

3

Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality

THE PRESENCE OF THE PASSION OF JESUS IN THE STRUCTURE AND APOSTOLATE OF THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION

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Outline

- I. THE PASSION AS THE CENTER OF INTUITION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION
 - A. The three essential elements of every religious institute.
 - B. The search for a unifying principle.
 1. How and when did the Passion enter into the life of Paul?
 2. How and when did the Passion begin to synthesize the spirit of Paul?
 3. How did the unifying idea of the Passion become the characteristic of the Congregation?
 - C. The “memory of the Passion” as the Passion-centered characteristic of the Congregation
 - D. The element of theological reflection added to those of intuition and institutionalization.
- II. BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT THE “MEMORY OF THE PASSION”
 - A. The contested role of “memory” in the field of spirituality.
 - B. The teaching of Holy Scripture concerning memory.
 1. *Memory* and *Memorial* in the Old Testament.
 2. *Memory* and *Memorial* in the New Testament.
 3. The first manifestation of the “Memory of the Passion” in Palestinian Christianity.
 - C. The biblical-theological context of the Passionist fourth vow.
- III. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY AND APOSTOLATE IN THE LIGHT OF THE “MEMORY OF THE PASSION” OF THE LORD
 - A. Some notions.
 1. What is *memory*?
 2. Different types of memory.
 - a. Transfiguring memories.
 - b. Subversive memories.
 3. The Passion of Christ as an object of memory.
 4. Current trends of thought regarding the “memory of the Passion.”
 - a. Max Thurian and the renewal of “memory” in Sacramentology.
 - b. The memory of Jesus and the essence of Christianity.
 - c. The memory of the Passion in the political theology of Metz.
 - B. The relevance of the spirituality and apostolate of the “memory of the Passion” as conceived by St. Paul of the Cross.
 1. A first principle.
 2. The situation of the Church at the time of St. Paul of the Cross.
 3. The originality of St. Paul’s apostolic method.

Conclusion.

I. THE PASSION AS THE CENTER OF INTUITION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION

A. The three essential elements of every religious institute

There are three elements that make up the essence of a religious family when an ascetic ideal becomes an historical reality: a spiritual experience or mystical intuition, theological reflection, and institutionalization:

1. The *mystic* element supplies that primordial instant of a spiritual experience or intuition on which everything else is nourished; the root which vivifies the whole being of a religious family; the vital link with that first “moment,” which always remains active because structured religion never extinguishes it.
2. *Theology* brings a significant phase of reflection and critique to the mystic, experiential element of the charism which gave birth to the institute.
3. *Institutionalization* is the process whereby a religious congregation takes on its socio-historical physiognomy. It is made up of external aspects, traditions, structures and legislative characteristics.

These are three forces which tend to exclude one another by an internal dialectic. Nonetheless, they ought to remain united while keeping their own formal diversity and autonomy. One or the other element stands out in any particular period: there is a time of care for institutionalization, a time of spiritual exuberance, a time for an emphasis on theological reflection and critique. No one is sufficient; no one is useless; all three are indispensable.

Religion itself, like religious life, is not a simple reality. It is complex and rich, and should strive to maintain unity and balance amid such complexity and profound richness.

Our Congregation, as the historical realization of the Cross-centered ideal of Paul Danei, has to take those three elements into account. Due to the times in which he lived, their appearance in our history offers certain peculiarities which influenced the foundation of the institute and the characteristics of his spirituality. Let us list those particularities:

- 1) our holy Founder was not the kind of person for whom the first result of his spiritual experience would unfold in a doctrinal line as, for example, in the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross;
- 2) even less was he an individual who would draw out all the practical conclusions from his experience in order to create a spiritual technique for producing the same effects in others: e.g., the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola;
- 8) right from the beginning, his intuition was directed to forming an *institution*: to gather companions, to make a foundation, to write the rules of a fraternity; and
- 4) in St. Paul of the Cross, the *intuition* flowed into an *institution*, putting off for another time the *theological reflection*.

The methodology for a study of the Passion-centeredness of our holy Founder has to take account of that basic fact, namely, an insight tending immediately to its practical realization in the foundation of an institute.

B. The search for a unifying principle

A study of the way in which the Passion became the totalizing center of our Founder's spirituality and of our Congregation brings up three questions:

- 1) How and when did the Passion enter into the life of Paul?
- 2) How and when did it begin to be the unifying principle of his life and spirituality?
- 3) How did that unifying idea become the specific form of the institution he founded?

Answering those questions is not easy.

1. How and when did the passion enter into the life of our founder?

It is from third-person sources, from the depositions in the Processes of Beatification, that we learn how the Passion entered Paul Danei's life. They recall, for example, some episodes from his childhood such as the comments of his mother concerning the sufferings of Christ or the spirit of penance which distinguished Paul even from his youth. Nonetheless, it is difficult to reconstruct the evolving steps of a Passion theme in his mind on the basis of such testimonies. This is especially true when we take into account the strongly retrospective tendencies evident in those witnesses, insofar as their point of departure is the final stage of the Passion-centered development in his life. Consequently, using testimonies which refer to the first period of Paul's life, an evolutive study is difficult indeed.

The Passion-centered element is missing in one very important moment in the life of the Founder, namely, his conversion. Likewise, that theme is missing in the visions about the foundation up until the forty day retreat. This is a particularly telling clue, since it has to do with facts narrated by Paul himself amid an abundance of other details.

Undoubtedly, common opinion is strongly favorable to maintaining that the Passion polarized the attention of St. Paul of the Cross at the time of the visions about the foundation. This is a conviction strengthened by two facts. First, there was the vision of the Virgin dressed in the garb of the Passion, the Sign on the breast, and the explanation of the symbolism of the habit's black color. Secondly, such a conviction is confirmed by the fact that in 1721, at the basilica of St. Mary Major, he made a vow to propagate devotion to the Passion and to gather companions. With that, the general persuasion is that the element of the Passion was always present to the Founder and that it always occupied first place in him.

Up until now, however, the anachronisms of the visions (narrated only by Rosa Calabresi) have not been studied. They were pointed out by *Zoffoli* (1), and posit rather delicate critical problems. They let us glimpse the fact that the thesis proposing a clear awareness of a Passion-centered finality for the Congregation, right from the beginning, is a long way from being fully demonstrated.

The difficulties that the common opinion present are the following: first of all, in the detailed narration of the *visions about the foundation* – in the years 1717-1720 – our holy Founder never mentions an apparition of the Virgin; and, in the second place, in those explanations he explicitly tells us that he saw the Name of Jesus within the Sign. When asked, since the first rules had been burnt, Paul told Fr. John Mary that the addition *Xpi Passio* “was given to him in other later illuminations” (2)

Therefore, the deposition of Rose Calabresi contains a direct contradiction to what was explicitly stated by our holy Founder. The explanation of Fr. Enrico Zoffoli – “elements which refer instead to other visions of our Lady” (3) – is not acceptable. When would such visions, mentioned neither by Paul nor by Calabresi herself, have taken place? This contradiction basically undermines the credibility of the whole vision related only by Calabresi. Do we have to conclude, therefore, that Rose Calabresi made it up? That would be a rash explanation, and would not take into account the personal qualifications of the witness which are well noted in the details of the Process. So, what then?

In my opinion, the more probable hypothesis is as follows. Discussing autobiographical confidences made by our holy Founder in the last year of his life, Rose could easily have given an account of the facts that was not strictly historical or chronological, but rather theological and interpretative. Even though not fully understood at the time, in the light of what happened later, everything had become clear in Paul’s life concerning the purpose of the first visions. As regards the habit, the Sign, and the finality of the Congregation, I would say that such interpretations remained strongly impressed in the spirit of Paul from Castellazzo on, and that the most holy Virgin played a singular role in them. These confidences, shared by a saint who saw everything *sub specie aeternitatis* and in a backward glance at all that had happened, were able to create the impression in Calabresi’s mind that he was treating of particulars recounted to her for the first time. In any case, a study of the genesis of the Passion-centered idea of our holy Founder ought to proceed with great tact and a critical sense before affirming, on the testimony of Calabresi, that it was really clear in Paul from Castellazzo on. And the same is true for the later details of the finality of the Institute, as well as the habit and other particulars of Passionist life.

The same can be said concerning the *vow at St. Mary Major*. Certainly the presentation of that vow as oriented to “promote devotion to the Passion” is anachronistic and reflects a later mentality, which from then on remained expressed in the fourth vow to propagate the devotion to the Passion among the faithful.

Two points have to be clarified about the aforementioned vow at St. Mary Major. In first place, the chronology. After categorically affirming the making of the vow in 1721, Fr. Zoffoli says in a note: “Such also seems the more common and well-established opinion of the biographers of the Saint” (4). So then, the date is not certain. Fr. John Mary says vaguely: “At the end of the early days which were spent in the said city (Rome), in the basilica of St. Mary Major and before the sacred image of Mary Most Holy which is venerated in the Borghese Chapel there, for the first time he made a vow to promote in the hearts of the faithful this holy devotion to the sacred Passion of the Redeemer. This sharing with Fr. John was made in the last years of Paul’s life: “During the final years when I went with him to Rome, he confided to me...” (5).

The second obscure point is: what was the purpose and what was the formula of the vow? According to Fr. John Mary, it was that of promoting the devotion of the Passion. Well then, such a phrase is not found confirmed in the Founder's correspondence during those early years. Would it not be, rather, that in his sharing he used the same terms that were then used for making the religious profession? And this is the other point that needs clarification in order to follow the gradual maturing of a Passion-centered ideal in St. Paul of the Cross.

In the life of our holy Founder the first time that there is mention of the Passion, as noted by himself, is during the forty-day retreat. More precisely, on December 4th, 6th, 8th, 20th, 21st and 29th (6), and without seeming to be the theme that preponderantly synthesizes the aspirations of Paul. The fact that the Passion is mentioned for the first time on the 8th (the Rules being completed between the 2nd and 7th of December) makes us realize that writing helped him a great deal in concentrating on what was his chief preoccupation (6-a). But apart from that, nothing indicated that this man would become an apostle of the Passion or the founder of a Congregation especially consecrated to the propagation of its awareness and meditation.

2. How and when did the Passion begin to summarize the spirit of Paul?

The conclusion to the preceding hasty review of the traditional information concerning the progressive concentration of Paul Danei on the Passion seems somewhat disappointing, especially so, if the data which establish the centrality of that theme from the beginnings of his life are submitted to criticism. The only thing that can be deduced clearly is that right from the beginning there was a dynamic force, whose evolving lines separate as quickly as they appear. One could mention some predispositions of soul which might have moved that holy man toward a conclusion that would center in the Passion. Among others, his spirit of penitence could be such. Then too, the identification of his life with the role of founder put Paul's whole being in a continual tension of clarifying between what already was and that which he wanted, and with a concentration on his specific objectives in carrying out the implantation of a new religious family.

The unification of the spirit and life of Paul of the Cross through the idea of the Passion is a phenomenon essentially tied to his mission as founder. It was his work that brought him to such a synthesization, as we will see in the following section. Therefore, the concentration of the theme of the Passion in the life of our holy Founder is clearly subject to the normal laws of the progress of interior discernment about his particular mission.

3. How did the unifying idea of the Passion become the characteristic of the Congregation?

Research on the progressive steps which brought St. Paul to specify the Passion as the characteristic of the Congregation holds some surprises. First of all, the Passion is missing not only in the visions of the foundation of the institute, as we mentioned and as the saint himself related them (7), but even in the list of purposes for the fraternity which he intended to establish. It is a list of good works, without any order of preference, without any primary purpose, and joining together the evangelical counsels in an indiscriminate way with all the works of zeal. No primary objective, centered on the Passion, is evident. Admittedly, in speaking of Friday (8), the symbolism of the black habit is clearly indicated, but only as signifying the continual

remembrance of the Passion of Christ. So still, reading the texts apart from a search for finalities, the remembrance of the Passion and the teaching of meditation come through only as some of the good works which the *Poor of Jesus* ought to practice and promote. At this stage, we are yet far from discovering the context of the totalizing idea of the Congregation.

Will the vow at St Mary Major, then, help us to understand any better the way in which a unifying idea came to penetrate the soul of Paul?

First of all, there are several obscure points to be cleared up. In what year did the vow actually take place? If the current opinion of 1721 is accepted, when the Rules had not yet defined the purpose of the Congregation or contained the fundamental chapter on the Passion, then such a vow has no other significance than that of an ordinary private vow relating to a certain practice of devotion to the Passion. We have to admit that our Founder was inclined to such vows.

During his lifetime we know that Paul made at least ten vows: to obey everyone, to eat only what was necessary, to do the more perfect thing, a private vow of chastity, to persevere in the service of the hospital of St. Gallicano, to observe the forty days (*Quaresima*, Lent) of our Lady, to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Rose at Viterbo and to Loreto, to defend the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption (9). The majority of these vows had to be commuted.

Consequently, we have two options: either Paul made the vow of the Passion when he had the finality of the Congregation clarified and the result was very close to our own fourth vow or, rather, it was a simple act of private devotion. Perhaps the greater light at this phase will be found by focusing around 1728 when he was authorized to gather companions by Benedict XIII, and then when there were some important clarifications from Bishop Cavalieri during the stay of Paul and John Baptist at Troia.

We hazard to designate the 1725-36 decade as the decisive period for the integration of the Passion as the central idea of our Congregation. For all practical purposes, it was during his stay at Troia with the Bishop that Paul definitively shaped the specific finality demanded for the foundation of a new religious family. The meeting with Benedict XIII and the permission to gather companions that was granted in 1725 had signaled an important step toward its concrete realization. Yet many essential elements were still lacking. Our holy Founder was still not a priest. The stay at St. Gallicano forms another distinct period. The interior conflict brought about in his soul by the oath of perseverance in the hospital as chaplain must have awakened a new sense of being a founder. The ascent to Monte Argentario in 1728, the preaching of the first mission in 1730, the first monastery on Monte Argentario, the new writing of the Rule in 1735 – all of these undoubtedly contributed to discovering God’s Will, that is, the unique specific mission and the central position of the Passion of Christ in the Congregation.

Now let us see how this presence of the Passion reclothed the Congregation, taking as our point of departure that directive of the first Rule which refers to the specificity of the Passion-centeredness of the new spiritual family.

C. The “memory of the Passion” as the Passion-centered characteristic of the Congregation

The first reference to the finality of the Congregation in connection with the Passion appears in a passage of the Rule composed in the sacristy of St. Charles at Castellazzo. In a brief section concerning Friday and the memory of the Passion which his followers ought to cultivate on that day, Paul Danei writes:

“...And furthermore, dearly beloved, you must know that the main object in wearing black (according to the special inspiration that God gave me) is to be clothed in mourning for the Passion and Death of Jesus. For this purpose let us never forget to have always with us a constant and sorrowful remembrance of him” (10).

This simple recommendation at the beginning of his role as founder reveals an aspect which will quickly emerge and will be repeated in an almost obsessive way. Namely, that the new Congregation ought to relive the Passion as a perpetual memory. Our attention is immediately caught by the presence of three expressions relative to remembrance-memory: “let us never *forget* to have... a *remembrance... continual* and sorrowful.” As is easily seen, we do not have here any concrete kind of devotion to the Passion. It is a matter of reliving it as a constant remembrance. The black habit worn in perpetual mourning for the Passion of Christ is the visible and tangible expression of its continuity and practical application to everyday life. After this first text, Paul of the Cross will insistently turn to the theme of the Passion lived as a perpetual remembrance when he wants to precise the purpose of the new Congregation.

Passing from the prologue of the primitive Rules to their subsequent redactions (11), we come up with the following results:

In the Rule of 1736, when the founder refers to the purpose of the Institute, the word “memory” appears three times and “devotion” four times. Upon closer examination of the contexts for these citations, we note that “memory” is used in connection with the images that refer to the first inspiration, namely, dressed in black and in mourning over the Passion. “Memory” is also the key to the meaning of the special vow. Contrariwise, the word “devotion” always appears in a juridical context, relative to the special vow and its binding purpose.

In the Rule of 1741 we find important modifications. “Memory” is reduced to two citations, while “devotion” has risen to five. What happened? In November of 1740 Paul of the Cross presented the Rules to the Holy See in order to have them approved with an apostolic rescript. The review took until May of the following year; the Rescript of approbation was sent on May 15, 1741. The examination was severe. The Cardinals subjected all of it to rigorous sifting. Obviously the fact of a special vow required important theological and juridical precision in order to avoid doubts of conscience for anyone who professed it. This scrutiny brought about a substantial change of terminology. If, as a matter of fact, in the primitive and earlier texts the mystic element was expressed by *memory* and the juridic one by *devotion* in a satisfying harmony and balance, now the balance was tipped in favor of devotion and to the detriment of the mystic element. Those discussions and changes had to have an influence on the Founder himself, and from that time on his correspondence constantly makes more use of the word “devotion”.

An indication of his worries during the months of waiting for the approbation is Paul’s insistence in his letters on reassuring friends about the binding purpose of the vow. Not everything emerged clear and well defined. The missionaries would satisfy the vow with a half or

quarter hour of meditation after their sermon to the people; clerics and brothers would recite five *Our Fathers* for the intention that devotion to the Passion would be spread everywhere. With such guarantees all was clear, but as a concrete result the mystic and inspirational aspect of the fourth vow was left weakened by the juridic overhaul.

The redaction of the formula of profession took place between the revision of 1741 and the approbation with the Brief of 1748. As a result of the casuistry occasioned by the approval of 1741, mention of the Passion entered into the vow formula, but tied to the word *devotion*. Thus the professed, in view of that formula, bound himself to “promote devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ with all his strength in the faithful.”

The Rule received a more solemn approval in 1748. This time Paul adds some touches to the text that had been reviewed in 1741. Undoubtedly, this time he was aided by some theologian, because his charism of the mysticism of the Passion emerges as better formulated. In fact, in this very important step of the definitive elaboration of the Passionist Rules there is a return to the terminology of 1741. Thus, the word *devotion* disappears completely; and in all texts where the Passion is mentioned as the end of the Institute, there are only the words *memory* or *memory and cult*. We would be tempted to think that the vital thrust of the original inspiration, coming to the fore again full of dynamism, might manage to put everything in place.

But if the word *devotion* totally disappeared from the Rule, it still definitively settled into the most important formula of all, that of profession. As was already mentioned, the founder sent that formula to Cardinal Albano in 1745; the content of the special vow was put forth there as directed to promote the devotion to the Passion. In the Rules of 1746, the only place where the word *devotion* is found is the profession formula. One can conclude that a kind of balance had been reached between the inspirational charism and the casuistry of special vows.

When we pass from official texts of the Rules to correspondence, we find a similar phenomenon. In the years after his mystic experiences at Castellazzo, Paul speaks in a natural way of the *memory* of the Passion. Read, for example, a letter written to his own brothers two years after the redaction of the first Rules (12). Soon after that, at the time of the first revision (1740-41), his language takes on a noticeable change toward the almost exclusive use of *devotion*.

Around 1746, when the time for the observations on the part of the Commission was over, we can say that the founder went back to his first intuitions by using the word *memory* again. But he did it with prudence. Thus, in a letter of that year to Cardinal Gentili, he puts together *devotion* and *memory* (13): He immediately resumes the use of the word *memory*, but not in such a way that the word *devotion* disappears.

The texts of the Rules and the correspondence about the purpose of the Congregation do not exhaust his preoccupation that the Passion might be truly lived. When Paul touches on the theme of the Passion in his letters, it is seldom that he speaks of *devotion*, even though he knew how to overcome the more restrictive aspects of such a religious attitude and to raise it to mystic heights. Generally, when he treats of the Passion and a corresponding inner attitude, he prefers to speak of meditation. Moreover, this aspect of meditative remembrance is the closest expression we have to what Paul meant by the memory of the Passion.

More frequently, the more concrete details for a life lived so as to rise to the models of high mysticism also disappear. From then on, he preferred to speak of the immensity of the Passion as a sea without shores wherein the human person is lost and loses itself, of the desert of the Passion which the soul enters forgetful of all creation and in a total self-emptying, or of jewels which are the pains of Jesus and with which the inner self adorns and clothes itself. According to the specialists in spirituality, this high doctrine of St. Paul of the Cross is defined as a spirituality of *participation in the Passion* rather than as a devotion.

Summing up the analytical evidence of the texts of Paul of the Cross concerning the finality of the Congregation and the manner of living the Passion, the main thing that we can say about them is that it would be very difficult to conclude by shutting ourselves up in a purely devotional concept. Rather, it highlights the variety of expressions used to explain the rich content of such a life and inspiration.

It is possible, of course, to restrict our attention to the two key concepts expressed by the binomials, *devotion-memory* or *memory cult*. If we have to precise the two expressions better, we would say that, almost without exception in the texts of the Rule after the revision of 1746, *memory* is the original concept and closest to the insight contained in either *devotion-memory* or *memory-cult* right from the beginning. It is also closer to the scriptural bases concerning the continuation of the Passion as applied through sacramental renewal. As regards *devotion*, even if it is more recent and less used in the post-1746 texts, nonetheless it was more frequent than *memory* in the previous redactions even if in formally juridic contexts, until it attained a central place by its inclusion in the formula of vows.

We bring this analysis of Paul's vocabulary concerning the manner of living the Passion to a close by referring to a somewhat stereotyped formula. Better than many other phrases, it expressed his mind concerning the way of living the Passion in his Congregation.

In the letters of our holy Founder there is a set formula that his Passionist sons have used as distinctive of the Congregation and as the maxim that best describes its spirituality: *May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be always in our hearts*. This phrase fully sums up what Paul meant by *Living the Passion*. It meant an habitual presence of the sorrowful mysteries of Jesus in the life of his religious. It is not just an intellectual remembrance but rather a loving dwelling-with in our human existence, conforming to the full sense of the word "heart" in Sacred Scripture.

The difficulty of balancing the original inspiration and formulation centered on memory with the consequent juridic complications is clearly evident in a manuscript that remained unedited for a long time in the General Archives of the Congregation and had the title "Breve Notizie". It is an anonymous writing, probably composed in 1768, shortly before the solemn approbation of the Congregation by Clement XIV. A work of singular theological vigor, one can clearly draw from it the exact role of *memory* in the spirituality of the Congregation and its relationship to the fourth vow, the latter being formulated to specify the duty of promoting devotion to the Passion:

"The most efficacious means for the conversion of sinners and for the sanctification of souls is the frequent remembrance of the Passion of Jesus Christ, from the forgetfulness of which proceed deplorable evils and disorders.

“Therefore, our most merciful God in His infinite goodness granted strong and gentle inspiration to establish this poor Congregation in Holy Church. Its purpose is to form zealous workers filled with the Spirit, that they might be fit instruments used by the Almighty Hand of God to sow virtue and root out vice in the people with the most potent weapon of the aforementioned Passion, whose very loving attraction even the hardest heart cannot resist.

“To accomplish this end, after the year of probation, the Religious... add a fourth vow to promote a tender devotion to the most sorrowful Passion of the Redeemer” (14).

Later revisions of the Rule – those of 1769, 1776, 1980 and 1959 – did not alter in any way what pertained to the vow to promote devotion to the Passion.

D. The element of theological reflection added to those of intuition and institutionalization

What we have presented thus far is only an enquiry into the reality of the *Passion of Christ* as a personal experience of Paul and which became incarnate in the institution of the Passionist Congregation. In this historical-type trajectory, at what point do we find the theological element or that reflective deepening which we said was also one of the characteristics of every institute?

In our holy Founder there is a direct progression from *intuition* to *institutionalization*. But the element of reflection is not missing: It took the form of a somewhat later literary creation: *The Treatise on the Mystical Death*.

It might be said that St. Paul of the Cross, after the long decades of structurizing his intuition and arriving at a final synthesis of theological reflection as a seventy year old, would offer the treatise on *Mystic Death* as his most representative work. That marvelous mystical study constitutes the last stage he reached through the constant exercise of the memory of the Passion. From that moment on, the whole Christian life, and more so the religious life, is a reproduction of the death and resurrection of Christ.

II. BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT THE “MEMORY OF THE PASSION”

A. The contested role of “memory” in the field of spirituality

That which seemed so fascinating in the previous chapter about the passion-centered perspective of our holy Founder comes up against rough going from the mystics, when they treat of the dangers of the memory and of a total liberation from it.

St. John of the Cross devotes the first fifteen chapters of Book III of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* to fighting those dangers. His doctrine might be summed-up in the following propositions:

1. the necessity of overcoming every recollection arising from natural remembrances;
2. the necessity of a total emptying of distractions coming from the memory;
3. the necessity of also emptying oneself of supernatural apprehensions;
4. memories are an impediment to union in pure faith.

Not only do the mystics submit the memory to severe testing, but revolutionaries and advocates of universal progress also align themselves against an inner attitude of remembrance. Here are some slogans of such a mentality. The memory is:

- a traditionalist and reactionary category;
- a bourgeois opponent of hope;
- a “put off” and a cheat, and the death of future chances;
- antagonistic to an impetus for forward-looking progress;
- anti-revolutionary;
- a deprivation of the critical ability, of risk, of hazard and of a liberating thrust;
- a retreat from present frustrations and a retreat into the good old days;
- the filter of the past through a stereotype of innocence, in which whatever was irritating, risky, sad or provocative disappears;

If mystics, progressives and revolutionaries are against the memory, what are we going to say about our whole ideal understood precisely as the *memory of the Passion*? Harder still, where are we going to find a point of contact for grasping the significance of *the memory of the Passion* in its most profound meaning?

In order to avoid this dead-end the best thing that we can do is to search the Scriptures, for the Word of God remains forever.

B. The teaching of Holy Scripture concerning memory

If the doctrine of St. John of the Cross is literally true, with it falls the whole thought of our holy Founder and our spirituality. Where can we base a careful discernment? Let us turn to Scripture.

1. “Memory” and “memorial” in the Old Testament

We begin a brief review of the teaching of biblical theology concerning *memory* and *memorial*.

The Old Testament looks at memory from the following perspective: in order to be spiritually fulfilled, man has to establish a continual contact with God, a contact that can only be verified by the inner activity of remembering. It is through the memory that man turns to the consideration of the revelation received from God, relives the principle happenings of the history of salvation, and elevates his mind to God in prayer.

We want to pause a bit on some of the more striking aspects of turning to God through the technique of memory.

Let us start with the revelation itself of the name of Yahweh. The culminating moment of that revelation is related to us in Exodus 8:14: “I am Yahweh.” Yet, that instant does not pass, that revelation rests fixed in a certain sense in the very words which denominate the divinity. From Sinai on, the name of Yahweh remains as a memorial of what that revelation involved. That is why it is written immediately after: “This is my name forever, a *memorial* from generation unto

generation” (Ex. 3:1b). From that moment on, to *remember* the name is to put oneself in contact with the mystery of the divine being and to relive the theophany of Sinai.

It we pass from the Sinaiatic revelation to the principal stages of the history of salvation, the *liturgical feasts* present themselves as *memorials* of the saving action of God, that is, celebrations which actualize a past action of God by means of a liturgical repetition: For example, of the Passover it is said: “This day shall be a *memorial* for you, and you will celebrate it as a feast in honor of Yahweh from generation to generation” (Ex. 12:14). Exactly the same is said of the unleavened bread: “This will serve you... as a memorial before your eyes” (Ex. 13:9).

In the sacrificial liturgy memory is presented with a somewhat different connotation. Unlike the Passover or the name of Yahweh, now it is not the remembrance of God doing something for men but of creatures as they worship before God. In Leviticus (2:2) there is the mention of the sacrifice of oblation “which the priest will burn before the altar as a memorial.” The incense and oblation are offered “as a *memorial*” (Sirach 45:16), and the just man’s sacrifice as “a memorial which will never be forgotten” (35:6). Likewise, each one of the two loaves of proposition is called a *memorial* (Lk. 24:7).

Even articles of cult share in the character of memorial. In the description of the high priest’s ephod and breastplate, there is mention of the “memorial stones,” that is, the precious stones to remind Yahweh of the twelve tribes. Of the other priestly vestments the same is said; they are “memorials through the embroidered writing” (Ecc1: 45:10 sq.).

Trumpets are taken up as a *memorial before the Lord* (ibid., 50:16), that is, they carry to men the remembrance of God. Meanwhile, the little bells edging the ephod “are placed there as a memorial of the sons of Israel” (ibid., 45:9), signifying that their sound reminds Yahweh of the sacerdotal character of the people of Israel. When the trumpets sound during battle, they remind Yahweh of his alliance with his people and they ask help and protection.

Ransom money and tribute are also a *memorial*. As is said in the book of Numbers: “It will be as a memorial of the Israelites before the Lord (Nm. 31:54; Ex. 30:16). Statues are a *memorial* and a *monument* (Is. 57:8); in fact, an image of Yahweh or of an idol recalls the divinity to the believer. It is “in order to be remembered” that the historical literature recalls the happenings of Salvation History (Ex. 17:14).

A privileged area of the *memory* of God is prayer. Factually, the spiritual act of prayer is a *remembrance of God, a memory of God*. For that reason, Sheol is often described as a place where there is no longer any *memory* of God (Ps. 6:6). In many Psalms there is mention of *remembering* his holy Name (30:5), of giving praise at the remembrance of his holiness (97:12), of remembering his immense goodness (145:7). There are also Psalms which bear the title “*for remembrance*” (38:70), that is, those which are to be sung on occasions or commemorations which touch on history.

This rapid review gives an idea of the breadth of the *memory* and *remembrance* theme in the Old Testament.

Briefly, we can say that it embraces the whole complex reality of the presence of God in man. God enters into the interior of man by means of thought, and that puts him in contact with the Lord by means of remembrance. *Prayer* stabilizes contact with God through the *memory*; meditation of salvation history *recalls* the liberating deeds of God; by iterative *commemoration* the liturgy celebrates the outstanding moments of divine intervention in the past; sacrifices *recall* the disposition of oblation which animates the people: Yahweh is present in the midst of his people by means of the *memory* of his Name.

2. “Memory” and “memorial” in the New Testament

Now let us see how the theme of *memory* is presented in the New Testament.

The first thing that stands out is a great lexicographical difference: the use of the words *memory* and *memorial* is greatly reduced, and the objects of the memory are simplified and reduced to the single thing of which remembrance is made.

As regards frequency, in the whole New Testament the words occur seven times, and can be divided into two categories: there are four usages of minor import, while the others have reference to the death of Jesus as joined to the celebration of the Eucharist.

The instances of lesser importance are: in the Letter to the Hebrews (10:3) there is reference to the “*remembrance* of sins,” which is the annual sacrifice of expiation; the Acts of the Apostles (10:4) record “the prayers and almsgiving of Cornelius, which rise before the Lord as a *memorial*,” and in Matthew (26:13) and Mark (14:9) we have the story of the anointing of the feet of Jesus by Mary, a gesture that will be kept in memory wherever the Gospel is preached.

The three important passages that remain describe the Last Supper, that particularly solemn moment in the life of Jesus which the Apostles are expressly ordered to repeat together in memory of him (Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24-5).

In these last texts, memory in the New Testament remains fixed on only one thing. Here we are not talking of the name of Yahweh, nor of the salvific actions of the Old Testament, nor of memory from the viewpoint of history or the inspired books. In the New Testament the unique object of memory is the *life of Jesus*, and his *death* especially. The importance of this remembrance has particular prominence from the fact that, in the synoptic tradition, it is the only precept given by the Lord at the Last Supper.

Now let us try to understand the profound intention of the Lord in giving this testament to his disciples at that qualitatively culminating moment in his life.

Whence comes this singular preoccupation of Jesus that, after his death, his own should come together and celebrate communally the memory of his death? Admittedly this mysterious command can be studied from different angles. But we intend to view it from the perspective of a technique for assuring the permanence of the salvific action of the Person and the work of Christ.

Granted that Jesus essentially linked salvation to the acceptance of his Person; His Person is at the center of his activity and preaching. To believe and accept him signifies a rebirth to a new life and the possession of the principle of everlasting life. But what will happen when he has

passed from history? What of the faith of those who had known him and are left behind? What of the new disciples who will follow him through the preaching of his messengers? What is the fundamental reality on which his followers will live and by which they will remain faithful even to the end of time?

By means of the resurrection Jesus certainly remains in the midst of his own. But how change that particular presence into a vital and transforming reality? How bring it about that the faith of the disciples, instead of lessening or disappearing, should rather grow and mature? This whole problematic presented itself to the mind of Jesus at that moment when he was on the point of leaving the historic dimension of his mandate in the world. It is in this context that an understanding of the precept to communally keep in mind the “memory of Jesus” is to be found.

If Jesus remains in the midst of his disciples through the resurrection, a spiritual contact had to be established between them and himself. And that contact was only to be had by the particular activity of reliving the life of Jesus through *memory*. Ever since the Last Supper, the evocation of the life of Jesus by the spiritual function of memory is transformed into the special technique to which are linked all the effects derived from contact with the Person of Jesus. The celebration of the memory takes on something of an absolute value, in the presence of which are obtained the supernatural energies for persevering in following Jesus and announcing his mystery to the whole world.

Considering the profound reality hidden in the spiritual activity of the *memory*, we have to underline the particular importance Jesus annexed to the *remembrance of his death*. In his last command to *do* this in memory, Jesus did not reduce the object of such remembering to the resurrection or to his glorious life at the right-hand of the Father; he signifies his *death* as the privileged and indispensable object of that memory.

He had spoken several times during his life about the different modes of his presence. He had promised a special presence whenever two or more were gathered in his name. That was one of the ways of keeping memory of Jesus. But when he wanted to indicate the binding object of a qualitatively superior remembrance, he referred to his death.

3. The first manifestations of the “Memory of the Passion” in Palestinian Christianity

The singular power of the memory to activate the presence of Jesus becomes evident soon after his death. In fact, the paschal presences through “apparitions” happened within the context of meetings and comings together in which his disciples were keeping memory of him. Such was the situation of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, talking about Jesus and the happenings of his life (Lk. 24:14). What else were the Eleven doing in the upper room but recalling together the events of those last days? Likewise, Magdalene was going to the tomb to commemorate Jesus and weep before his tomb (Jn. 20:13). Even the Pentecost event came true within the setting of a gathering prearranged by Jesus (Acts 1:4).

With the closing of the post-resurrection cycle, the Christian communities quickly began an intense development of ways of keeping memory. Nor did the hope of a desired parousia hinder these celebrations. They centered on the part of Holy Week around Easter and were marked by a

three-fold character: *memory of the death*, the *Eucharistic memorial*, and an *eschatological-resurrection meal*.

In recent years a providential coming-together of archaeological discoveries and studies on the Judaeo-Christian mentality has helped to highlight the manner of celebrating the *memorial-meals* of Jesus, and the theological suppositions that motivated them.

In first place there was the *Galilean* or *Nazzarean group*, with a special kind of calendar and memorial meal. The first memorial meal was celebrated at Bethany on Tuesday of Holy Week. It recalled the farewell dinner at the home of Lazarus, when Jesus spoke in anticipation of his own entombment. The second celebration took place on Holy Thursday, remembering the Eucharistic meal; and the third, celebrated on Easter Sunday on the Mount of Olives, was eschatological in character, recalling the banquet which ended in the Ascension.

Similar to the Galilean tradition was another of a *Judaeo-Christian* or *Ebionite* type. This community also celebrated three *memorial* meals. The first, on Tuesday, kept memory of the supper of the washing of feet, the betrayal of Judas, etc., a meal of mourning that was held in Gethsemane. During the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday there was a second solemn meal celebrated on Mount Zion, in memory of both the Eucharistic supper and the death of Jesus. The third was celebrated at Bethany on Easter Sunday and recalled the meeting with the Risen Christ.

The *Hellenist* Christians had their own three types of celebration suppers, that were distributed in the following manner. The first was celebrated on the night of Saturday before Palm Sunday in Gethsemane and recalled the washing of the feet. The second was held on the night between Palm Sunday and Monday of Holy Week. The institution of the Eucharist was celebrated on the night between Holy Thursday and Friday on Mount Zion. This was then completed with another which was celebrated between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, recalling the meeting with the Risen Christ.

Each one of these meals had its own proper setting. The Bethany one was celebrated in a grotto near the wall of our monastery that was discovered in 1952; that of Gethsemane, near the sanctuary of the Agony and excavated in 1955; and the third took place in the synagogue at Mount Zion, researched in 1951.

The celebrations of the *memory of the Passion* outside of Jerusalem took the form of Eucharistic celebrations, without the complexity and the many memories to which the topographical framework of the Holy City was susceptible.

C. The biblical-theological context of the Passionist fourth vow

The rediscovery of the biblical concept of memory brings out two points.

First, there is the eminently historical character of the religion and faith of the Israelites, and its consequent relationship with memory. This historical note clothed events with a tremendous significance. Past happenings had that significance not only once and forever, but rather as on-going revelations of the salvific will and action of God, a God ever ready to intervene and

repeat the gesture of salvation. Through that historical significance, a past event became, on the one hand, a revelation of the temporal reality that is the design of salvation; and, on the other hand, its repetition and renewal, by means *of* memory, actualize and make present the salvific work of God.

Secondly, the rediscovery of the role of memory in this context reveals all the originality of biblical mysticism vis-a-vis other philosophical systems. The latter are inclined to union with God through ecstasy or intellectual concentration on the very being of God. But the concept of memory, with its rich churning of salvation history, suffices in itself to evoke the aspect of concreteness and immediacy that is special to biblical mysticism – that coming close into the divine sphere, not by an intellectual concentration, but through an encounter of grace that is the intervention of God in human existence, God revealing and saving.

Let us conclude by returning to the Passion and to its *memory* as the unifying principle of the spirituality of our holy Founder and as the inner “form” of the Congregation he founded. A deepening of the biblical concept of memory contributes in an exceptional way to a better appreciation of our special vow. Furthermore, it invests that vow, and the sublime and grace-full vocation it symbolizes, with intriguing implications that surely no other theological concept, devotion, older or modern format, can offer.

Now, when the revival of Scripture studies furnished ideal conditions for reaching a kind of profound renewal, I cannot think of a more opportune or God-given method for a new and yet the original formulation of our spirituality than a deepening of the biblical category of *memory*. With it, Christ willed to characterize the whole liturgical economy of the New Testament and, eighteen centuries later, Paul of the Cross turned to esteem it anew and place it as the center of the proper finality of his religious family.

III. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY AND APOSTOLATE IN THE LIGHT OF THE “MEMORY OF THE PASSION” OF THE LORD

A. Some notions

1. What is memory?

Memory has an active function: It carries on a work of synthesis, of elaboration and creation on everything that has happened in the past. With regard to man’s being in particular, memory achieves a synthesis between what was lived at a given moment of the past and what is presently realized or hoped for in the future.

Without losing the objective relationship with what was a living reality in the past, memory makes the past evolve towards a new reality by remembering the events of the past.

Memory thus:

- transforms the remembered material;
- shapes it;
- prolongs it;
- modifies its structures and form, even by adding or subtracting, but without falsifying the past;

- discloses internal coherence which unites events, more than merely associating facts and ideas from the past;
- discovers the profound structure of life by understanding in a better way its causes, its importance, and the relation between what once occurred and what was added later; and,
- provides a knowledge that is not along the line of complete information, but rather of a deeper insight into the experience of the past by means of the human experiences accumulated later.

2. Different types of memory

a. Transfiguring memories

“There are some different kinds of memories. There are those in which we just do not take the past seriously enough: memories in which the past becomes a paradise without danger, a refuge from our past disappointments – the memory of ‘the good old days.’ There are memories which bathe everything from the past in a soft, conciliatory light. ‘Memory transfigures,’ we say, and at times we experience this in a rather drastic form, for example when old soldiers exchange war yarns at a regimental dinner. War as an inferno is obliterated from such memories: what seems to remain is only the adventure experienced long ago. Here the past is filtered through a harmless cliché: everything dangerous, oppressive and demanding has vanished from it: it seems deprived of all future. In this way, memory can easily become a ‘false consciousness’ of our past and a opiate for our present...”

b. Subversive memories

“But there is another form of memory: there are dangerous memories, memories which make demands on us. There are memories in which earlier experiences break through to the center-point of our lives and reveal new and dangerous insights for the present. They illuminate for a few moments and with a harsh steady light the questionable nature of things we have apparently come to terms with, and show up the banality of our supposed ‘realism.’ They break through the canon of all that is taken as self-evident, and unmask as deception the certainty of those ‘whose hour is always there’ (Jn. 7:6). They seem to subvert our structures of plausibility.

“Such memories are like dangerous and incalculable visitants from the past. They are the memories we have to take into account; memories, as it were, with future content. ‘Remembrance of the past,’ says a contemporary philosopher, ‘can allow dangerous insights to emerge, and society as it is established would seem to fear the subversive contents of this memory.’ It is not by chance that the destruction of memory is a typical measure of totalitarian rule. The enslavement of men begins when their memories of the past are taken away. All forms of colonialization are based on this principle. Every rebellion against suffering is fed by the subversive power of remembering suffering. In this sense, suffering is in no way a purely passive, inactive ‘virtue.’ It is, or can be, the source of socially emancipatory action” (15).

3. The Passion of Christ as an object of memory

The Passion of Christ does not belong to the category of transfiguring memories. The Old Testament, for a great part, tended to transfigure the past by enlarging God’s salvific actions. One can say that a substantial portion of biblical historiography belongs to that type of memory. But the Passion of Jesus introduces a completely new element into biblical memory. The central object of the memory of the Passion is a failure, quite contrary to the other historical narratives in

which only the memory of triumph survives. Whereas the object of history in general is the great and glorious past, the memory of the Passion initiates a totally new and paradoxical history.

It should be said, though, that attempts were made to transfigure the Passion of Jesus too. The very Passion narratives in the Gospels are conceived according to the Old Testament categories. The effort there consists in trying to avoid the paradox and the scandal of a crucified Messiah. That is why those narratives consistently use the argument of prophecy: everything with regard to Jesus had been prophesied. The Passion thus was not an absurdity, but ought to be seen within God's salvific plan. Only a minimum of transfiguration is used in the New Testament, at least in the sense that the Passion is always presented as followed by the Resurrection. That is the real context in which to understand New Testament "memory," and specifically the "memory of the Passion."

4. Current trends of thought regarding the "Memory of the Passion."

Without any claim to exhaustiveness we want to present some current trends of thought which emphasize the actuality of the memory of the Passion. We shall limit ourselves to three areas: sacramentology, the history of Christianity, and political theology.

a. Max Thurian and the renewal of "memory" in Sacramentology

According to the studies of Max Thurian and more recent authors (16), the notion of memory is rooted in the Old Testament and points to a rather complex reality related to salvation history and its mysterious ways of realization. Prof. Oñatibia defines the memorial act or the rite of commemoration as follows: "A ritual celebration commemorating a salvific event of the past which becomes present in this very celebration and in which the celebrating community partakes." Evidently, by this notion of *memory* or memorial, different nuances are added to the simple idea of devotion that relate the religious or cultural act to the historico-salvific re-actualization of the past. Devotion denotes only an actual disposition of abandonment to God. Whereas, in memory, the remembering of the past enters as an essential element, which produces actual spiritual effects of a special kind.

On the other hand, memory is not to be identified with sacrifice, which means the actual oblation of a material object and entails a special form of destruction in order to acknowledge God's absolute authority over people and things. The essence of sacrifice does not include in any way a meaning of remembrance. It is only in Christianity that, by Christ's special will, the Eucharistic sacrifice is constituted as a form of efficacious memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross.

b. The Memory of Jesus and the essence of Christianity

Next to these traditional meanings of *memory*, *memorial* and *sacrifice*, others have recently come to the foreground allotting to memory a primordial rank in the very development of Christianity. The considerations of the French Catholic author Marcel Légaut deserve special mention in this respect (17). According to him, memory was the proper means proposed by Jesus before dying to allow his disciples to follow his steps and to mature the experience begun during the time they were living with their Master.

“The few months that Jesus lived with his disciples had of necessity to be prolonged so as not to make them fruitless. For, in spite of growth, they had permitted but an elementary initiation into his objectives, a glimpse of the future to come. During the course of time, the disciples will have to perpetuate that presence and, inspired by the memory of Jesus, become more conscious of their true vocation. Following Jesus and under his action, they will thus be enabled to draw from the old treasure a new one. To create means also to enrich ever anew the old treasure with a truth which it is always in danger of losing, because it does not possess this truth in itself” (18).

During the whole of his life, Jesus had initiated them into the mystery of coming together as the spiritual ambient proper for creating interior transformation. It is at one of those meetings that he told them to come together to keep his memory:

“During his life Jesus showed his disciples the richness of these meetings, particularly at the moments of special intimacy related by the Gospels, as, for example, on the mount of the Transfiguration. Towards the end of his life, at the hour of the Last Supper, he recommended in a more formal way that they come together in his name: ‘Do this in memory of me.’ This final request got a special insistence in view of his imminent death and the final separation. On many occasions Jesus had assured the disciples that he would be amongst them when they met in his name. A few hours before everything was over, in those moments so charged and yet so meaningful, his last words – more wrenched from him than premeditated – were the parting promise of one who goes away after having accomplished his task and yet is aware of hardly having started his mission. It was a mission which he entrusted to his followers, knowing their frailty and weakness. It was a real prayer that he addressed to them” (19).

From that moment on, gathering in view of keeping the memory of Jesus became of absolute importance to renew faith in him. “Jesus promised his disciples that ‘by doing this in memory of him,’ they would find contact with the absolute to renew their faith, the direct and intimate contact they had experienced in those blessed hours during which he stood not only in front of them but with them, when they were completely fulfilled by his penetrating and transforming word” (20).

Memory was thus changed into a specific spiritual activity in order not to lose the meaning of what had been experienced in living with Jesus. And beyond the first followers, this act of remembering became the specific activity which brought future generations to the understanding of his life and mission: “The same call and the same promise were directed to all those who would share the faith of the first disciples, along a future that the apostles conceived in the mode of their own time, but which Jesus did not want to evaluate, confessing ignorance by an evasive answer” (21).

After his death, the gatherings to keep the memory of Jesus became the privileged moments for meeting the Risen One. “The fruitful remembrance that Jesus had promised to the disciples meeting in his name, manifested itself for the first time in a charismatic way a few days after his death. They were all together in one place for fear of the Jews. They were united by a feeling of terrible anxiety which completely overpowered their faith in Jesus, although its intensity originated from that very faith. What was given to the women visiting the tomb, faithful to a love which no threat could discourage, was also granted to his disciples in the silence of their shared despair: a special confirmation personally offered to everyone of them, a superhuman splendor,

capable of strengthening a faith which to them had become so essential that, even when buried under the ruins of their hopes, nothing could possibly destroy it. And so, too, on the road to Emmaus the promise was fulfilled in the breaking of the bread” (22).

But in the course of time, it was very difficult to implement Jesus’ commandment as purely as he had wanted. “Do this is memory of me.” That was relatively easy for those who had known Jesus, at least in the early days. Then, such a recommendation may even have been superfluous. Could the disciples do anything but remember that past? Like a lost paradise, it was gone from them now, but it remained even more real within them than the present and would, so they believed, soon return again. In the future everything would combine to influence the disciples to reduce that memory to the level of their own possibilities and those of their environment. So nothing was more necessary than to keep intact the spiritual vigor of that memory – obtained in the anxiety and the nakedness of those last hours, to keep it from becoming just a hieratic story, to keep it from disappearing completely into history. Even then, would that be enough?

Imperceptively, there was a strong inclination in the disciples to let the memory of those few months passed together with their Master become emptied of its original substance. In the absence of Jesus, nothing could protect that memory, which would deteriorate unless it remained related to him. Nobody could really keep it by his own spiritual strength, without impoverishing it. What the disciples had experienced when living with Jesus was apparently not sufficient, in the absence of any doctrine, to nourish an ongoing cult. That is why the “memory” was soon influenced by previous attitude of heart and mind and by interpretations that were drawn from traditional beliefs and practices (23).

No wonder, therefore, that modes of return to Jesus quickly developed in which the pure memory was hidden under forms more visible or easier to perform and to understand. Such was the case with the celebration of the memory of Jesus under the form of the Last Supper, the cultural sacrifice. He himself somehow caused these forms to develop, since the theological circumstances of his death contributed in a large degree to impose such a meaning on the memory of Last Supper: the paschal celebration, the immolation of the Lamb, etc.

“The circumstances of the death of Jesus were at the origin of the evolution of the Last Supper. It seems that the very way in which Jesus conceived his death, once circumstances had made it inevitable, is historically at the origin of the evolution undergone by the celebration of the Last Supper. It is an evolution that is certainly to be attributed to the human incapacity to rise to the spiritual level reached in those final hours, as well as to the pressure of religious traditions” (24).

For Légaut, the celebration of the memory is so essential to Christianity that, by Christ’s own will, not only the origin of faith in Him should be connected with that celebration, but also its maturation and its very perennial character in an original purity: “The whole history of Christianity develops around the effort of the Christians to remember Jesus in a real way.”

Hence, Légaut does not hesitate to formulate the two following statements in which one can clearly see the relationship between the way a Christian community lives an authentic life and the way it relates to the mystery of Jesus: “The most convincing test of the vitality of a church is the

way its members ‘do this in memory of him;’ and, ‘There is no better way to test the spiritual state of a church than to examine the manner in which its members ‘do this in memory of him.’”

Certainly, Légaut’s synthesis contains affirmations which seem questionable as far as their theological content is concerned. Leaving aside these technical aspects, one cannot but feel challenged by his intuitions regarding the importance which the fulfillment of the Lord’s precept to “Do this in memory of me” has had in the development of Christianity and its liturgical celebrations. His considerations seem to be especially relevant to a better appreciation of the way in which St. Paul of the Cross wanted to live the Passion after the manner of the theological category of memory, which is related to New Testament data and so rich in content.

c. The Memory of the Passion in the Political Theology of Metz

J.B Metz made an original analysis of the actual crisis to which our technical and progressive society is submitted. He presented his views in a conference held in New York in October 1971 and later published as “The Future in the Memory of Suffering.” It is not easy to make a summary of that article. But I would like to quote his concluding remarks to show the importance he attributed to the *memoria passionis* as a transforming power for the future of humanity:

“Finally, let us consider the situation of the Churches in our society. Clearly the Churches are now fast ceasing to be religious establishments serving society as a whole; clearly they are increasingly becoming minorities, whose actual and public influence is constantly decreasing. They are becoming more and more what might well be termed cognitive and emotional minorities. The question arises whether the Churches are on the way to becoming sects? If the answer is Yes, are they to be more or less irrelevant subcultures within the framework of our technological super-society? This is the focal point of a number of questions that cannot be taken further here. If the Church spells out the *Memoria passionis Jesu Christi* in the midst of our society – that memory of suffering in which the history of human passion is made unforgettable – then it can ultimately be or become a minority without necessarily closing itself into a false sectarianism. Then it will remain the bearer of a dangerous and subversive memory on which much more depends than the will to self-assertion of a religious institution – and that more is the future of our humanity” (25).

B. The relevance of the spirituality and apostolate of the “Memory of the Passion” as conceived by St. Paul of the Cross

1. A-first-principle

The apostolic activity of St. Paul of the Cross originates from a first principle which can be stated as follows: all evil comes from forgetting the Passion; all good comes from remembering the Passion. Evidently, we are confronted here with a conviction that was engraved in Paul’s soul by a mystical illumination.

In this spiritual attitude of our holy Founder there is something that confers on him an excellent greatness: he has a remarkable intuition of essential realities and of the initiatives needed to reform the Church. His intuition is revealed in the striking clear-sightedness with which he rose to Christ’s ultimate will and discerned the essential elements of Christianity, its

possibilities and conditions for survival, starting with the memory of Jesus and especially his death. The same applies to his renewal efforts. As nobody else, he went to the very roots of all deviations and deformities in Christianity, namely, the forgetting of the Lord's last precept to keep his memory. Other great reformers have tried to renew the Church by improving the clergy or by reforming or creating forms of evangelical life; some have made renewal efforts starting with education or mission activities. The Church at all times abounds in holy reformers and founders. But Paul of the Cross may have been unique in returning to the heart of the Gospel, by founding a religious community destined to awaken the memory of Jesus in his death.

2. The situation of the church at the time of Paul of the Cross

To understand the originality of his insights and the orientation of his apostolic work, it is helpful to recall briefly the situation of Christianity at the time of Paul of the Cross.

Historians are unanimous in recognizing the state of spiritual poverty in the eighteenth century and of the moral decadence in the European church of that period. It would be very instructive to apply M. Légaut's test, mentioned above, to Paul's times, in order to discover the root and the dimensions of ecclesial decadence. If the oblivion of the "memory of Jesus" is the clearest indication of such weakness, the eighteenth century failed to come to an authentic realization of the words of Jesus: "Do this in memory of me." Its liturgy, estranged from the real life of the Christian community, its forms of devotion, most of them para-liturgical, demonstrated that the forgetfulness of the memory of Jesus was at the origin of that decay. The memory of Jesus was not practiced in the Eucharist, but in devotions such as the Way of the Cross, which had become popular through the great Franciscan missionary and contemporary of our holy Founder, St. Leonard of Port Maurice.

Next to these para-liturgical devotions, meditation on the mysteries of the life and death of Jesus was practiced by an elite of Christians. This form of memory was not only individual, but also restricted to religious communities and related groups of initiated people. Paul of the Cross gives a strongly negative judgement when he refers to the forgetfulness of the Passion into which the Church of his time had fallen. The bitter avowals of the great missionary bear witness to his accurate vision in discovering that the oblivion of Christ's Passion was the root of the evils that afflicted his times, And such forgetfulness could only be overcome by the opposite remedy, namely, the memory of Christ and his mysteries, especially the Passion, according to the desire expressed at the Last Supper.

3. The originality of St. Paul's apostolic method

The method adopted by Paul of the Cross was not as such a return to sacramentalization or to the Eucharistic celebration. Although the Eucharist occupied a central place in his personal spiritual life, his apostolic activity was not geared towards the reform of cultural celebration. Liturgical renewal in his time was certainly not acquainted with O. Casel's vision, a return to "memory" by the symbol of "mystery." And there was even less of an opening for liturgical renewal by means of a more intelligible participation of the faithful through the vernacular language: It was not along that line that Paul wanted to renew Christianity, anymore than by promoting para-liturgical devotions such as the Way of the Cross.

In view of returning to “memory” he adopted a special way: the spiritual activity of meditation. He stressed its importance not only in his personal life and in his religious institute, but he also wanted the masses to practice this form of the memory of the Passion. He obliged his religious preaching missions to devote at least a quarter of an hour to such meditation after the main sermon, and the whole congregation followed its points as they were made by the missionary in a loud voice. The prescription in the first chapter of the Rule urged the practice in the following words:

“The members of this least Congregation who are recognized as capable should, therefore, both during missions and in other religious exercises, teach the people by word of mouth how to meditate on the Mysteries of the Most Holy Passion and Death of Jesus, our true Good. Ordinarily this should be done after the mission sermon or at some other time that may be judged more opportune” (26).

It can be said that meditation was the proper technique used by St. Paul of the Cross in view of returning to the memory of Jesus. It was a method much more interior than other approaches. His ideal of returning to the remembrance of Jesus was more along the line of pure memory, so difficult to realize without contaminations or deformations, as M. Légaut has underlined. In trying to actualize the pure memory of Jesus, it is difficult to strive higher than what Paul of the Cross intended to do by instructing the people to meditate on the mysteries of Christ’s life, passion and death.

The memory of the Passion recurs as an obsessive theme in the mind and writings of Paul, and this from the very beginning of his conversion. He was not aiming at the promotion of one or other devotion to the Passion or only to found a confraternity destined to foster devotional attitudes among its members. Rather, in a most original form, his fundamental intuition recovers something of extreme importance in Christianity: the memory of Jesus and of his mysteries by means of highly interior and remembering practices which were the popular meditations on Christ’s Passion.

CONCLUSION

At the end of our prolonged considerations, we can draw two clear conclusion:

1. The unifying idea of the spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross is the Passion lived and preached as memory,
2. This spirituality and this apostolic method have a renewed pertinence for our times.

For these reflections to be complete, at least at the level of a sketch, it would have been necessary to include elements from the small treatise on *Mystical Death*, but that we leave for another occasion.

Let us conclude by quoting the words of the Preface for the feast of St. Paul of the Cross, which summarize our study:

“You showed the wonders of your power
in raising up St. Paul of the Cross

to keep alive the memory
of Christ's Passion.
As he contemplated
the supreme love of your Son for us,
you gave him mystical insight and wisdom
and special gifts of grace.
You marked him out
by his love of poverty,
and by his desire for prayer and solitude.
You made him a spiritual guide
and a preacher of the gospel.
As he proclaimed the rich harvest of salvation,
his words and example brought back to you
countless sinners who had strayed from you
and kept before the eyes of your people
the Passion of Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

NOTES

1. Zoffoli, E., *S. Paolo della Croce*. Storia critica, Rome 1963, Vol. 1, p.161.
2. *Lettere di S. Paolo della Croce*, Rome 1924, Vol. IV, p. 222, note.
3. Zoffoli, *op. cit.* I., p. 161, note 5.
4. *Ibid.*, I, p. 239, note 26.
5. *I Processi di Beatificazione e Canonizzazione di S. Paolo della Croce*, Rome 1969, Vol. I, p. 160.
6. *Let.*, I, pp. 6-16.
- 6a. Translator's note: The preceding sentences of this paragraph specify the same confusing dates in both the Spanish and Italian text. The second reference to Dec. 6th may be simply a typographical error. It is strange that the sentences; "... my sole desire is to be crucified with Jesus" (Nov. 23) or "I also held colloquies on the sorrowful Passion of my beloved Jesus" (Nov. 26) and other citations were not made. Yet these lacunae do not substantially impair the general sweep of the author's presentation in this section. Cf. also, Giorgini, F., *Promuovere la Grata Memoria e il Culto della Passione di Gesu*, Ricerche di storia e spiritualita, *Passionista*, n. 15, Rome 1980, I, 1.3, pp. 14-18.
7. *Let.*, pp. 21-22.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.
9. Zoffoli, *op. cit.*, III, Analytical Index, cf. *Voti*.
10. *Let.*, IV, pp. 220-221. (Eng., *Words from the Heart*, Dublin 1976, p. 14.)
- 11 Cf. synoptic texts in *Regulae et Constitutiones C.P. Editio critica textuum curante Fabiano Giorgini*, Rome 1958.
12. *Let.*, I, pp. 53-7.
13. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 328.
14. S. Paul of the Cross, *The Congregation of the Passion: What it is and what he wanted*, Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality n.1, Rome 1982, "Account of 1768," nn. 1-3.
15. J.B. Metz, *The Future in the Memory of Suffering* Concilium 1972, N. 76, pp. 14-15.
16. Cf. M. Thurian, *La Eucarestia Memorial del Señor, Sacrificio de acción de gracias y de Intercesión*, Spanish ed. in "Sigueme," 1985 (English trans., *The Eucharistic Memorial*, Richmond, J. Knox Press, Vol. I, 1961); I. Onatibia, *Recuperación del concepto de Memorial por la teologia Eucaristica contemporanea*, in "Phase," n. 70, 1972, pp. 535-545.
17. Cf. M. Légaut, *Introduzione all'intelligenza del cristianesimo*, Assisi 1972.
18. *Ibid.*, (this and following citations taken from Italian translation), p. 287.
19. *Ibid.*, pp.288-289.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 289-90 passim.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
25. J.B. Metz, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
26. *Rule of St. Paul of the Cross*, Inspirational text, 40th General Chapter, Rome 1978, n. 3, p. 4.

The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ or the Passionists is an international Catholic Congregation of religious Brothers and Priests. Our charism is to keep alive the memory of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus in our hearts. Products. We preach Christ Crucified and keep alive the memory of His Passion thru contemplation, Missionary outreach, Retreats, Recollection, and Parish Missions. categories. Nonprofit Organization. STORY. Our Story. The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ or the Passionists is an international Catholic Congregation of religious Brot The elections took place at St. Paul of the Cross Golgotha Pastoral Center in Karungu during the General Congress which was held on February 13th -16th. Congratulations to Fr. Andrew Okeyo, (Provincial) and his CouncilÂ "We seek the unity of our lives and our apostolate in the Passion of Jesus." The Passionists express their participation in the Passion by a special vow, by which they bind themselves to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ. They strive to foster awareness of its meaning and value for each person and for the life of the world. They seek to incorporate this vow into our daily lives by living the evangelical counsels. Read more Background information. The late Fr. Victor Camusso, CP was one of the pioneers of Passionists mission in Kenya.