised on the cross with Christ, grieves with Him over the abandonment by the Father, and dies mystically with Him (*Noche II*, 5,1-7; *Subida II*, 7,9-11). Christ suffering is always present in his writings, at least as the way and the example to be followed. Imitation of Christ Crucified, especially in His obedience to the Father’s will, is absolutely necessary if one wishes to attain perfection (*Subida I*, 13,4). The cross, understood as a continual commitment to suffering, is “the narrow gate”, the only one which leads to Divine Wisdom (*Cantico* 36,13). Knowledge of the Cross is, for John of the Cross, the negative way. In fact, faith foregoes seeing the things it believes in and is directed to the cross (A. Cugno, *Saint Jean de la Croix*, Paris, 1979, p. 38-39). Cf. art. “Nuit,” *DS*, t.11, Col. 519-25.

The mysticism of St. Paul of the Cross (d. 1775) is centered on the Passion of Christ (Basilio de S. Pablo, “Pasiocentrismo en la vida mística y apostolado de S. Pablo de la Cruz,” in *Teología Espiritual*, t. 11, 1967, p.431-454). For Paul, Christ Crucified is the supreme expression of the agape and the Passion, “the greatest and most wonderful work of Divine Love” (*Lettere*, ed. Amedeo della Madre di Dio, t.2, Rome, 1924, p.499). His writings, especially the “Diario” (ed. E. Zoffoli, Rome, 1964) reveal his constant participation in the Passion through physical and spiritual sufferings:

The mystical marriage does not nullify but rather confirms and intensifies the intimate union between Paul and the Passion of Our Lord. The ring which was placed on his finger has “engraved on it the instruments of the Passion.” And Our Savior told him that he must ever keep in mind the memory of “His sorrowful Passion.” What is most important for him now is “pure suffering,” which S. Breton explains as a pronounced experience of his own nothingness (*La mystique de la passion*, p. 187-236). It is also “mystical death,” an expression Paul seems to have borrowed from the writers on pure love - the offering to God of a soul “crucified and dead” in obedience, desolation, agony, death and hope (*Morte mistica, ovvero olocausto del puro spirito di un anima religiosa*, Bilbao, 1976, p. 13-17; cf. *DS*. t.10, Col. 1789-90 and its note, *infra*).

4. Other mystics of Jesus Crucified

The spiritual experience of the Poor Clare Veronica Giuliani (d. 1727) is one of the most interesting. Her “Diary” relates visions and conversations with Our Lord in His Passion which produce His Sorrowful Image in her. One day, a brilliant light shone from Our Lord’s side and went right through her heart “like a burning flame” arousing in her inexpressible “sorrow and love” (*Diario*, ed. O. Fiorucci, t.2, Citta di Castello, 1971, p.23). The Capuchin, Tommaso da Bergamo (d. 1631) and St. Charles de Sezze (d. 1670), among other Franciscans, were mystics of the cross. The French school founded its mysticism on the obedience of the Son to the Father. John Eudes, who thought of himself as “host and victim,” exhorted the faithful to be examples of the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord: members of the mystical Body, in order to make themselves conformable to the Head, must, like Him, offer themselves as a victim for the salvation of the whole Body (“Le royaume de Jesus,” in *Oeuvres completes*, t.I, Vannes-Paris, 1905, p. 310-311).

During the 18th century the spirituality of the Passion was represented by new religious congregations and 19th which took it as their inspiration. A group of saints and holy souls represented the Passionists at the foot of the cross: Vincent-Mary Strambi (d. 1824), Dominic Barberi (d. 1849) and Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin (d. 1862) (cf. *DS*, t.6, Col. 1-3). The Redemptorists drew their inspiration from the devotion of Saint Alphonsus Liguori to the Passion. The Missionaries of the Precious Blood, founded by Saint Gaspar del Bufalo (d. 1837) and the “Stigmatines,” led by Gaspar Bertoni (d. 1853), practiced a form of spirituality whose origins went back far. The mysticism which required the soul to offer itself as a victim and to make reparation inspired the foundation of various religious orders like the Sisters of Marie Reparatrice, founded by Emilie d’Oultremont (d. 1878) (“Marie de Jesus” *DS*, t.10, col. 513-515), and the Priests of the Sacred Heart, founded by L. Dehon (d. 1925) (*DS*, t.3, Col. 105-115).

G. Passion Mysticism today

1. In our own day, men and women *participate in the Passion* to the point of *re-living it physically*.

Although it is not easy to pronounce judgement on the natural or supernatural character of the physical phenomena which accompany their experiences (cf. art “Extase,” *DS*, t.4 Col. 2171-86), it should be remembered that these phenomena do not represent the essential element, which is intimate union with Christ Crucified. Possessing the stigmata - whether continually or for a period limited to the most intense moments of this union - is a relatively frequent occurrence after St. Francis of Assisi’s experience. Ann-Catherine Emmerich (d. 1823) (*DS*, t.4, Col. 622-27) was favored in this way, and, in our own times, Marthe Robin (d. 1981).

The case of Gemma Galgani (d. 1903), whose sanctity has been recognized by the Church, is of particular importance (*DS*, t.6, Col. 183-187). In her “Estasi” (Rome 1941) she calls herself a “fruit of the Passion,” and an “offshoot of Our Lord’s wounds.” The source of her suffering, as with other representatives of the school of reparation mysticism, is quite simply the consciousness of the limitless suffering of Christ because of men’s sins. Gemma participated mysteriously in Our Lord’s suffering, enjoying, from time to time, touches of His Glory. She experienced the torments of the Passion, the crown of thorns, the nails, the lifting up of the cross, death and the lance in the side. As she was dying, she stretched out her arms in the form of a cross.

2. Spirituality and suffering

Modern theologians, feeling the need to reappraise critically the mentality and practices of a former age, have sometimes passed harsh judgements on the spirituality of the Passion, in which they have noted a tendency to exaggeration or to love suffering for its own sake. A society which seeks man’s freedom looks upon suffering as something purely negative, an enemy to be eliminated under penalty of appearing to justify evil. This point of view makes it easy to discredit a form of spirituality which for centuries insisted on the acceptance of God’s Will and self-abnegation. Of course, a Christian can never justify evil, especially when it proceeds from selfishness and hatred. Nevertheless, he cannot ignore the fact that suffering is frequently a consequence of our limitations and our sins. It is also sometimes an indispensable requisite for love. It was precisely for this reason that Our Lord chose the cross.

3. Vatican II

In the encyclicals from “*Mystici Corporis*” to “*Redemptor Hominis*,” the magisterium of the Church has endeavoured to instruct the faithful on the meaning of the cross in the life of the Christian: We shall only recall the teachings of Vatican II about different aspects of a theology of the Cross. In presenting the idea of a Pilgrim Church which lives by faith and hope, but does not yet share the glory that is to come, and which “proclaims the cross and death of the Lord until He comes” (*LG* 8), the Council in fact develops a “theology of the cross.” The theme of the Passion and the cross is fundamental to the essential features of faith: revelation, redemption, anthropology: The proclamation of death and resurrection is considered the supreme expression of Divine Revelation (*DV* 4). In the relationship of obedience and sacrifice which binds the Son to the will of the Father, the Passion displays the real face of God and His love (*LG* 3; cf. 37-38). By giving His life for His brethren, Jesus witnesses to His brotherly love for them and reveals salvation to them (*LG* 22, 42; *DV* 4, 14; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 2).

The Council urges those who preach the Gospel to “make known this mystery of love truthfully,” and without “blushing at the scandal of the cross,” because therein lies the power of the Word (*AG* 24). However, the Passion is not simply a “sign of God’s love for all men”; it is also a “source of grace” (*AG* 24). It is from His cross that Christ “draws all men to Himself” (*Jn* 12,32), through its sanctifying power (*LG* 3,48; *DV* 17). By His Passion, Christ conquers the devil, sin and death, and announces genuine freedom and real peace (*LG* 7; *GS* 2, 12,22,38; *SC*6), while reconciling men to God (*SC* 5; *GS*78). When the soldier’s lance pierced Our Lord’s side, the Holy Spirit poured sacramental grace over the whole world (*LG* 5,7,21,39-40; *DV* 4,17; *AG* 4; *SC* 5).

Through the Mystical Body the Divine Life spreads among its members and here the Council echoes the Passion mystics – “the sacraments maintain a mysterious link with the Suffering

Christ” (LG 7). Imitation of the Passion and molding oneself on the pattern of Christ Crucified are oft-repeated themes (LG 7; GS 22,37). “In accepting death for us sinners, Jesus teaches us by His example that we, too, must carry the cross which our human nature and the world place on the shoulders of all who seek justice and peace” (GS 38).

4. Passion mysticism and ecumenism

In recent years, ecumenical dialogue has suggested a new approach to the theological and spiritual meaning of the cross. An appeal in this direction has also come from Protestants, especially as the Protestant church, at different periods in its history, has insisted on this point in an effort to discover once more its vital principle.

In our view, serious difficulties stand in the way of combining the mysticism of the Passion and the “*theologia crucis*” of the Reformed Churches. Luther taught that our suffering cannot make us conformable to Christ; it is His suffering, which, destroying sin in us, makes us conformable to Him. The protestant theological renewal remains faithful to this principle. Christ does not work in us by His Almighty power, but by His weakness. The believer stands with all his weakness in the presence of Christ Crucified and carries his cross by the simple fact that he is a Christian (D. Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, Munich, 1937). Mystical union between God and man is realized, not directly, but through Christ, the fundamental synthesis of suffering and love. The Christian is united to a “God who has suffered” through the mediation of Christ (K. Kitamori, *Theologie des Schmerzes Gottes*, Gottingen, 1972). It was at the precise moment of declaring Himself abandoned by God on the cross that Jesus revealed the Father and His justice (cf. art. “Luther,” *DS*, t.9, Col. 1208-40). He takes the place of abandoned and oppressed humanity. He delivers men from their misfortunes by taking them on Himself (Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott. Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie*, Munich 1972).

It is clear, therefore, what distinguishes the “*theologia crucis*” from the “*mystica crucis*”. In the first, Christ heals us by His own wounds; in the second, man comes to God, drawn by the grace which flows to him from the cross.

CONCLUSION

There are two principal views about trying to explain to modern man the meaning of the cross. One is traditional and purely spiritual in character. This stresses the fundamental attitudes of Christ’s experience and of His Passion. The other is of recent origin and has a strong social emphasis: it sees in the Passion and Death of Christ especially a consequence of His denunciation of injustice, oppression, the worship of material gods. Since the “*memoria passionis*” is inseparable from the “*memoria resurrectionis*,” the human suffering of Our Savior is an appeal to overcome our own, in order to form a human condition worthy of the new creation instituted by Christ (7.B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*, Mayence, 1977; Ch Duquoe, “Attualita della croce, in *La sapienza dela Croce oggi*, t. 1, p. 11-17). This second view has some truth in it. It emphasizes fraternal charity, inseparable from the justice of the Kingdom as it is from human justice. This fraternal charity can indeed blossom into a form of Passion mysticism. It helps the Christian communicate in the charity of Christ, who gave His life for those He loved (Jn 15,13), in order to make all men “truly free” (8,34-35). However, these two views, the traditional view centered more on the person of Jesus suffering in His Passion, and the more recent view, directed rather to the spread of fraternal charity among the children of God, combine like two aspects of the single commandment of Christ (Matt 22, 34-40).

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Editor s note.

As indicated in the Outline, Fr. Flavio added a list of bibliographical references after his conclusion. Since, as with the other sources that he indicated throughout the article, most of the books cited were not in English, they are nor included here. However, reference can be made to the original text in Vol. XII of the classic *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, which should be available in the Religion section of any major library.