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**Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality**

## **THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION AND ITS CHARISM**

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# THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION AND ITS CHARISM

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## Finality, Space and Time in the Passionist Constitutions

### Preface

When we reflect on a Rule which we may not have kept very well but which “has made saints,” we like to return to the sources in order to evaluate, as much as we can, the importance its beginning had on a corporate life. In these reflections I shall concentrate on the first chapters of our Constitutions which deal with the questions of finality, space, and time. I shall use the Historical Sources of our Congregation (1). The synopsis of the six different formulations of the classical synopses of our four Gospels. But I have no doubt that a careful examination of these multiple versions might reveal some very significant additions and omissions to a critical mind.

A priori, but not trusting a prejudice which I share with many others, I would be inclined to think that in the course of time our Rules would be more and more aligned with the juridical demands of a certain Roman spirit. Accordingly I would be tempted to make the contrast between Gospel and Church, as was done at the beginning of the century. Little by little and by an implacable logic, the bureaucratic rigidity of the administration would be substituted for the original fervor of the kingdom. This fate is not particular to us. All Orders have more or less experienced this law of entropy or diminishment of energy.

For prudence sake, I shall forego this possible reading of our history. But to comment on the texts which I have considered in their spiritual context, I thought it necessary to immerse them once again in their native atmosphere. The “form of the Holy Rule” – to use the Founder’s expression – has first of all been exercised in a life of “abnegation, solitude and contemplation” before being signified in a legislative document. I do not want to oppose absolutely these two states of the one same thing (as they spoke in the Middle Ages of “different states of one same essence”). But I do believe that the passage from one to the other is never made without some loss. We do understand that the “reforms” so frequently in the history of the Church have periodically tried to climb back up to the top. I am not a reformer. But I am sensitive to what “happened in the beginning.”

### I. In the Beginning

Every beginning evokes in us the freshness of a sudden spring, the song of a spring which finds a canticle of canticles in itself before giving itself to the more or less loquacious digression of the river beyond. Mythically this is the way we conceive what has preceded the existence of our Congregation, since we no longer see myth as a minimizing of understanding. In this preexistence “when all things were still life in God” (a long speculative tradition interprets the fourth verse of St. John’s Prologue by a mere change of punctuation), the interior elan dispensed with imperative rigors of the law. What is there then in the beginning?

In the beginning there is neither father nor mother. There are two brothers (it is unnecessary to recall for this purpose the founding figures of Remus and Romulus). Two brothers with predestined names: Paul and John Baptist. The first, if I be permitted this simplification, is more open to the "breath" of the Immense (this term will return quite often in his Diary and Letters). The second is more attentive perhaps to the contours of things, more sensitive to the need for specific determinations. However, I do not want to force the differences or to project the ancient shadow of the "unlimited" and "limited" on this primitive pair. But, however inadequate it may appear, this description does not seem to me totally inaccurate.

If I should write a novel about our history, I would be tempted to attribute the passive characteristics of the Congregation to the influence of John Baptist to the degree that his example could explain a certain timidity to go out of native frontiers, a certain fear of what could be an adventure (such as Blessed Dominic's English "venture"), a certain poverty of imagination. I shall not insist on these naughty thoughts. For in the beginning the differences which they would confess later on were included in the uncontainable joy of a community of heart and spirit.

What then did our two men do in this preexistent state of the Congregation? We know the history well. After all, the history was not yet born for Paul of the Cross, nor for his brother. Perhaps at this preexistent time, which was not yet time, what happened was almost like my first day of Novitiate. There was morning and evening. Nature was very close to us there: water, land, sky and the passing breeze from the trees. Our thirst for relevance would have been satisfied by the perfect void, I understand that when contemporary men hear these beginnings recounted, they can experience a feeling of boredom which could be expressed rather well by saying: "Nothing happened." Or rather would say that their doing (I say "agir" rather than "action") is not listed among their elementary activities. By analogy with the neutral element of the mathematicians, their "doing," when added to their daily work, alters it in no way, like the zero, in arithmetical addition, which leaves the number intact.

It is true that in 1719 Paul experienced what could be called an "inspiration," a motion in the sense that it functions for an eventual foundation. But it does not seem that Paul of the Cross was really "moved" at the first moment, or set in motion. It is only in a second moment that the light, becoming more urgent, enables the vague idea, which was not yet a power, to give itself a kind of spiritual body and a "habit."

If we want to think about this first moment "before the Passionist world had come to be," we can find some analogy in that creative void which the poet called "a rhythm for nothing," something like a waiting for someone or an availability for something. Something seems to have begun to sing even before the words of the song have been specific. While waiting for God, Paul basically lived the life of the Word "Who was in God, for God, and near God," before creation. Such is the operation – null and fundamental – like the mathematician's neutral element. Yet this "neutral element" was for him precisely the essential element.

This first phase does not disappear but, on the contrary, it is there when the idea is specified and when the delighted charm begins to smile in the shadow of a figure. The tiny room of Castellazzo, hanging like a kind of ridiculous appendix to the village Church, has, from this

viewpoint, the value of a symbol. With Master Eckhart we could speak of an “adverb of the Word.”

Life then is reduced to solitude, poverty, fasting and prayer. A true beginning never starts with an addition but with a subtraction, with a retreat, which is also living “where our heart dwells.” Fertility needs a certain separation, a “step” outside the world, which is a transgression of common sense. In the word “abnegation” we find the term “negation.” But this negation, which distances us from things, is also a seed of being and of life. Fasting, solitude, silence and prayer itself, inasmuch as it implies some separation, are, in their own way, modes of this negation, which is final judgment on the world. From time immemorial the “world has been judged” by the evangelical word. “Judged,” which does not mean despised or underestimated but deprived of that fascination which could make us forget that the world remains and must remain – in the immense presence which we express by saying “He is” – the sign of vestige of that ONE to whom the soul wants to be united, “prescinding from all other things.”

I am certainly excluding from this desire for separation, of which solitude and silence are the primordial forms, every personal joy, joy which we expressed in Spinozian terms “as joy which comes from the fact that man considers himself as his own power.” But this quasi sportive aspect of performance, while we cannot deny its presence, and I think this is normal because it is necessarily linked to the feeling of our freedom, connatural to every human act, remains subordinate to a higher will. More exactly, it is subordinate to that instinct inherent in every being, which brings it back to its source, a relation or “esse ad” which reminds us of the condition itself of the Word “in the beginning.”

Prayer, which springs spontaneously from this state of “purity” refound, is identified then with respiration, a breathing in and a breathing out. We are reminded, in this regard, of the celebrated “prayer of the sunflower” – that astounding flower which is defined by its internal need to “turn toward the sun.” Prayer, in this sense can be likened to a kind of fundamental “tropism” or “helio-tropism.”

By way of a conclusion to this first development of our origins, I would say that the preexistence of the Congregation is a kind of “heliotropic” existence. The specifications of a Rule ultimately have meaning and importance only to the degree that they are for each one of us the active memory of the heliotropic preexistence.

## **II. The Finality of the Congregation**

Questioning myself as a philosopher and theologian on the general determinations which govern the prescriptions of a Rule, I shall consider finality, space, and time as fundamental categories. They are valid for every religious Rule, whatever it be. But I shall not forget that these categories are, clothed by a certain spirit which we shall call “Passionist.” Someone may ask why I attribute such importance to these three categories. My answer is very simple. They are very important because a foundation must necessarily reply to these questions: “Why found an Order? How can you make it exist in space and time, which are for us the very conditions of every existence? I shall begin with the category of finality.

To understand the finality of our Order better, I shall use the Thomistic analysis of the human act because it seems to be both simple and clear. In the famous schema (cf. St. Thomas,

S.T. I-II, q. 12-17), we must distinguish first those acts which, on the part of intellect and will, concern the end; then those acts which concern the order of means (counsel, judgment, consent and choice) and finally those which concern the order of execution (command, active use, joy and repose in the end accomplished).

1. We shall examine first the order of the end: I recalled earlier that in a first moment Paul of the Cross experienced a movement which would be translated into an emotion without yet being a specific intention. We must examine again the two “moments” to which I alluded: first the moment is a kind of creative void; the second is an intention which is specified in an image wherein the initial enchantment took shape.

For this first moment, St. Thomas speaks of an idea of the good, which in terms of will or appetite resounds in the effectivity under the form of satisfaction. These two inseparable aspects of an idea which is love, and of a love which is idea, are the preliminary condition for every efficacious intention. In terms which are not philosophical but rather “poetic,” I would say that every efficacious will – and to be efficacious, especially when it involves a work in which a man is totally engaged – must be preceded by a time of enchantment. It is precisely that “enchantment” which we can discern in the life of St. Paul of the Cross before the idea of the future Congregation takes shape and form. I speak of enchantment; recalling Plato’s Ion and especially Phaedrus, we could also say “enthusiasm” or “mania,” which I would translate both by the word “folly” (because one must have the folly of the cross to undertake certain foundations) and by the words “ecstatic love.” The founder thus dreamed his work before he brought it into reality. There was then, even before the Castellazzo period, what I would call the phase of the primordial dream. And this dream is certainly what St. Thomas called the idea, with its connotation both of the ideal which attracts and of satisfaction in something which transcends us and in which we can forget ourselves, at least as human limited individuals, conditioned on every side.

In this primordial time of the “pre-existence,” I shall distinguish the correlative moments of an idea which entreats us and of an affection which envelops our whole being; of an idea which sings and of a song which orientates you, which is your true Orient (recall the ancient Advent prayer: 0 Oriens).

In the second phase of this pre-existence (which occurs in Paul’s life around the years 1721-22), the initial enchantment passes to the rough draft of a first execution, wherein the idea, under the weight of the satisfaction which is there, becomes in some way self-affirmative and self-realizing. I would say then that the idea becomes “cause of itself.” Self-affirmative, it is developed in a judgment of effective possibility. And it is then, but not before, that we can speak of intention and of end in the precise sense which these two correlative terms evoke. The intention has meaning only to the degree in which it implies a judgment of real possibility. On the other hand, the end signifies the conversion of the initial song of the soul, of the creative dream in which it rests, into a future weighed down by should-be. A should-be which also implies a should-do, inseparable in its turn from a system of means.

But before studying the order of means, I am going to make a practical reflection which seems to me very important today. We complain not only about the lack of vocations, but of countless departures which recently have afflicted almost all the religious Orders. If we ask for

reasons which motivated this exodus (and which in great part are the cause of the difficult conditions of our time) we will perceive that often and in depth, something has ceased singing. Or, and this I think is the real reason, nothing ever really sang. Starting there, whether it be a question of end or means, it is impossible to remain there because these practical specifications are no longer enveloped in this satisfaction, in this enthusiasm of which our ancient masters spoke. We are essentially sons, less by our works than by our dreams. Our life must be dreamed in the way I have said, before it can be, so that it can be truly lived.

2. The order of means is easy enough to understand. The acts which concern it are exemplified well in the life of our founder. It is certain that he took his counsel as well as seeking it from others; that he questioned himself about the best means to use for the execution of his master idea, that is, primordially, his Rule, inasmuch as this Rule is like the plan of a certain architecture. The ontological truth of an Order is actually the adequation of its being to the exemplar and master idea, which idea is itself subordinate in that first phase of loving enthusiasm. Finally, after deliberation and consideration of the external conditions which do not depend upon Paul's will, he sets his mind in a judgment of reality, the instrumental ensemble which, all things considered, would seem to him more suited to the end which he intended. At this point it is very possible that Paul of the Cross suffered from a certain disappointment. Returning to his work, a little like the artist coming back to his painting, he could have experienced some sadness, noting a greater distance than he would have wished between the "idea" which had exhilarated his youth and the realization which must verify it. This sadness of all the founders is inherent in every creative effort.

3. I shall not delay on the third phase of our schema which deals with its realization. I think that the command of which St. Thomas speaks and which marks in the will a resolution persistent in the face of every obstacle is a characteristic of Paul's spirit. As for this "active use" of which St. Thomas also speaks, I think that the founder was not unprepared. I think he put himself in motion, body and soul, so as to accomplish his plan. I think that he knew how to control the conditions and means of execution with a genuine practical spirit. It is sufficient to read his Letters to see this. On the contrary, what I would like to emphasize is the "fruition" which should normally be the conclusion of the practical syllogism which constitutes every human act. "Fruition," joy, the joy of the servant who has finished his work. And I do not see why our founder would have been deprived of it. But this joy following the finished work is always mixed with some sadness and delusion (I explained why this is so previously). There is delusion over the inadequacy between the initial pro-ject and the ob-ject, that is, the finished work with all its imperfections which all human life connotes for us. Still more, and this is very important, the evangelical judgment "when we have done all that, we say we are useless servants" would certainly remain in him. Useless does not mean that one does nothing. But when the work is finished, our fundamental joy does not rest there. We must detach ourselves from the work done; detach ourselves from it in a judgment which puts it at a distance. Contemplate it in retrospect, under the species of non-being, as if all creation, beautiful though it be, evoked in the person responsible for it, the risk of an unconscious idolatry. Break the image or possible idol so as to keep only the transparent icon whose features disappear in the light which bathes it and which restores it to the supreme and original joy "which will never be taken away."

Among the true founders then, I shall distinguish a double beatitude: one which precedes the work which it makes possible, and which does not depend on it and which we shall therefore call

antecedent and immutable because it is in some way consubstantial to our being itself inasmuch as it is “in God, through God, for God, near God.” The other is a consequent beatitude in the work accomplished, and everything considered is as imperfect as the work itself. The art of the saints has always subordinated the second to the first and has seen in the temporal consequence only the remembrance of the eternal abode where the treasure of our heart is concealed.

4. Rereading the first chapter of our Rule in its Italian and Latin style, I cannot hide that I admit a certain disappointment. It is specified that the end of our Congregation is the same as that of every Christian, and a fortiori of every cleric, namely, the observance of God’s law and of the evangelical counsels. That is why, it is added, “the brethren...should first of all take care of their own souls, of their own perfection according to the manner prescribed in these Constitutions.” Then, and in second place, “they will devote themselves with zeal to the works of love for their neighbor.” Finally, “seeing that one of the principal ends of this Congregation is to lead our neighbor to union with God, teaching them in the best and easiest way possible, the brethren of this Congregation who are recognized as competent for this work, should teach the people how to meditate aloud on the mysteries of the Passion.”

Several things amaze me in this text. Let us leave aside the question of the ends, which by this plural number raise the classical question: if a society is defined by its end, how can you have several ends? Supposing that this be possible, what is the precise order of these ends? At least it seems that the principal end is what we designate by the “desire for personal perfection” and “eternal salvation.” Hence the easy and current objection: would the religious be first of all an egoist preoccupied before all with guaranteeing his own eternal future, as if the religion he entered was primarily a life-insurance society? I call this an easy objection because it is sufficient to reply that individual mediocrity is not the best condition to “save another person.” A serious objection, however, if it is true as certain phenomenologists have noted, that the higher a value is in the axiological hierarchy (and this would be the case of the values of the sacred), the more it escapes an explicit will. If we could push the opposing thesis to the extreme, we would have to conclude either that the spiritual perfection of the individual is in no way concerned with the values of the sacred, or that the explicit worship which religion, i.e., every religion, gives to God, would necessarily condemn these values to decadence.

I have some difficulties in subscribing to both of these positions. That is why, while admitting that value and end, end and norm not be confused, it is impossible, in the measure in which these values must be realized on earth, precisely in a kingdom of values, for the values to be an exception to efficacious willing. And it is precisely to the degree in which these values have the right to exist, that they also have the right, in the role of their should-be, to an efficacious should-do of a realizing intention. I hold, however, what seems to me to be a well-founded thesis, namely, on the one hand, the need of not confusing end and value; and on the other hand, the necessity, preceding all organization, of a kind of enchanting and poetic phase in which what will be an end, and before being it, discloses the charm of an attractive, enthusiastic idea.

As regards the egoism of which we spoke, and which seems to corroborate the terminology of personal perfection, I think that we should not separate the two aspects, objective and subjective, of the aforesaid perfection, yet recognize the need to preserve in the first place the centrifugal direction of the spiritual intentionality. “God is to be served first” as we said in



former days. It was to remind us that there is order of priority, and that the “I”, however spiritual it might be, can in the process of self-development only be the indirect effect and not directly sought, or the superabundance which will be given to us by way of addition.

But I am a little more surprised at the fair portion which is allotted to the Passion of Christ in this paragraph. Would it be exhausted as a purely instrumental means? Would it be at the service of a faithful people whom we could thus animate by giving them a kind of exciting magic through public meditation?

I must acknowledge that the transcription, in rules or prescriptions, of a primitive fervor is almost always accompanied by a loss, at least in language. In the founder’s meditation, the Passion of Christ is something totally other than an accompanying phenomenon or a simple means. For it is precisely there that his heart dwells. He moves in it; he allows himself to be carried by it. It is in the Passion that his God is best reflected, because He is alien to our impure riches of whatever order it might be. But in the more or less awkward passage from the order of “enchantment” to that of the end and of its realization or execution – which in the pre-existence was the song of songs – it cannot but undergo the pragmatic inflection of a specific task, of the apostolate, in view of obtaining the effect which, in the reckoning of results, proves the most likely as regards results.

The important thing in the present case is to perceive well both the constraints of this passage and the very legitimate concern to lead people, of faith or otherwise, to this meditation on the Cross which is the only way to God.

### **III. Space and Time**

The texts which I shall freely comment on concerning these two tangible forms of Passionist life are found in different chapters of our Rule. We find the most specific indications about space and place in Chapters 2 and 3. As for the organization of time, it depends on the multiple observances or tasks which are the responsibility of the Religious. I shall avoid recalling details which everyone knows.

1. We must not forget that we were founded by a man who loved the wide open spaces and solitude; who was a hermit before being a preacher; who was sensitive to the sight of the sea (sense image of the “immense”); and who, like the great prophets, was familiar with the mountains because there one heard the breeze of Yahweh. I also think that he loved living water and flowers, and that, in the foundation of a house, he was attentive both to its poetry and its “functionality.” He liked things to be clean (recall the magnificent word with which Catherine of Genoa defined God, “NETTEZZA” - “CLEANLINESS”), but he did not confuse cleanliness and beauty. We must take these things into account if we wish to understand what the Rule says about our places and dwellings.

2. Place is actually inseparable from that important category of today which we call “Dwelling.” Dwelling, however, itself is inseparable from environment. The great modern problem, at least one of the great problems, is especially that of dwelling. I have the impression that in our times, we no longer dwell in our homes. For us, they are rather the place of passage or transition, the springboard for the next flight. As an ontological category, dwelling significantly

modifies the “being as being” of former times. For us today, “being as being” means “to be near.” But ultimately being as being, in its prepositional expression, is an abstract projecting of the LOGOS condition, for concretely as the Prologue specifies, “He was in, for and with God.” These three prepositions which I have underlined define being as being according to its theological exemplar. The Word is thus the model of dwelling. And so our houses should be, according to the Rule, the pattern, or, if you prefer the sensitization of this fundamental abiding or dwelling. Paul of the Cross gives us the secret for this conclusion in his life as hermit. If we want to restore the metaphysical-theological context from which our houses, such as Paul conceives them, take all their meaning and intelligibility, we must first of all recall the condition of the Johannine Logos Who is “in God, for God, and with God.” Such is the fundamental dwelling, or abiding “before the world began.” Then we must recall that condition of the hermit or solitary-prophet which reproduces this divine condition of detachment from all things in his desert, which in turn reproduces in space the state of separation of the original Word. Then we call the solitude or environment in which our houses are situated. Finally, emerging on this global horizon of intelligibility the specific functions of our houses should be recalled. These functions are not mysterious. The Rule, without becoming metaphysical, by a sure instinct of in declinable connections defines the house by a quasi-group of operations. It specifies that it should be the place where one recollects oneself, that is, where the person reassembles his powers in a substantial act, which does nothing but makes us be in God and near God. Moreover, the house, strange as it is, is also the place from which we must go out, because of a transitive action which dedicates and consecrates us to the good of the neighbor. Finally, the house is the being-there to which we must unceasingly return to restore our strength and to distance ourselves from what we have done and done well. To sum up, the house, in its functionality refers to the three fundamental operations which Neo-Platonism and subsequently Christian thought have expressed in a pithy terminology of Latin and Greek:

MONE	-PROODOS	-EPISTROPHE
MANERE	-EXIRE	-REDIRE

which I would translate:

ABIDE	-GO OUT	-RETURN
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This operating trinity, which defines the house, is first of all the definition of spiritual being itself, which, to quote a Proclusian formula of St. Thomas “abiding in itself, proceeds from self and returns to self in a complete return to its essence.” Permit me this evangelical illustration: I find in John 13:1-5 (which I shall relate to the first verse of the Prologue) the equivalent of these operations which I have just briefly analyzed. With slight paraphrasing, we find, according to the main indications of the different prepositions, this kind of formula: “Jesus, knowing that He was in God, and that He came from God, and was going to God, etc.” A house really exists only if in satisfying these functions, it makes possible the three-fold operation which our ancients expressed by the three terms BEING, LIFE, THOUGHT and which, as we know, they applied to the three Divine Persons. I shall conclude by saying that a house is a trinity in earthly act.

To facilitate the reading of this development, I propose the following diagram. Its meaning seems clear enough after the above explanations.

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- |                                       |           |             |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. THE ABIDING IN GOD<br>OF THE LOGOS | 2. DESERT | 3. SOLITUDE |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
- 

THE HOUSE

- 
- |                                  |                                    |                                       |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. ABIDING<br>BEING<br>IMMANENCE | b. GOING OUT<br>LIFE<br>PROCESSION | c. RETURNING<br>THOUGHT<br>CONVERSION |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
- 

3. The reflection on time must not be dissociated from what I have just said about space and place in their fundamental operations. To use a former analogy, I would say that “silence” in the terminology of time corresponds symmetrically to “solitude” in the terminology of space. Now silence sends us back to the word, and the word, in turn, is not separated from a discursiveness or, if you wish, from a “current” or succession of irreversible power.

Paul of the Cross, after many others, in particular Master Eckhart, has commented in his own way on the Vulgate text: “Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia omnipotens sermo tuus a regalibus sedibus venit.” (“While all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty word leapt down from his royal throne.”) The word proceeds from silence, abides there, and returns there. As discursive, inasmuch as it is a kind of flowing stream, it always risks forgetting its origin in that divine “silence of the sea” for which it sprang in the beginning.

We can then apply to time, as the Rule conceives it, the schema of the three operations which we have noted above. I also recall that according to our spiritual masters, Paul of the Cross understood that silence is the secret of fruitfulness. The spiritual masters have interpreted the three births of the Word in this way: in God, in the Virgin Mary and in the soul. Time, in fact, by the succession which it includes and by the concern and preoccupation it evokes is dissociated with difficulty from a certain agitation. Silence reminds us that it is the true environment where the Word is born according to its three births, and that it is, in this sense, a reducer of time.

Time then would be the proliferation in action of a substantial, immobile doing which keeps action on the slope of “agitation.” We reread, for example, what is said on the time of the missions. Before the mission, the preparation for the ministry is carried out in a “recollection”; during the mission, this previous doing proliferates, under the fire of zeal, in a “multiplicity of converging actions”; “after” the mission, the apostle “returns” to the initial silence in which he is converted.

Action, as seen in this schema, is considered according to our Rule as a dramatic temporality (in the sense of the Aristotelian Poetics) which has a beginning, a middle and an end.

4. If we now consider the content or rather contents which fill the temporal succession in our Rule, we perceive that they cover three kinds of occupations: prayer, preaching and study. But

these three types of occupation can, unless I err, be assimilated to a triple birth of the Word: in the soul of the religious, in that of the faithful, and in the studious mind. Prayer is closer to silence; preaching translates the silence of prayer into speech; study, when it is well understood, should be the return or conversion of the discursive intelligence to simple gaze on the silence of God. In this sense the intellect “breathes for the Spirit.”

5. But there is more. In this listing of activities, we can easily discern the same dialectic. Prayer begins in a previous silence, analogous to the celebrated prayer of the sunflower. It continues in psalmody and readings, which create a marvelous procession; but it is concluded again by prayer in the original silence. The “time” of prayer thus reproduces the three fundamental operations which I spoke of as regards the home.

Likewise apostolic action is inaugurated by a void of withdrawal which prepares the word; it continues in a more or less eloquent discursiveness; but it must end again with this public meditation which leads to the silence of the Passion.

Finally, in study, the work is begun by a silent invocation to the Spirit (recall our traditional *Veni Sancte Spiritus*). It should be done in an authentic elaboration of ideas (instead of being satisfied with a more or less parrot-like repetition). Then it is provisionally concluded by a return to the Spirit Who fructifies it while recalling to us that the most beautiful studies, if we become complacent in them, are only idols to be pitilessly broken, so that we may reach the naked, kenotic God of the Cross.

6. These are simple indications which each one, according to his temperament, may take up and deepen for himself. I have no pretension of teaching anything. I simply think that the texts, which I ventured to comment on, have buried within themselves – perhaps under the preponderance of law – a reserve of living water, which a little good will is enough to bring forth again.

In this sense, we are all, each in his own place, responsible for the Rule in the limits of our individuality and our roles. Therefore, we are responsible for our form of being and hence of our being itself. I am in no way thinking about transformation imposed from on high simply in a juridical way. The Congregation will never have a future except to the degree that we make a future, to the degree in which it will be the transparent image or icon of a personal, concerted doing.

Everything else will be given us in abundance, if it is not wordy speech. But we are already aging. I understand the despairing word of the skeptics: is it possible to return to our mother’s womb? There is no speculative reply to this question. Only the dynamism of a youth – which is not the privilege of a twenty-year-old – can remove this kind of question by action. More than ever, it is a question for us of the famous alternative: to be or not to be. There is no alternative. Is it possible to be born again? A vague hope is not enough. Something must sing in us. An Order, if it should truly exist, can only be a certain song of the world.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, I would like to say a word about poverty on the one hand, and on the other, a word about the Passion.

It seems that poverty was one of the founder's fixed ideas. I have asked myself why? Is there in this, as we say, a difference of accent, a dominant which would have been derived from the Capuchin spirit? I grant that founders can, at the level of their affinities, insist on one or other of the Gospel components which integrate religious life.

But this explanation seems to me to be insufficient. And if it is insufficient, it is because, in Paul, as in Master Eckhart, poverty has a quasi-metaphysical meaning which transcends the current understanding of the vow of poverty, above all in its juridical form. In order to grasp its radical nature we must go back to Eckhart's sermons on "detachment," on this "ARMUT" which is explained in the "triple nothingness": to have nothing, to know nothing, to will nothing. At this level, poverty, in its usual sense, is only the deficient and limited image of this most profound poverty which strips the being of its multiple possessions, of whatever nature.

This transcendent poverty unites us to the poor, naked God, Who is nothing of what we pretend to know about Him by our learned or naive attributes; Who mortifies our wills and desires; and Who smiles at the prestige of our private possessions. The order of the meanings is as follows: the poverty prescribed by the vow is the image and sign of the poverty of willing and knowing, which in their turn are the image of this absolute nakedness, in the light of which we relate to God.

And it is here that the Cross and Passion take on all their importance. The Cross is the poor and naked God in the sign of contradiction which makes us a sign. It is the kenosis of which the Apostle Paul speaks in his Letter to the Ephesians. It is God beyond Wisdom and Power, beyond, consequently, what we call "Being." From now on, everything which we said about the "desert," about "silence," about the "home," converges at this point toward this high place, which is our "abode," the Source of our action, the "Omega" to which we unceasingly return.

The Cross is also our name. But this name is an infinite task. What we express in terms of negation, or of "nothingness" pertains to us to make it happen in a being of history and of flesh; in a life which will be both the gift of grace and the work of our love.

Editor's Note: We are grateful to Fr. Silvan Rouse, C.P. for translating this article.

## IS THERE A SPECIFIC PASSIONIST APOSTOLATE?

Rev. Stanislaus Breton, C.P.

It is good, on the occasion of a meeting which brings due recognition and honor to the different provinces and regions of the Passionist universe, to reflect together on that which unites us in a common difference. What was called at one time (in terminology of English derivation) a “common sense,” cannot be a mere averaging-out of opinion. Beyond our “provincial” differences, it ought to be that which unites us in the most explicit possible awareness of a specific unity, a unity which transcends our particularity, of course, but which, without abolishing it, raises it beyond until we come to our very originality. I mean the originality of our very being.

In this first section, I would like to reflect on difference and the contemporary preoccupation to preserve it. Then, insofar as I can, I will elaborate the concept of our difference. Lastly, I’ll ask myself some questions about various way of exercising and applying it in the present situation.

### I. Difference and Specification

1. I refrain from all scholastic definitions of difference. I would, however, simply remark with St. Thomas that the divine unity cannot be illustrated in the manifestations of its glory, except through the distinct variety which makes up the richness of our universe. “Universe,” that is, uni-diversity (*uni-diversite*).

I would observe in this context that the common formula of identity, “x” is “x” (for example, “a dandelion is a dandelion”), is merely an empty tautological defense against the classless pretensions of contemporary totalitarianism of a right not to be absorbed into a universal facelessness in which, according to the well known expression, “all cows are black.”

It is in this sense, then, assuming to make an original interpretation of Master Eckhart, I am happy to interpret the “*Ego sum qui sum*” of Exodus: “*Ego*,” he remarks, “is a separative pronoun (pronoun discretivum). But this separation, far from being isolationist, is the only manner in which God, and we with him, can be present or immanent in the world of things and of men. Without pride, and simply acknowledging that which makes us and that which we are, each one of us as Passionists has the right to say, *Ego sum qui sum*: I am who I am, and that which I am.

2. Given our present day conditions, I do not marvel that there proliferate all over the place personalists proclaiming in a variety of ways that right to be different with a preoccupation to present this difference from and in spite of everyone. What strikes me most in these manifestos is that very often they have emerged as a protest, particularly in the socialist countries, against a dominance that has striven to force all that endeavored to maintain its own difference into the sorry dissolution of uniformity.

The preoccupation with being different, on occasion, smacks of exclusivism or exaggerated egoism, in the jealous preservation of the individual or collective identity. This certainly is a real

risk and I will endeavor not to minimize it. But, and I insist on this, in the measure in which such a preoccupation is the expression of an authentic vocation (by this I mean the voice of one who appeals to that which in himself is irreducible), it is a healthy sign. Moreover, in this preoccupation one may discern, not only respect for a multiform grace which allows its proper splendor to unfold in the multiplicity of its gifts, but also a respect for “others” who certainly are others only in the measure that they could not be that which I am. From this it emerges that the consciousness of our difference, all things considered, is the best means to take one’s proper place or to situate oneself in a world which simply would not be a world if it did not allow room for unlimited diversity.

3. Now that which surprises me in the Church of today, at least in its broad outlines, is the contemporary insistence on progress in the opposite direction to which I’ve just indicated. One has the impression that religious Orders today, influenced by the prevailing global conditions, tend to renege on their difference and not give any further credence to the origins from which they derived. On this account, they succumb to what might be called the principle of dissolution of spiritual energy, a principle according to which the universal religious (just as bodies and things) tend progressively to identity or equality of temperature or to that which in its final analysis is the cancellation of all distinction, in a word, to the death of the universal religious insofar as “uni-diversite” is concerned.

4. It is against this dying process, it seems to me, that action should be taken. It would seem, however, that few courses of action are open; the only one in fact that really warrants itself is the reactivation of that which, for the sake of brevity, I would term a consciousness of being and of origin. The two, being and origin, are necessarily related. St. Thomas himself noted that since genesis is a way to being, there must necessarily be affinity between this genesis and this being. Put more simply, the Gospel reminds us that an evil tree cannot bear good fruit, or that you cannot pluck figs from a thistle. Consequently, if we would return to be reborn from our mother’s womb, it would necessarily entail knowing the way back or how to revert to the place which is at once the principle of one’s being and activity.

## **II. On the Passionist Difference**

I am not forgetting that we are treating presently of the Passionist apostolate. But I believe that this Passionist “doing” is inseparable from our specific Passionist “being.” “To be” (*etre*) and “to do” (*agir*) are convertibles. It isn’t a question of separating them. And since this “being” and “doing” are based on the same principle, the conversion to which I alluded above demands a return to that foundation, i.e., to that which in the founder and in his founding individuality transcends time and the particular place of a foundation historically dated.

Before elaborating the concept of our difference, I would like to put forward a couple of preliminary remarks.

1. What strikes and surprises me most in the first chapter of our Constitutions (and I have had occasion to explain this at greater length in another study) is that, in the text which ought to insist par excellence on our specificity, the reader charges right into disappointing generalities.

The aim of this Congregation, you recall, is none other than that proposed for every Christian and, in particular, for every Religious: namely, our personal sanctification. It's really strange. This beginning which is supposed to fix that which specifies us, immediately appeals to that which in no way distinguishes us from others. It all happens as if this difference necessarily flees from whoever pursues it. You expect to discover a new America and you realize, after taking stock, that you still haven't left the well-known world where every other Christian and Religious lives. It's less surprising, though, after some careful examination. It's like, for example (and I will not delay on this), when the celebrated Italian mathematician Peano, wanting to plot out an axiomatic system in arithmetic, arrived not at a definition of number, as Russell observed, but a totally different series. Will we, too, be condemned to general determinations, without ever being able to reach that which, in a quality uniquely different from all the rest, is precisely what constitutes the quality or the savor, as when we speak of the savor of a local wine?

2. This leads me to a second observation. If the difference is so difficult to grasp, is it because we want at all costs to lock it in an abstract definition which is always generic, i.e., off-side of the authentic difference? Or does this difference, which we cannot capture in a notion, perhaps offer itself to a more concrete sensitivity which knows very well how to distinguish between what is Passionist and what isn't, just as our sight distinguishes between black and red, as our palate can tell the difference between one liqueur and another, as our ear distinguishes one note from another note, as our touch distinguishes rough from smooth, our thermal sense tells hot from cold?

For my part, I sense accurately enough, at the end of a certain long-standing density and from experience, what distinguishes us from a Jesuit or a Dominican or a Franciscan, even in spite of all the borrowing that a critical history helps us to discover. I believe that there is among us a practice of authority which is not that of sheer commandment; I believe that there is, or rather there was, a certain way of softening the distance which separates the cleric from one who isn't; a distinct way of celebrating liturgical feasts, with more abundant food-stuffs. And then we mustn't forget that there is the reference to a history which is properly our own. A history which invokes as its source personality which one cannot confuse with any other. A history which is made up, as every other history is, of shade and of light. A history which is deposited in each of us as a kind of collective unconscious and which, alongside every clear perception, determines in each of us a certain way of seeing, of judging, in brief, of reacting to things, to events, and to people.

3. I do not agree with belittling this very precious "sensitivity," which is incorporated in our every existence. But I do believe that it is possible to elevate it to the dignity of a concept.

To begin simply, I only recall what no one ignores, namely, that existence of a fourth vow which, in some way, has the value of an indicator of specification.

This indicator, it is true, can remain simply in the juridic order. It can distinguish a religious Order in the way that a flag can distinguish one nation from another. It is an indication that should not be neglected but which, in the long run, risks dozing off into the drowsiness of a signaling indicator without any real force. It isn't enough, therefore, to invoke this social difference, real as it is, in order to reach our specific difference. I will not pass it by in silence;



but I believe that is necessary to deepen it, to excavate down to the spiritual roots which give the fullness of its significance.

4. On this question, allow me to make a reflection which I think has great importance. If one studies the principal Rules which, in the history of the various Orders, have determined the great guidelines, you can see that the contents are almost always the same. I will go a bit further. Many practices and customs are to be found, beyond the cultural area of Christianity, even in non-Christian religions. To give an example, I think of certain traits that we have in common with Indian monasticism. The difference, therefore, doesn't come from the contents.

Where do we find it then? More precisely, we can use the distinction between the dominant form and the recessive form. Let me explain. In order to make things practical, I do not deny that the Franciscans and the Dominicans have among their elements a devotion to the Passion of Christ. But, for whatever importance it might have, it is not that which specifies them as a religious Order. Following that up, we can, however, say that in our Congregation the Passion of Christ has the value and function of a dominant form; and this dominant form is precisely what, for us, fulfills the role of a principle of specification.

This simple reflection puts us, I believe, on the right path. But if we content ourselves with accepting this and without pushing the concept further, we will only go away, all things considered, with a good platitude. So we ought to question ourselves about this "dominant form" and to propose the following questions about it:

a) In what does this "dominant form," in the last analysis, determine our Passionist being (*essere, etre*) and our "doing" (*agire, agir*) ?

b) How is it possible and feasible to actualize it in our present situation, that is, in our contemporary world?

I will reply first of all to the first question. The second question which many of us will see the more urgent, being left for the last section of this lecture. It's my opinion that so-called "urgent" problems are never well solved by rushing.

5. Let us return to the question: In what sense do the Passion and the Cross determine our Passionist "being" and "doing"?

The obvious response, which is not as superficial as it might seem, lies in this: if the Passion and the Cross determine our "being" and our "doing," it is precisely because they have given us our name. Without them, we would no longer be Passionists. An obvious answer, as I said; and, as such, running the risk of disappointing us. To give a name (to "name") today means to put a label on, or to "style" a certain kind of initiative or activity. If the name is to be more than a simple title or an appellation controlled by Church insistence, the name that designates us should have, so to speak, a biblical value; in other words, the name should have an ontological import. I mean, it should be a call, a vocation, a task. In brief, it ought to be a value that enthuses us and which, in each of us, translates into an ought-to-be and ought-to-do.

Finally, that which determines (or specifies) us, insofar as we are Passionists, is the capacity for enthusiasm and, consequently, the degree of ought-to-be and ought-to-do that the Passion of Christ frees in us. If the same fire that consumed St. Paul of the Cross is not in us, hope is useless. In the case it would be best to inscribe over all our houses the Dante phrase: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.”

In order to understand better what I am trying to suggest, let me make a digression which, in another context, proved itself to have a certain utility.

Consider the following three expressions:

- I believe in God the Father almighty;
- I believe that God is the Father almighty;
- God is the Father almighty.

At first glance, the three formulas seem the same. But in reality, such is not the case.

The first says nothing about God. It specifies the sense or the orientation of a movement of faith; or, if you prefer, the fervor of an outburst.

The second, instead, is already on the path to objectification. It determines a confession of faith by that which a certain religious society emphasizes, by a modality of belief (“I believe that....”). And so one can differentiate it from the faith of all those who do not believe that God has such an attribute.

Lastly, the third sentence, ending the process, has the value of an objective statement, in which a certain pro-position is put up for our declaration, for our assent.

If we apply the same formulas to the Passion and Cross of Christ, I would say that the Congregation of Passionists gushed forth from an impulse of faith, from an original enthusiasm, from an “I believe in the Cross of Christ, salvation of the world.” This “I believe” foundation was that of St. Paul of the Cross. And it is from this fire, from this river of fire, that we are born. We exist today, with a true existence, to the extent that we make this origin ours, as the principle of our Passionist “being” and “doing:”

The formula “I believe that the Cross of Christ is the salvation of the world” is another turn of the original fire, but already more immediately directed toward what I would gladly call the “confession of Passionist faith.”

Here is what I mean by that. As you know, the title of our Congregation defines it in reference to the Cross and to the Passion. It is an abbreviation, the syncopated formula of a confession of faith by which a religious society defines, socially, its reason for existing (*raison d’etre*) as a community within the Church. In the same way it distinguishes it from every other religious society which has a right to exist within the ecclesial community.

The third formula, which concludes the process of objectification and which I mentioned above, establishes a third level. It begins a reflection, the importance of which we will see later. For now I just want to situate it in the global economy of our Passionist “being” and “doing.” First of all, this formula or level completes the process of objectification. It does so by

establishing the Cross of Christ as the object of a thematic which will be developed as much in philosophy as in theology, in Church history or in Christian art. As you can see, it is a stage beyond the second original formula. Yet it should not be disdained for that reason, even though there may be some who would surely believe that the fervor of our origins is thus separated from the severity of the original concept.

6. As a conclusion to this digression, these three formulae allow us to define our specific difference. More precisely, this specific difference makes a three-level structure in this way: the first level - the most fundamental and that which is always implied or understood – becomes the basis of the second level: that collective confession of faith which makes us a unique religious society in the Church of God and which justifies our name and official designation; and the second level gives the basis, in its turn, for the third: namely, that theoretical area in which the Cross of Christ becomes, by a process of continuing reflection and for which we can use the English term, the topic (basic theme, starting place, the heading of a long development) of a properly Passionist thinking.

Such is the ordered structure, or again the law of the three stages of Passionist faith, which determines our specificity in an adequate way.

It should be noted in passing that this tripartite structure is not just a simple bureaucratic juxtaposition of three levels, like three levels of a house. These three levels “communicate” among themselves in such a way that the first nurtures the second, and the first and second sufficiently form together the necessary possibility of the third.

It is absolutely necessary to respect this linking-together, under the penalty of otherwise making an intolerable vivisection upon our Passionist life. Don’t think that this is just a philosophical elucubration. This connection between the three movements of Passionist faith is a vital necessity. If the first stage is lacking, it’s useless to hold on to the second; or, then it would be only a social body without a soul, somehow continuing in existence only by a kind of law of social inertia or acquired speed. So, too, the third level can only be maintained if it is fed (if I may use the phrase) by the original fervor of an “I believe *in* the Cross of Christ, salvation of the world” and by the lucidity of an “I believe that (collectively) the Cross of Christ is the salvation of the world.”

Summing up, then, I would say this: the first level determines our Passionist “being” (*etre*); the second determines our collective Passionist “life” (*vie*); the third determines our Passionist “thought” (*pensee*). Being, life, thought – these three form the unity of our Passionist existence. In a word, I would say that these three movements, in their unity, define the Passionist trinity, indispensable for our survival and development.

### **III. The Dynamic of the Cross, Or, on the Specificity of the Passionist Apostolate**

In concluding this exposition, I can now treat the second question which was formulated above in this way: How is it possible, in the present situation, to actualize our Passionist “being” and “doing” in the form of an apostolate, that is, of a mission within the Church?

The answer to this question ought to follow the structure of the levels previously defined. And since a mission (or an apostolate) is defined in terms of operation, I will try in concluding this lecture to precise the specific operation which corresponds to each of the levels.

1. What is (or what are) the operation (or operations) which correspond to the first level: that of the “I believe in the Cross of Christ, salvation of the world”?

At the risk of surprising you, I will address this proposition by speaking of an operation which does nothing beyond itself and which can therefore be called, according to the thinking of the American mathematician John Yarnelle, “the indifferent element.” By designating this operation as “indifferent,” it does not mean that it can be neglected. Far from it. Rather, the operation is called precisely this because, added to every other apostolic operation or work, it doesn’t change the operation at all inasmuch as it makes it possible and necessary in depth.

In this regard, let me give an easily understood explanation. Everyone knows that in arithmetic, the zero added to any other number, in addition, doesn’t change that number:  $0 + 1 = 1$ . This means that the “indifferent element,” although it doesn’t do anything, is nonetheless the most indispensable element because, according to the way we conceive it, it conditions the very possibility of arithmetic. So likewise, the operation of which I am speaking and which does nothing, which, in this sense is the spiritual or mystical equivalent of the mathematical zero, is the most indispensable of operations. It is that without which nothing would be accomplished that would be truly fruitful and without which we would be, according to the apostle Paul, only cymbals more or less resounding.

I see the symbol of this operation in the attitude of the Virgin, of whom it is said in John’s Gospel: “*Stabat mater ejus juxta crucem*” (By the cross stood his mother). She stood erect near the Cross. To stand erect, near is an operation which undoubtedly doesn’t accomplish anything great, but which still decides everything, in depth. “She stood erect near the Cross” is exactly the same as was, in another context, the Word of the Johannine prologue where the Word also “was with God.” He was thus with God before the world was and was the reason the world became possible as the result of an authentic creation. Note that sublime imperfect tense: *erat*. It is an operation that never ends, an operation that puts us in contact with eternity. It is an operation which can be broken-down, if you will, in the following manner: **to-be-in, to-be-toward, to-be-near-to** (*etre-dans, etre-vers, etre-aupres de*). In this regard and in a paradoxical way, our ancients spoke about an “unmoving movement” (“*immobile movement*”). And, in fact, this “to-be-toward” (*etre-vers*) is a good description of a kind of mobility, likewise well translated with the preposition “toward.” St. Thomas, in his trinitarian theology, notes that this (mobility-toward) constitutes, in their impulse toward their correlative, the divine Persons of the Trinity. And this movement is really a repose, a repose well emphasized by the use of the preposition “in” (*dans*), making us dwell “there where our heart is.” Lastly, the preposition “near to” (*apud*) is like the unity of this repose and this movement.

These three aspects (of the “indifferent element,” of the operation proper to the first level of our Passionist “being” and “doing”) form the only sufficient expression of the “I believe in the Cross of Christ” which we have taken as the origin of the Congregation. If it be true that a being conserves and develops itself in virtue of the same cause which gave it birth, then we have to conclude that each of us, in order to be faithful to our proper origin, ought to reproduce in

ourselves this operation that we have termed “indifferent.” We will have to do it with the savor proper to our own individuality. It is this “indifferent” activity or operation which will be, in a literary sense, our fundamental poetry that will keep us indefinitely in the youth of our Passionist “being.”

2. From this first operation we derive the second. This is the one that in another work, I have called “transitive” and which can compare, after a fashion, with the creative activity of the Word. So we can define this second operation as the poem of our original poetry. It corresponds to that dynamic postulate expressed in the celebrated phrase: “The good is diffusive of itself.” If the apostolate is diffusive of a good and the Good, it necessarily presupposes that which I have called elsewhere a “Good Friday Spell,” after a famous musical.

What would an apostolate signify that wasn’t the heart-felt diffusion of something that we have in our hearts? We will not pass to the “I believe that the Cross is the salvation of the world” and thus to the spreading of the salvation, if there is not first the “we believe in this Cross as the salvation of the world.”

Here again, it would be helpful to divide this transitive action and to propose the diverse grades of this operation in a kind of progression.

a) The first and seemingly the most simple consists in diffusing among ourselves the interior joy that we have within us by the simple action of presence and radiance. At one time in a prisoner of war camp, I myself knew some exceptional men from the density of the interior joy which they let shine through. It was good to be near them, as it was good for the three privileged disciples to be near the Lord when his glory shone at Tabor. If we, with our “being,” give to others nothing of the fullness of this joy, there is no hope. The Cross of Christ will be, as Nietzsche believed, the morbid contagion of a kind of sadness or the impotence of a spiritual phthisis. The first thing, therefore, is to create around us what we call an area of gravitation.

b) Closely allied to the first grade of transitive action is the second which I would express in the words of St. Paul: “The spiritual man judges all things.” I have often had occasion to observe how men of today like in us this liberty of judgment which we derive from the Cross and by looking, from the height of the Cross, upon the world about us. They and the world are waiting for a new word from us, something that will be more than just an echo of the opinions that swirl around us like a new common sense. In this regard, the Cross is a kind of critic-in-action on the evident pretenses holding sway over the major part of our contemporaries in the name of “wisdom” or “power” (cf. I Cor. 1), the behavior of conformity. We ought not to be copies of this conformity but, on the contrary, free men who are allowed, in full liberty, to put up for discussion in an intelligent way all that is commonly accepted.

c) To this second grade, I will now add a third which is more difficult to actualize. Recently the American theologian Harvey Cox has noted its necessity in a book with the rather original title, “The Feast of Fools.” The foot of the Cross, in the history of Christianity, became a **power for derision** which emphasized the ridiculousness of the powers of this world. I have dreamt, on my part, of a theater of the absurd which might reactivate that derision of the “powers” of whatever kind in our great cities, profoundly bothered and bored as they are. Although we shouldn’t

imitate them in all of their eccentricities, the history of spirituality tells us of some “fools of Christ” who did exactly that.

I believe in the power of a positive laugh, which underlines the ridiculousness of the important things of this world; it is a healthy laugh, the saving power of which it seems that we in the Congregation have forgotten a bit.

d) In the fourth place, I am watchful about not forgetting all that more directly concerns our traditional apostolate. In this regard, let me again make two observations.

The first refers to our congregation.

I understand the preoccupation on the part of our superiors to increase our relatively small numbers. But I maintain that we will grow in numbers if, without worrying about propaganda, we are careful to present ourselves just as we are, in the simplicity and the joy of our life.

Furthermore, and this is even more important, it seems to me that the apostolate, today is less the apostolate of the Word, than that of action. Let's clarify. The “Word of the Cross” should not be chained. We ought to renew, each according to his capacity and the possibilities offered by our respective locales, the kerygma of the Cross. We ought also to promote the Passion, for which we have made a special vow, in the hearts of the faithful of whatever social class. But having said this, and it must be said, I think that the efficacy of the Cross is manifested by a kind of action which is detailed by the final judgment in the celebrated chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel: “...I was naked and you clothed me; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,” and so on.

Briefly, it is necessary that the Word of the Cross is verified in our activities on behalf of justice in the world. This means concretely: it isn't enough that the Word of the Cross is true, to use the phrase, *in se*; there is also a need that we “do” this truth (*veritatem facientes in caritate*), making it a power in changing the world; and the world will believe our deeds more easily than our words. More exactly, the need is to have our words take on a more efficacious dimension that would make them more credible or “viable,” as the Americans say. Our “Word” needs to become more operative by means of our generosity.

In line with this, I hold that this idea continually imposes a new hermeneutics about our vow of poverty. Up until now the more common exegesis centered this first vow around our personal sanctification or on the “interior of the Congregation.” The newer approach, which I ardently hope will be implemented, gives it an apostolic interpretation, centrifugal and diffusive of our goods. Perhaps by putting it in relation to the rigors of the final judgment, we will give to that “I” of Christ (spoken of in St. Matthew's Gospel), that face of light, which illumines the disinherited of every kind who knock at our doors. The glory of Christ ought to shine upon the poor in such a way that, apostolically and as the Congregation of the Cross and Passion, we can assume the responsibility of making Christ present in this numberless multitude which still has only a human face. Today, isn't one of the major tasks of our specific apostolate to make alive the name of Christ suffering in a human face? I allow myself to ask the question without any illusions about the difficulty of putting into actual practice the new interpretation of our poverty the which I have welcomed. At least it's right that the question be asked, and asked clearly.

3. The third level of the structure of the Passionist Credo, as I have outlined it, corresponds to that which we call, for want of a better phrase, the theoretical operation or activity. In my estimation, it seems more and more inseparable from our specific apostolate. The Cross thus becomes what I have called a topic, an area of reflection. And this area is important today because we live in a world which Maritain said has arrived at the “reflective age.” No longer can we content ourselves with beautiful images or with clear dogmatic statements, although they may be necessary. We, too, have to enter into this age of critical reflection, difficult and thankless as it may be. Here again it would help to make this speculative-critical activity a bit more concrete.

a) To make of the Cross of Christ a “theoretical object,” susceptible of being phrased in workably formulated propositions, supposes first of all – according to the Thomistic theory which inspired me in the preceding paragraph – that we make it the light under which we consider and contemplate everything that comes under our reflection in one way or another. The Cross thus becomes the unifying principle of our intellectual life. For in a world more and more dedicated to the dispersion of information, that intellectual life runs the risk too often of becoming a kind of butterfly-ish agitation moving on from current interest to current event and with only brief pauses.

b) Next, this theoretical area of study centered on the Cross should be spelled-out and organized in a methodical way.

For the time being and without entering into particulars that don’t pertain to this discourse, I think that systematic division of this “staurological” field of study could be organized around three headings of unequal size. Before analyzing them a bit, let me name them:

I would distinguish an area which I would call – just to hurry things along and for want of a better term – the **esthetic** section; then, the **theological-philosophical** section; and finally, a section I would put under the title of **ecumenical**.

c) The **esthetics** of the cross have to do with all the artistic or literary works referring to the suffering of Christ. And here we have to distinguish. The first job is to collect such items. This would become a collection which would permit easy access to the major works treating in some way of the “Good Friday Spell” which we spoke of earlier. But this isn’t enough. Each one of us, according to our own preferences, should then choose from this abundant and so widely available material, whatever can nourish and further our Passionist sensibility. Because, and I insist on this, none of us can live in a world becoming ever more prosaic without a minimum of poetry. So each of us, by a principle of personal selection, ought to select from among the sacred texts in literature or the arts, music or painting, whatever seems most capable of stimulating his fervor and revealing to him another aspect of the multiform grace of the suffering Christ.

d) Because it is more well known, I will not insist on the necessity of **theological** and **philosophical** reflection under the Cross.

Today, more than in the past, we have the means not only of informing ourselves, but, what is rarer, the means of forming ourselves. This means to have, under a staurological **theologoumenon**, a personal mind-set which would be not just a literary conceit, but a coefficient of originality that could enrich the common patrimony of the Congregation.

e) Lastly, I referred to an **ecumenical** section of “Passiological” studies. In saying this, I mean all that in the Cross of Christ which allows Christians of different confessions to join together in a common and essential thought. But I am also thinking, by reason of my personal experience, of all those who do not pertain, whether near or far, to our christian community. I have the naivete to believe that the Cross of Christ can still speak to people of the East and the West, and that they are not as insensible as might be thought to that divine and human fascination that emanates from the Cross. Here I’m touching an area of reflection that I’m aware is not open to all of us. Nonetheless, it seemed right to me to make at least a modest allusion to it.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding this discourse, I am conscious of only having proposed a program for your reflection. As a finale, I simply note three things:

- the necessity of an acute awareness of our specific difference;
- the necessity of thinking about this difference according to the three axes of the Passionist Credo, in its hierarchical structure;
- the necessity of radiating in an activity of presence, diffusion and reflection, “the length, the breath and the depth of the charity of Christ.”

All this expressed a duty which is truly an “infinite work.” But I believe that fortune smiles on the brave, and “the Courage to be” (in the beautiful phrase of Tillich) is the only way, today, to exist truly.

Editor’s note: We are grateful to Bishop Norbert Dorsey for this translation which he did while still a member of the General Council.



# THE PASSION OF CHRIST TODAY

## A THEORETICAL OUTLINE FOR ITS ACTUALIZATION

Rev. Stanislaus Breton, C.P.

In these pages, my intentions – and I state immediately their rather theoretical character – will be to propose both an analysis of the present situations relative to the Passionist understanding of the Passion of Christ, and an attempt, of a relatively conceptional order, to actualize this time-honored practice, which is challenged today for sundry reasons.

### I. Preliminary Analysis

1. By diagramming to the extreme, I would say that the Passionist history (and probably non-Passionist history also) of devotion to the Passion should be considered on several levels, if we want to understand it. To be brief, I shall distinguish four of these levels, to which correspond respectively:

- a) a **fundamental sensitivity**, specified diversely according to the attitudes which are implied here;
- b) a particular type of **space-time form**, or if you wish, of realization of space-time;
- c) a **particular modality of category**, or, if you prefer, of categorical understanding;
- d) lastly, all original type of **theological idea**, or more exactly, a certain way of understanding the word “God” in reference to Jesus Christ.

2. From this moment, it is important to emphasize the close connection which links each of these levels with the others by a set of similarities. In other words, such a type of fundamental sensitivity (type of reaction to the Passion of Christ) implies strictly a specific form of space-time conception, a particular categorical modality and an appropriate theological idea (more exactly, Theo-logico-Christic idea).

For purposes of pedagogical clarity, I propose the following framework:

I	II	III	IV
Fundamental Sensitivity	Form of Intuition of space-time	Categorical modality	Theologico-Christic Idea
1.	1`	1``	1'''
2.	2`	2``	2'''
3.	3`	3``	3'''

The simple numbers or those with markings indicate the place occupied by an original form of devotion to the Passion. I shall have to fill in these empty spaces. The reader is simply asked not to hurry “filling them in.” He is also asked not to decide a priori whether it is a matter here of simple phases of an historical evolution or, more profoundly, of levels needing to be harmonized in a complex form which would integrate the different factors.

### II. Analysis of Situation

1. Since my personal evolution is not alien to a vaster transformation which immensely surpasses the case of one individual, I will say that up to now, in the whole Passionist Congregation, as well as in all the faithful, devotion to or participation in the Passion has been developed under the sign of compassion.

2. I shall therefore define the first type of fundamental sensitivity (corresponding to number 1) as sensitivity of compassion. Then I shall show what form of space-time intuition, what categorical modality and what theo-christological idea are necessarily linked to it by a relation of strict implication.

### **A. Fundamental Sensitivity of Compassion**

1. There is nothing more instructive in this respect than the “Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love” of Juliana of Norwich (with the Introduction of Sr. A.M. Reynolds, C.P., London, 1958). I could not recommend the reading of this work too highly; on the one hand for a better understanding of a traditional form of “participation in the Passion,” on the other, to understand better to what extent such a touching and medieval conception is practically impossible for us.

2. The essential word which is unquestionably its source is the Pauline formula in the Epistle to the Philippians: “Your attitude must be that of Christ; though He was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men” (2:5-7). A word, which in Paul and then afterwards in Francis of Assisi and so many others after him, was realized either under the visible form of stigmata or under the visible form of co-sufferings. In the “sufferer” these co-sufferings correspond theoretically to the different phases of Christ’s Passion, such as are described by the Synoptics. I hardly need to insist on the details which I presume are known through the various histories of spirituality.

3. Three things strike one in this **com-passion** – as fundamental type of sensitivity to the Passion of Christ. They are as follows:

a) The desire (and I insist on this word) of the fervent soul is to identify herself as much as possible with the interior and exterior sufferings of the Man Jesus. Consequently the relation between Jesus and his “co-suffering” disciple could be expressed or represented in the following way: supposing that one could establish an ensemble P of the “passiform” elements of the Passion of Christ, and an ensemble C containing the response of “compassion” as elements, one could say:

- all the elements of the ensemble P have an image in the ensemble C (the group P is then, mathematically, an application);
- all the elements of the ensemble C are the image of at least one element of the ensemble P;
- But we must add immediately: to each element of the ensemble P there corresponds one element at most of the ensemble C. In this sense the relation of the ensemble P with the ensemble C (and vice versa) will be interpreted as a relation of bi-jection, or, according to English terminology, as a one-to-one relation.

b) in this sense, the profound desire of the co-suffering soul will be to reproduce, in its own flesh and spirit, all the sufferings of the Suffering Christ. I say indeed profound desire; others would say “willing will” because in fact the limitation of human expression would not be adequate to a certain infinity of the Passion of Christ.

c) And that brings me to a third point: The co-suffering soul assumes that the suffering of Christ would have been unlimited from a double viewpoint: extensively and intensively. This means that Christ assumed all classes of human suffering (except those linked to sin and its consequences, such as, for example, sickness, or at least certain sicknesses, on which I need not insist). Not only did He assume all classes of suffering, but He took them upon Himself in their maximum degree of intensity. Participation in the Passion, since the word “participation” indicates to take part in, to take a part, to take one’s part in the measure of one’s own capacity, can then be only partial. Hence the choice made in the ensemble P to render possible in the ensemble C the one-to-one relation which the soul desires.

4. One could then develop what I would call the deeply felt axiom of this “compassion” behavior, as form of fundamental, sensitivity:

a) assumption of the absolute of Christ’s suffering which constituting a maximum could neither increase nor decrease, from the viewpoint of extension as well as from that of sensitivity;

b) assumption 2: the more and the less in human sorrow-suffering are said in relation to a maximum, extensive and intensive, realized in the individual Jesus. In this sense, all the sufferings of humanity, past, present and future, are implicitly contained in the “immense ocean” of Christ’s Passion.

c) assumption 3: In the measure in which our sufferings are all contained, virtually or eminently, in the Passion of Christ, they take on a super-eminent value, which, in turn, associates them to the redemptive function. In this measure, it justifies them by giving them a sufficient reason which saves them from absurdity and from the classical objectives drawn from the problem of evil;

d) Finally, assumption 4: our sufferings, contained and justified in their finiteness in the infinity of Christ’s Passion, can become a supreme joy. Hence a mysterious coincidence of opposites, often recalled, between the maximum of suffering and the maximum of joy. This is what Faber perhaps one day defined as “luxury of pity.” These few indications can suffice for a first approach, although I am aware of their obvious inadequacy.

## **B. Time and Space of Compassion**

1. The form of space-time intuition, corresponding to this type of fundamental sensitivity, designated as compassion, could be expressed in the following way: Christian time and space are a time and space in which nothing new, nothing strictly new, is produced.

2. In this sense, I would say that it is a mythical space-time in the reproduction of a past considered essential, in short, of a founding event. At most, the differences which could be perceived concern either the extension or the intensity of this reproduction.

3. This reproduction, repetition, considers the participation as a kind of imitation, of *mimesis* which establishes the relation of copy to model between the privileged soul and Christ. All this happens as if the christian faith tended to restore, to reestablish a former state (and consequently, to repair a subsequent state which was considered to be damaged). The evolution, if there is one, is from then on especially the regressive type. It is a question of returning to a past phase, but to a past considered as essential in its material historical content. According to the play upon words which only the German allows, one can say with Hegel: *Wesen=gewe-sen*. We should not be surprised that in Catholicism, the link between a certain traditionalism and a certain integrism of the essential has been so often accepted as an evidence.

4. This analysis of the form of compassion and of space-time (of the “reproduction” type) which corresponds to it, is not meant to be a negative judgment. I am not here to depreciate systematically, in the name of modernity – set up in its turn as an absolute – an age from every view-point so moving and which must be respected precisely in what it irreversibly possesses. But it would also be unreasonable to see there the sole possible form of religious knowledge in its “Passionist” fervor. “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” This is the moment to remember it more than ever:

5. In this form which schematizes an era and a “power” among others of the Passion of Christ, it seems to me that an equivalent incomparable model could be found in the Medieval painting of the celebrated picture of Grunewald. He seems to want to fix on canvas, in a kind of plastic stigmatization, or, if you will, of aesthetic reproduction, the *Christus Patiens* in the climax of His Passion as well as in the climax of the powers of evil of which this suffering is, as it were, the echo and the promise of a defeat.

From this viewpoint one could oppose the Kenosis of the Man of Sorrows to the Byzantine glory of the *Christus Victor* in an impressive symmetry. The supreme negative would be thus symmetrical to the supreme positive.

### C. Categorical Modality

1. In this framework of categories, there is the category of the same which is here stressed in accord with what was said about the fundamental sensitivity and its form of intuition.

2. According to Medieval interpretation, the qualitative Same is what we understand by “similar.” In this case, “similar” must be understood in a notably dynamic way as process of assimilation or, again, of identification.

3. Within this categorical abstraction, the power of desire is perceived, which is here desire of imitation, profound will to surrender to God and to his Christ, in what we would call the essence or the substance of Christianity.

4. I recall in passing, the relation of similarity is an interesting case of relation of equivalence whose properties I point out, without however being able to insist on them. These are the properties of reflexivity ( $x R x$ ), of symmetry (if  $x R y$ , then  $y R x$ ), and that of transitivity (if  $x R y$  and if  $y R z$ , then  $x R z$ ). These are not vain subtleties. The theologian, it is true, could raise some difficulties here and object that if there can be some similarity between man and God, there is no

resemblance between God and man. I pass over this difficulty because in the idea I am examining, and in the measure in which one interprets psychology in depth, we must say that in the strict sense if the “co-sufferer” resembles Christ, in his turn Christ resembles his faithful disciple with that reproduction which engenders it again in Him and testifies in this way to his infinite power. In the same way the transitivity of the aforesaid relation has a certain importance. By this transitivity a golden chain of identification is created. Little by little, for example, between Francis and his disciples, there is created a series of approximations, which can be theoretically graded according to more or less to constitute one totally and strictly ordered whole.

#### D. The Theo-Christic Idea

1. I ask then the question: What idea of God and of his Christ lies beneath this historical configuration of religious knowledge, in its reference to the Passion of Christ?

2. It has often been observed that this very concrete and sensible devotion to the Passion of Christ is inserted into a precise historical context: that in which the humanity of Christ is given full value for the first time with such an accent. The Passion of the Man of Sorrows verifies, so to speak, the *Ecce Homo* of the Synoptic narrative under the naive and astonished look of the co-suffering faithful. The Passion shows us a depth of humanity in the climax itself of evil and of the negative. The tragic accent is doubtlessly present. But it is not this tragic destiny which attracts the greater interest. What is important after all is that we have a God sensitive to the heart, a God who walks before us because He knows by experience what is in man.

3. In conclusion – and this is the point I wanted to reach – the Theo-Christic idea which explains such a compassion is, basically, the profound con-naturality between man and God. In this sense, the Theo-Christic idea is that of a human God, of a God-man well before, if I may say it, the Incarnation of the Word. If there was the Incarnation, it is because already and from all eternity, God was psychologically man. In the beginning was man. “Transcendental psychologism” some will say, taking up a celebrated expression. I do not contradict it; but I do not want to give it a pejorative connotation. Resuming the schema outlined above, I could complete the first section thus:

I	II	III	IV
Fundamental Sensitivity	Form of Space- Time Intuition	Categorical Modality	Theo-Christic Idea
1. Compassion	1` Reproduction	1`` Identity	1``` Anthropological Type

#### III. Transformation of the First Type of Participation in the Passion of Christ

1. By way of preliminary remark, I shall return to the text of the Epistle to the Philippians: “Your attitude must that of Christ....”

2. Here again we can say that the reference to the Passion takes the form of the Same. But it would be erroneous to understand this “Same” in the sense of a reproduction. More correctly, what operates here as first mover is not so much the model to reproduce in this historical materiality, as a call which echoes the scene of the Last Judgment in the Gospel of St. Matthew. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger

and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, in prison and you came to visit me” (25:35-36). What suggests this text, therefore, is the following: to have the attitude of the Lord Jesus in us, is no more to reproduce the detailed materiality of his sufferings. It is, on the contrary and at his explicit invitation, to turn ourselves away from Him, in the suffering fulness of His body and His soul, so as to turn our gaze on others rather than on Him. Far from being His reproductions, they are the authentic forms of a new sorrow and stripping which we risk ignoring on behalf of a repetition, which goes back toward the past and substitutes a Christic impulse that is itself turned toward the future of a necessary transformation. Here we think of what Jesus said on the way of the Cross:” Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children.” It is therefore a new figure which emerges in the passage from simple reproduction to an authentic production. This is what I must explain.

### **A. Fundamental Sensitivity of Collaboration**

1. It is time to introduce into what I call “fundamental sensitivity” as a generic type of reaction two very different ways of reaction. The distinction to which I allude was classic for a long time. Since sensitivity is inseparable from what our ancients called “appetite,” they called “concupiscible” that sensitivity whose appetite is modeled on the subject which it pursues (it was, in other words, the primacy of desire in the broadest sense of the term). The word “irascible” was reserved for a form of sensitivity, which far from approaching the object in order to appropriate it for oneself, assumes an aggressive behavior in regard to its object, or even releases a motion of irritability. The object becomes then a negative stimulant which it deals with either by putting it farther away or by transforming it.

2. The fundamental sensitivity with which we are concerned now is of this second type. It is an irritability which does not put its own object farther away in its present condition except to transform it, by producing it under new conditions. It has therefore a two-fold aspect: a negative aspect of refusal and denial; and a positive aspect of creation. More concretely, its first movement does not bear one toward the suffering Christ by appropriating His sufferings to oneself, but toward another who is not Christ, another anonymous one, suffering and deprived, to whom Christ gives his name and so to speak his I or his Ego, to motivate a dynamic of justice on our part.

3. In this new fundamental sensitivity to the Passion a summary analysis can therefore distinguish:

- a) a material object different from Christ, his Other;
- b) another material object, but in its formality of deprivation;
- c) formality which, considered both under the light of Christ and in relation to his liberating power, shifts the attention toward those who will be brothers of Christ, but on condition of making the light and glory of His face shine on them. More exactly, it is a question of “giving” Christ a multiple face which enables Him to say: “That man truly exists, therefore I exist.”

4. As is obvious, this kind of sensitivity is no longer turned toward the past but toward the future. However, from the Christ-Object of compassion, it passes to the Christ-function (transforming energy), on which we can count for a work of transformation.

5. We have then a process of de-centering (with regard to Christ), then of concentration on the Other, and finally of re-centering but which confers on Christ the multiform face of Others, freed, in the measure possible, from its evils and from its sufferings. Such an active, sensitive, aggressive participation in a suffering to remove (rather than to perpetuate it by a kind of affective contagion), and sensitive in addition not to the Passion of Christ as such, but to its liberating power, deserves, it seems to me, the name of fundamental sensitivity of collaboration or of synergy. Instead of being hypnotized by the empirical I of Christ, it is preoccupied in giving Him the face of others so that these in turn might have the divine face of their liberator.

6. It is not hard to find in the Scriptures a justification for such a transformation of sensitivity. While compassion stops at the Suffering Servant, the sensitivity of collaboration prolongs the prophetic anger, the aggression against evil, the removal of sorrow and the advent of Justice. This adds to Christ what it lacking to his historical individuality, subsuming under his power and his prestige what does not exist humanly.

One understands from that moment the whole of the assumptions which underlie this second manner of feeling. I simply call to mind the most important in the limits of my discourse:

a) What is called “love” is less an affection or a desire, which would still be under the sign of “concupiscible,” as we have already said, than a wrath against evil, an aggressivity against sorrow, because it is first of all the exigency of justice.

b) What is called “love” in a still deeper sense is the joy of creation, namely, that which consists in causing “what is not” (to take up a Pauline expression) to pass to the condition of what is.

c) The evangelical spirit, such as the conduct of Jesus affirms, consists precisely in this accomplishment of the good in favor of those who, for society and the established Order, “are nothing before the world.”

d) Such a privilege granted to what is not is not morbid complacency nor what could be called “non-existential love.” It simply echoes the “creator spirit” whose nobility makes something out of nothing.

e) What makes Jesus so marvelous is precisely that his work and his mission are inscribed in this axis of creative operation.

f) Consequently, in a certain way what excites us today in Jesus is less his human or divine substance, which makes Him the center of history, as his liberating and creative function. The Passion of Christ is less what we must contemplate indefinitely (in a *Stabat Mater* which would be ultimately the meaning of history) than an image speaking about what we have to put an end to.

## **B. The Space-time of Sensitivity of Collaboration**

1. The space-time in these conditions is no longer the inert container, where touching it might be repeated endlessly, however touching it might be, in what has passed. It is the environment of a free becoming, of a transforming action.
2. History, inasmuch as one can say that this expression has a precise meaning, is the space-time of a creative action. From a Christian viewpoint, salvation history is less history which revolves around Christ, as the world one time revolved around the earth (the Christo-centrism has become for some as debatable as Geo centrism), than the history which prolongs the struggle of Jesus on behalf of the “poor” of every kind, against the strength of the established world.
3. Thus one understands that the space-time of history is in its turn orientated: on the one hand it is irreversible succession and on the other, in this conception at least, the chronological series indicates necessary progress. But one cannot say that it is a true center of history. The space-time is no longer centered. We have here, through a new sensitivity , an important corrective to traditional Christology.
4. I would add that this de-centering on the Christological level is likewise accompanied by a symmetrical de-centering of the faithful. In the name of his faith, he henceforth risks becoming disinterested in his personal salvation (recessive character of the personal “resurrection” for example) in order to consecrate himself solely, in the name of the Passion-Resurrection, to be the temporal liberation of this “distant” anonymous one who is the true neighbor for his faith.

### **C. Categorical Modality**

1. What emerges in this perspective as categorical attitude, or, if your prefer, as conceptual form of thought, is no longer the category of the same (with its well-know harmonious proportions: substance, essence as well as the principles of permanence or conservation which are habitually linked to them), but the category of the other or, again, of the different:
2. Concretely that means that the faith in the Passion or in the Cross of Christ asserts itself less as memorial of what it was as remembrance of what was done, but as imperative of realization, as genuine representation of what is to be done and which will never be more that what has been previously realized.
3. In close connection with this category of the other or of the different, note the unusual emergence of the category of action, in the transitive sense of medieval tradition (*actio*). In contemporary language and particularly in cultural areas under Marxist influence, this recalls the theological and ideological terminology of creation and that (less compromised but idealistic flavor) of “constitution.”
4. The Other or the Different, action or “production” consequently involve, of course, the depreciation of every contemplative ideal. This contemplative ideal is wrongly considered as changeless and conservative, or, at most, as favoring the movements, of whatever order they might be, of restoration or of reparation.

### **D. The Theo-Christic Idea**



1. On the level of guiding (Theo-Christic) idea, this dynamic transformation of the “compassion” type into the dynamic formula of transformation or of synergy implies a modification of the same order.

2. I shall expose it by saying that the anthropological God, whose human sentiments govern the moving image of the Suffering Christ, yields place to a prophetic God, who is less a substance than an imperative. He is less The Being, magnificent and dear to contemplative and speculative souls (who contemplate in Him the transcendent reflection of a sublime navel) than the ethical anguish of a future event, namely, the event of a world where exploitation would cease. In this sense the universal judgment of the Gospel of Matthew is, in its own way, a judgment on God Himself, who seems to disappear or vanish in the human face which He presses to bring to birth.

3. Therefore there is no longer a God of the beginning and end of the world, or again an eschatological principle and end, which is delineated in the horizon of the Passion and of the Cross thus understood. I would formulate the matter drastically in this way: The Christian God seems to be exhausted or to be resolved in a function which is poorly distinguished henceforth from the more or less commonly participate necessity of the “temporal liberation” of humanity.

4. Therefore, if the transformation of the world thus understood becomes the one thing necessary, we can ask ourselves whether, in the final analysis, the Word “God” under the species of the Passion and of the Cross would not be a name to be kept provisionally but not without danger of ideological contamination, for an activity which could be designated by two adjectives: **critical** and **revolutionary**. The Marxist expression, **Critical-revolutionary activity**, would then become the true definition of christian faith for certain Christians whom I know well. They understand this in opposition to what they still call “Religion,” applying to this noun a negative nuance which recalls vaguely the term “ideological.” Such would be the components of this new figure of “participation” in the Cross, in the Passion. I do not know whether one can find in the history of christian art a correspondence to this new sensitivity. While asking once again an approach which some would judge rash, perhaps I could read a sketch – I say precisely sketch or rough copy – of the critical moment of the Cross in the derision of the powers and of the established order, which, in the pictures of Breughel, echo the extravagances of the “fools of the Cross.” But this is only an indication and I do not want to exaggerate its relevance.

The outline of this second configuration is as follows:

I	II	III	IV
Fundamental	Space-Time	Categorical	Theo-Christic
Sensitivity	Intuition	Modality	Idea
2 Collaboration or Synergy	2' Production	2'' The Other or Different	2''' God of Justice

#### IV. Toward a Third Type of Transformation of Devotion to the Passion of Christ

1. Permit me to try a third type of transformation, less accessible, because it is less clearly definable. Yet its importance must not be minimized even though, in the vicissitudes of our contemporary history, the signs which would enable us to find in ourselves a discreet involvement in it are poorly discerned.

2. In order to give a vague idea of it, it would probably be necessary to measure the impact on the devotion to the Passion of a mystical tradition and to reunite more precisely this tradition itself to a former Theology of the Cross. Some of the decisive elements of this theology are found in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (“the Logos, that of the Cross, is folly and weakness, but for those who believe, it is the power of God”).
3. For my part, I shall add that in some paintings of Jerome Bosch (the “Garden of Delights” in particular) and in the “Melancholy” of Albrecht Durer something takes place, but still very discreetly, of what for me would be the third form or third degree of the Passion of Christ. It is this new form, still very indecisive, which I shall attempt to describe.

### **A. A New Fundamental Sensitivity**

1. As a first approach I would like to recall from the start a Gospel detail (often suspected of apologetic purpose) which, for me, has something unusual about it. In St. John’s Gospel, Jesus says to the unbelieving apostle: “Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side”(20:27).The reader immediately asks himself: How is it that the condition of the Risen Lord could have tolerated these nail wounds in the hands, feet and side of the Glorious Savior? Do we not have here a strange coincidence of opposites: of paschal light and of Good Friday darkness?
2. Some will say that an analogous question was proposed to former theologians who asked themselves how, in the soul of Christ, “sadness unto death” could be harmonized with the beatific vision, which, according to the traditional doctrine, inundated Him with its light. Can it be that there is not only in the same subject but in one same faculty of this subject, this reciprocal passage from sadness into joy and from joy into sadness?
3. In those whom we call “fools of the Cross” and whom the Cross seems to have inebriated with “foolish wine,” we observe the shadow of a “sadness without cause” in the joy which enraptures them. I mean a sadness which has no objective reason in a particular situation, which does not depend on habitual conditioning, which for this reason could be called “ontological.”

This last term hardly enlightens us except in the measure in which it obliges us to penetrate deeper into the thing, beyond that realm which our ancients designated as “that of being inasmuch as being.” Perhaps (and I hold to this “perhaps”) we could presume that nothing in this “sadness” apparently justifies a kind of radical question which I would roughly translate in this way: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” (To understand it, it is not enough to bring it back to the rather banal although very important statement that “Love is not loved”). A philosophical question, I admit, but we must guard ourselves from imposing on our “fools” the classical form which we know. The question which I address to them is nothing more than an equivalent of the strange thought which the Gospel, apropos of Judas, expressed by the terrible “it would be better had he not been born.”

4. Perhaps the “sadness without cause” to which I allude leads not to any being whatever but to the being itself of the world. Would it then be a question of a kind of affective nihilism, which could make of being no longer the glory of creative action, but a kind of curse which would turn against itself in order to disqualify its principle? In no way would I attribute to the “fools of the Cross” such a gloomy atheistic idea. It is necessary then to push the analysis further. The spirit of

the Passion and of the Cross which speaks in our ecstasies: Would it re-awaken in the depth of their unconscious, not certainly a desire for death (which would definitively unite *Stauros* and *Thanatos*) but the nostalgia for a paradisiac state, for a “Garden of Delights” (to recall once again the incredible fresco of Jerome Bosch), which would be the pre-existence of all things in God in perfect identity with Him? The strange question, disputed in the Middle Ages, one which St. Thomas asks in various places of his works, namely, “Whether all things were life in God?” (*Utrum omnia in Deo vita erant*) would it have touched the thought of our spirituals, even divested of its technical apparatus? Congenital misfortune, the “sadness without cause” which the Risen Christ fixes for eternity in His glorious wounds, would it be a clear perception too intimate to break into a clear knowledge of this leap, impossible to cancel and that all which it bears in itself as an ineffaceable wound, this leap which is the “sign of contradiction,” the cosmic Cross (that *Weltkreuz* spoken about in Germany in the last century) which weighs on being itself of what is, because it is consubstantial with it?

5. This question, which I repeat by varying the formula, does not want to force the secret which our blessed “fools” in the “Garden of Delights” have entrusted to the sweet mercy of their own death. But it seems to me that one would not be simply to a certain depth of the Passion of Christ, if one reduced its impact to the two opposed and complementary configurations which I have described previously. The “sadness without cause” which darkens the face of the fool of the Cross is, perhaps, in its most radical dimension, the fundamental sensitivity to the Passion of Christ. And that is certainly why neither compassion in its traditional form, nor synergy in its modern acceptance, could exhaust its power, nor could it forever close this wound and this sadness without cause which ignore every remedy because they transcend every reason. And that is why again, neither the psychological God, still too human, nor the God of ethical or prophetic exigence will satisfy this “folly of God,” which our fools of the Cross commemorate. Beyond being, beyond wisdom, beyond power, the Logos of the Cross, power because foolishness, can only let a “sadness unto death” and a “sadness without cause” drop on being itself of what is, by the fact that this being divides us from this Nothingness par excellence which on the Cross makes us a sign and calls us to a beyond of this being inasmuch as being. The Cross, where the heart of our “fools” dwells, is indeed a folly which makes us go out of ourselves into a limitless joy; it is the vertical beam of the Cross which in the “Garden of Delights” aims at the ecstasy of our blessed. But it is also the unfathomable sadness of a separation and of a kind of “fall into being” which, in the sign of the Cross, sensitizes the horizontal beam which traverses the elan of ecstasy. Supreme joy and supreme sorrow. The contradiction is, after all, what our ancients called “flower of the soul”; “the spark of the soul”; it is the Cross of souls and, to return to a phrase of Bernanos, “the Cross of the way of the souls.”

6. I reserve the Paulacrucian expression of “naked suffering” (*nudo patire*; in Latin: *merum pati*; in German: *reines Leiden*) for this fundamental sensitivity to the Cross and Passion of Christ inasmuch as this Cross is divine folly which raises us above being in a joy above all joy. But it also reminds us, in an infinite and causeless sadness, of our separation, by our being itself, from the Nothing par excellence of the divine folly. In this regard call to mind the jubilant words of St. Paul but also that shadow which descends on the faces of the “Garden of Delights” of Jerome Bosch. Or again, the melancholy which abides in the celebrated painting of Durer – the “thought of the “thought” in the knowledge of being and of the world.

## **B. The Space-Time of Naked Suffering**

1. The space-time of naked suffering does not have, one conjectures, the same resonance (I would gladly say, in German: “Stimmung”) which it has for the sensitivity of compassion or for that of collaboration. It is neither that of the reproduction nor that of production. It is not that the naked suffering abstracts from these two aspects. But the main point of its sensitivity is not to be found there.
2. The space-time of naked suffering would then be, first of all, through the void of every form which they evoke, the “sensitization” or the schematization of this beyond of all form, of all being and of every being which is the “folly of God”(to *mooron tou Theou*). But it would also be that which separates the being of every existence from this Nothing par excellence which is beyond all wisdom, all power, as St. Paul reminds us. From this viewpoint, one could say that the time and space of naked suffering are the time of the Cross inasmuch as by its horizontal as well as its vertical dimension, the Cross is coincidence of opposites.
3. Under the first aspect of void, the space-time of the Cross will be concretized in the privilege which our ecstasies have always granted to the desert, to silence (which they made the place of every birth; to the nakedness of the soul, to this “germ of non-being” which cause all things to flower. But this flower of the world, or of the desert (for the desert flourishes according to the Scriptures) is also what separates us from this sublime From nothing (*ex nihilo*) of the origin. By its double component, which evokes supreme joy and sadness without cause, the space-time of naked suffering is indeed the space-time of the Cross.

### C. Categorical Modality

1. If compassion is under the sign of the Same, and the collaboration under the sign of the Different, perhaps we should say, although the language is here particularly deficient, that the naked suffering is under the sign of the Diverse. Let me explain.
2. St. Thomas, in a passage of the Summa Theologica, remarks on the occasion of an objection which is made apropos the relation between matter and God, that one could not speak in this regard either of identity (*idem*) or of difference (*differens*). Indeed, things which differ (and which imply a difference) can differ only in the measure in which they remain in the same genus. The specific difference is then linked to generic identity. And inversely, identity is always linked to a difference. That is why, because God is beyond all being and every genus, one could not, strictly speaking, apply the categories of Same and of Other to Him. It is in this sense that St. Thomas proposes the designation of diverse (*diversum*): The expression itself is not the most apt. It has only one advantage: that of suggesting to us a necessary transcendence of our familiar terms; and of reminding ourselves in the light of the “sadness without cause” of the “transontological” (or “non-existential”) splitting up which separates being from the beyond of being. This beyond is not to be conceived, doubtlessly, as an outward appearance, for this beyond where the fool of the Cross dwells and “in which he is” as in his garden of delights, could not be assimilated to the materiality of an exterior. But on the other hand, and however weak our images might be, this beyond must also indicate the sadness without cause of a separation or of a division which is not imaginary.
3. This diverse which enchants and surrounds the sadness of the fool of the Cross defines an operation which, I repeat, is neither simple reproduction nor production. For on the one hand the

folly of the Cross is open to an infinity of images; on the other hand, the frenzy of productive action risks engulfing us in our own productions. Consequently, the liberty of the fool of the Cross, in the naked suffering which unites him to the beyond of being, wisdom and power, could be defined as liberty of judgment (the “spiritual man judges all things”). It is judgment on being and on the world, which brings us back continually to its true origin; judgment of the Cross, which enables us to exercise, in the face of every idol or every prestige, the *non possumus* which, after Christ, the most fervent of his disciples learned to pronounce. This critical operation where distance is indicated, characterizes the configuration which I have just described. In a certain way it “realizes” in this judgment (*Ur-teil*) the separation which it experiences between what is (or the being of what is) and the beyond of being or the “Nothing par excellence” which judges the world on the Cross.

#### **D. The Theo-Christic Idea**

1. The Theo-christic idea which animates this third form of the Passion of Christ is not and could not be that which we have previously considered. What I have said is sufficient in itself to convince us of that. It is necessary, however, to insist on it here.
2. First of all it is clear that the God whom the fool of the cross presented to us is in a certain way folly in relation to the other theological faces. The folly of the Cross, by its abrupt character, by the constant paradox which it establishes on our earth, reminds us that the God whom it proclaims is nothing of what we most usually picture to ourselves. In this sense the folly of the Cross such as St. Paul understood it, prolongs by radicalizing it, the Jewish objection to all the theological “images,” however sublime they be. For the most sublime are also our greatest temptation. We mistrust images which are too material. But we also risk taking too seriously the “spiritual” or ontological attributes of Wisdom, Thought, Being, True, etc. The Cross from this viewpoint is an ascesis of thought. It forces us not to measure God according to the scale of our consecrated values.
3. This means that the God of the fools of the Cross, the God of naked sufferings, the God of diverse, of sadness without cause, is resolved neither in the anthropological God sensitive to the heart, nor in the prophetic God sensitive to the demands of justice, nor in the metaphysical God whose most beautiful name would be that of Subsistent Being (*esse subsistens*). Mindful of the Cross, we could call Him the “foolish God” but so as to express by this his “Nothing par excellence” who smiles at all our names, however well tested they may be.

#### **Conclusions and Perspectives**

At the end of this road, I would like – going back on my itinerary – to reflect on its significance as well as on its limits.

1. First of all, I do not pretend to have exhausted the possibilities of expansion of the Passion of Christ in the proposed ternary. I have purposely chosen those which seemed the most significant to me, in the narrowness of my horizon.
2. The schema, in its completeness, would be as follows:

I	II	III	IV
Fundamental Sensitivity	Intuition of Space-Time	Categorical Modality	Theo-Christic Idea
1 Compassion	1` Reproduction	1`` Same Identity	1''' Anthropological God
2 Collaboration	2` Production	2`` Other Difference	2''' God of justice
3 Naked suffering	3` Distance	3`` Diverse	3''' Nothing par excellence

3. I must say that these pure forms which I have tried to define never exist exactly in their purity as in historical reality. Consequently it is fitting to understand these forms or configuration not as cold essence in a kind of “subsistent whiteness” but as orientations, which, in the complexity of historical realizations, translate difference of accent, of dominants.

4. It is advisable to interpret in this way the theory of these configurations which I have just proposed. We can understand it as the design of a quasi-group of transformations, in which the insufficiency of one form is expressed through the necessity of its complementary form.

5. The forms whose description I risked, must then be understood in the movement which carries them on. Each, so to speak, is only the outline of a wave in the impulse which sets them down. We would be wrong to see here “the fixed will of a fixed state.” Having said that, each one still has its originality and enjoys, in the limits of an age, a relative stability.

6. There is more to be said. I would be tempted to see a certain necessity in the three forms which I have taken. By that I mean that they are not simple accidental occurrences in a history of spirituality. First of all, but I admit that this argument is not decisive, they are based on the New Testament Scriptures in our Gospels as well as in the Pauline Epistles. The “with Christ I am nailed to the Cross” or the “I bear the wounds of Christ in my body” cannot be separated either from the Last Judgment of St. Matthew nor from the enigmatic permanence of the wounds of the Crucified in the glory of the Risen Lord. Moreover, we could not dissociate these images from a history which is not a pure succession of events. Certain influences which have helped to mature the Christian conscience have enabled us to perceive better the insufficiency of one or other of these forms, which I remind you again, never exist in their purity in a given age.

7. It is not however this historical solidarity which seems in my opinion to define the connection between these different configurations in the best way. If we examine them one by one, we notice a logical connection which, beyond their effective content, enables us to see a connection, which I consider essential. This connection is nothing more than that which links the fundamental operations of the human soul between them, such as was formerly taught by the masters of Neoplatonism, who influenced Christian spirituality so strongly, and medieval spirituality in particular.

This is how we can briefly picture this connection. We shall first of all attribute a specific operation to each of these configuration. The first, namely compassion, insists on what we can call “no operation” or “zero operation,” operation “which does nothing” and which consists of “standing at the foot of the Cross,” of being near, of being-toward, as the innumerable *Stabat Maters* of Western painting have so movingly depicted it. This “no operation,” which changes in no way that to which it is added (no more than  $0 + 1$  alters the unity since  $0 + 1 = 1$ ) has its corresponding equivalent in the first verse of the Prologue of St. John: John shows us the Logos standing “in God’s presence,” in a “motionless movement” before, if I dare say it, proceeding to the creation of the world. What this compassion says to us, and what we may no longer forget here, is precisely the necessity of “being-in,” of dwelling somewhere, of *abiding*, (*menein*, specifies John who repeats this essential verb many times). We understand how our spirituals so often insisted on this fundamental operation: “to remain in the crevice of the rock,” in the wounds of Christ.

8. The second fundamental operation is also well indicated in the Johannine Prologue. It is the productive or creative operation to which I attach the form of collaboration or production, which is itself linked to the revolutionary scene of the Last Judgment.

9. Finally, the judgment, which I have associated with the configuration of naked suffering, is not only the difference of a stepping aside in regard to our works or productions. This painful liberty is also and especially the “reflecting” power which leads them back to their source, to the point of their origin.

Such are, in their specificity, the fundamental operations which put the forms of “participation” in the Passion into act. Even though each of these would define an historical dominant, one could not be isolated from the other two. It would then be misleading to separate what analysis allows us to distinguish. A theorem of the Elements of Theology by Proclus shows, with sufficient precision and by a correct division, in its respective divisions of the “whole” constituted by these three operations that these resist an abstract fragmentation of “substantialism.” A “production” cut off either from its origin in a substantial “abiding” or from its “critique” or from its conversion through judgment, would remain absolutely sterile or would be lost in this multiform proliferation of its metamorphoses. Inversely, a critique which would ignore the necessity of creation would be dissipated into an empty debate. Likewise, an “abiding” which would be sufficient unto itself would remain alien to this world whose principle it is. Among the theoretical possibilities which should be envisaged, only one is acceptable: that which unites three operations into a synergy of necessary complementarity. Consequently, we will guard against hardening those forms which history gives us. We shall also refuse to allow ourselves to think that compassion, for example, in the Middle Ages, would have been the refusal of all active participation in works of justice and charity.

10. We must not forget that, because of our weakness, a dominant, perfectly justified by the affinities of temperament and vocation, always risks leading us into the temptation of one-sidedness. The Christian Marxists who today refer to the Cross in the name of the imperative of justice will do well to remember this. Otherwise, in yielding to an uncontrolled ideological pressure, they will make their faith the slave of a situation.

But I do not want to delay on these reflections of ordinary good sense which a well guided maieutic can offer easy acceptance. By way of conclusion, I prefer to recall that I am writing these lines in a “poele” of Sweden, as Descartes would have said, on the occasion of a Passionist meeting. In this Scandinavian country which seems to have become the symbol of a European rationality in the mastery of nature as well as in the organization of society, I have continually kept in the horizon of these austere thoughts the fascinating and chilling image of an ideal of Reason satisfied by its own realizations. And I thought then of the confession of Bertrand Russell in his Autobiography: “I love Mathematics and the Sea, Theology and Heraldry; the first because they are exact; the second because they are absurd.” I leave to my reader who would have been animated by this zigzagging search, the care to echoing, in his own way, this astonishing thought. Editor’s note: Fr. Stanislaus Breton delivered the above Lecture during an international meeting of North-European Passionists at Goteborg, Sweden, June 1, 1978. We are most grateful to Fr. Silvan Rouse, C.P. for translating the above paper.