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1 "We now have to consider the problem and the dogma so often passed by in silence... this precious and glorious divine blood shed for us... for what reason and for what purpose was such a price paid?" These words taken from Gregory Nazianzen introduce the Author's extensive study on the paschal mystery of Christ. We use them also to effectively begin our review, by putting this question to ourselves:

2 What is the sense of Christ's passion, particularly the culminating moment: the pierced side of Christ?

3 Centering the incarnation on the passion we perceive with astonishment and dismay how God reveals to us the deepest aspect of his divinity and how he manifests his glory by becoming our servant.

4 Entering the world "through sin", death has dilacerated man: before God he is a being "lacking wholeness", a fragment of earthly life heading towards death. God alone can reconstruct and complete this incomplete "person" to which man reduced himself by sin. God does this by means of the "second Adam" Christ, in the identical "place" of rupture, death; the "estrangement from God", with an experience of the "being - to the - end", of the loss in death down to the abyss of hell, not exterior, but from within, experiencing all the dimensions of the being in the world (Hb. 2,16-18; 4,5).

5 Because of this "existential" situation of Christ, the Father has given "all judgment" to the Son (Jn. 5,22) and coming as judge: "Every eye will see
him, everyone who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. I am the Alpha and Omega, says the Lord God, he who (they pierced) is, was and is to come" (Ap. 1,7-8; Jn. 19,37; Zac. 12,10-14).

6 Paul's Gospel is the announcement of the cross of Christ. He would know no other (1 Cor. 1,23), nor would he glory in anything else (Gal. 6,14); for it is in the "folly" of the cross that the "power of God" is manifested (1 Cor. 1,18-24) and through the resurrection the "new creation", the salvation takes place confirmed by faith (Rom. 6,3ss) and realized existentially by love (Gal. 2,20).

7 Likewise in the Synoptics, the cross is not an isolated event, but rather it is the fact to which all the other events of the life of Christ tend and from which they receive their significance. Jesus keeps his "face turned" to the cross (Lk. 9,51).

8 We find in John the same identical need of the cross together, however, with a striking emphasis on the sovereign liberty of Christ (Jn. 10,18). His passion is an auto consecration for men given to them by the Father (Jn. 17,19). It is the supreme demonstration of love for His friends (Jn. 15,10) which demands an identical "donation to the brethren" (1 Jn. 3,16).

9 The three obstacles (nature, sin and death) which separate man from God were conquered by Christ: nature by his incarnation; sin by his death on the cross; death by his resurrection. H.de Lubac tells us that "What took place in the head must also take place in the members: incarnation, death, resurrection, eradication, detachment, transformation. There is no authentic christian life that is not subjected to this triple rhythm".

10 To the horizontal vision of the "passiologia": from the birth to the death of Christ, it is necessary to join the vertical vision: between heaven and earth, the "kenosis". This unfathomable event so mysterious and yet so real that for the Word to become "man" is already an annihilation, an annihilation that, according to some, reaches still deeper than the experience of the cross. Only with this vertical and horizontal vision will we grasp the uniqueness in the different phases of the salvific drama.

11 It is impossible to follow the Author in his ample analysis of the difficult exegesis of the Kenosis. Our interest is only in the conclusions: "The cross of Christ is inscribed in the creation of the world from its very beginning", and, in the concrete world of sin: Christ's redemptive passion already begins at the time of his incarnation (Kenosis). Finally, to the Creator and to the Redeemer nothing remains unrelated that happens in the creation entrusted to him, and "paid for" by him. Origen had already attempted to infringe upon the dogma of the pure impassibility" of God when before the suffering Son on the cross he felt he had to say: "Perhaps even the Father is not without suffering".
This manner of speaking satisfies the outstanding personal psychological needs of the modern man. We no longer tolerate the abstract use of "redemption", "justification" etc. Theology speaks a sensitive language when it presents to us the most concrete personality of the incarnate Word, suffering for "me", "for us" descended into hell and rose again. Alongside the abstract "scholastic" theology we always find at least the implicit theology of the great Saints who were all pervaded by their experience of Christ, and of Christ crucified. Medieval as well as modern theology ironically called "affective" in tone, expresses itself more or less happily in concrete and personal terms, we need only to consider the cult of the Heart of Christ. The "existential" reflection is also concrete even if it is not directed in the first place to Christ, but to every single man to be redeem. This personal, concrete language was already typical of Paul, living "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2,20).

And again, the language of Paul "If one died for all, then all have died" (2 Cor. 5,14) guides us in this language of personal responsibility: "to be - dead - with" is for us an ascension. The descent of one into the abyss becomes an ascent from the abyss for each one of us. In St. Mark's Gospel we find in the words spoken by Jesus on the cross, only the loud cry of abandonment and of death, but wonderfully presented, instead, is His agony in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is immersed in the terror (εκζαμενεις: anguish because of His separation from the "people"), in sadness so great (περι αμαρτοσ) that it oppresses him, and, while still alive, leads him "unto death", anticipating it as present. "Remain here and watch with me" (Mk 14,34) is the only consolation that Christ accepts: solidarity, active participation in His love and in His sorrow. Above all, the whole life of Christ is inconceivable without this "being - with", taking others-with-Himself, those freely chosen to be solidary with Him, even though in the moment of supreme trial almost all of them will abandon Him. Every other form of pietistic and sentimental consolation is refused: "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves" (Lk 23,28).

Factual solidarity becomes a dominating motive of Paul's life: to be "co-crucified" with Christ (Gal 2,19): "bearing on the body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6, 17) and the "bearing in his body the sufferings of the death of Jesus" (2 Cor 4, 10), "for the sake of His body, that is, the Church" (Col 1,24).

The Pauline "Kenosis", the content of which is primarily obedience not suffering (Phil. 2), corresponds to the "mandate from the Father" in John (10,18), which Christ fulfills in the: "I do" (14,31). For this reason He made His "abode" with us (1,14) to give us His flesh and blood as "food indeed, and drink indeed" (6,55) and, in the inseparability of water and Spirit (3,5) nay, of "Spirit-Water and blood" (Jn 1,5-8), to shed from His pierced side "blood and water" (19, 34). This is the summit of the "service" of Christ-the
servant in his co-suffering with men-sinners, towards whom His love is so great that it no longer distinguishes itself nor its destiny from that of all sinners. This is the climax to which the mystery of the delivering up of Jesus in His passion tends. The delivering up by the Father and the free offering of self by Christ (Jn 10,18; Phil 2) reveal an unfathomable mystery of love. That God "delivers up" His only Son belongs among the most incredible affirmations of the New Testament. We must understand this "delivering up" in the fullest sense, and not soften it with "to send" or "to give". God thrust his Son into the coils of the powers of corruption, be these men or even death. "God made Christ to be sin" (2 Cor 5,21), Christ is the cursed of God… Christ's agonizing cry on the cross "to fulfill the Scriptures. I thirst" (19,28) expresses the theme of the abandonment to the beloved Apostle not less incisively than it does to the other Evangelists. The spring of living waters for life eternal, from which all must draw (Jn 4,10.13s; 7,37ss) is in total dispersion; it is itself thirsting.

17 The darkness over the whole earth (Amos 8,9-10) is not, above all, the sign of the cosmic participation in the sufferings of Christ, but of the sorrow of God himself: "They shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son" as expressed in Zachariah 12,10). "When Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said: "All is finished!" And, bowing his head, He gave up His spirit (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα)" According to John the Spirit became, in an evident sense, "free" with Christ's last sigh of death. In fact the Spirit could not be given until Jesus would have been glorified (cf. Jn 7,39), that is, continues St. John, lifted up on the cross (cf. Jn 12,20-34); and the Risen One could therefore breathe it into the Church: "Receive the Holy Spirit..." (Jn 20,22).

18 John's testimony on the opening of the side of Christ fits both an apocalyptic ecclesiological context. The prophetic words "They shall see him whom they have pierced" (Zac 12,10), are brought out again in the true historical context of the passion (cf. Jn 19,37) as well as in the apocalyptic context of Christ who comes with the clouds for the final judgment (Ap 1,7). 19 More than the "Ecce Homo" (Jn 19,5), the Transfixed, raised on the cross, as seen and solemnly represented by John (19,32), becomes the definite image to meditate upon: "Ecce Deus", the final representation and interpretation of God, whom no one has ever seen (Jn 1,18). Here is fulfilled the theology of the raised serpent which the Israelites had to look upon in order to be saved (cf. Num 21,9-10; Jn 3,14). "It is, in the words of H. U. Balthasar, the same counterpart, the image of the Father transfigured, and wounded at the same time, that Thomas would touch with his hands" (Jn 20,25), even though he should have been satisfied with the trusting look (to see and to know and to believe are one and the same thing for John). The scene is complete, "intact" in the unity of the crucifixion and of the glorification.
This is the significance of the detailed account of the reason why the legs were not broken, but the side was pierced with a lance instead (Jn 19,31-34). Surely here in the first place, there is a reference to the paschal lamb whose bones were not broken (Es 12,46) as perhaps even in Psalm 34,20s, where the Lord protects the bones of the just "that not one of them is broken". Furthermore, as St. John (19,14) tells us, Jesus was crucified at the same hour in which the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in the temple. The Rabbinical law, on the contrary, prescribed: "the slaughtered lamb's heart will be split and the blood left to flow".

That the cross be solidarity has already been seen from the ancient Church being in the same form as the cross; in fact, the cross extends itself to all cosmic dimensions its arms extended to embrace all. In the Didaché we find that the cross is σημείον επεκτασεως, and that such an extension can only be wrought by God alone: "God stretched out His arms on the cross in order to reach the uttermost boundaries of the universe" (Cyril of Jerusalem). The cross is inclusive already by its external form.

The internal inclusiveness is, however, shown by the open heart, from which Christ's last substance is given: blood and water, the Sacraments of the Church. The heart is understood in a biblical sense and, according to the common feeling (philosophically) as the authentic center of the spiritual-corporeal man and, analogically, as the center of the man who holds himself open to God (Sam. 13,14). If in the Old Testament heart is furthermore the seat of spiritual power and of sentiments (whereas the bosom; rachamin, σπλαγχνα, indicates rather the seat of the soul), in the New Testament both aspects are combined into the concept of the heart: "the whole heart" to God indicating the opening of the whole man to Him (Ac. 8,37; Mt. 22,37). Therefore, the hardened heart (Mk. 10, 5 according to many parallels in the Old Testament) must be renewed: a stony heart must become a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11,19 etc., cf. 2 Cor. 3,3). And if Greek philosophy, in the wake of Homer, had seen in the heart the center of the spiritual-corporeal life (for the Stoa it is the seat of ηγεμονίκον = guiding principle of actions), New Testament theology adds an incarnating moment (the heart as absolute concretion of the soul and as its total sphere of expression) as well as a personalistic moment (man alone, a corporal-spiritual-christian is a unique person by God's calling, and he turns this his uniqueness to God with his whole heart).

The wounding with the lance and the flowing of water and blood must be read in continuity with John's symbols of the water, of the spirit and of blood. The key word "thirst" also finds its place in this context inasmuch as Jesus quenches the thirst forever (4,13s), "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink as one who believes in me" (7,37s) because the believer's thirst will be appeased forever (6,35). Connected with this is the enthusiastic
promise that this water will become in him who drinks it a spring of water welling up to eternal life (4, 14) and the words of scripture: "rivers of living waters shall flow from his κοτλατα" (7,38). We have already seen that Jesus, as the absolute thirst, transforms himself into an eternal spring of living water. The word of Scripture must be relinked either with the theologian Audet to the ever present analogy of water and Spirit-word (The words of Jesus are rather "Spirit and life") or, better, with Phithian-Adams to the wellspring of water in the new temple of Ezekiel 47; cf. Zach. 13,1), with which Jesus has already compared His body (Jn 2,21). That John, in the springing up of the water and of the blood, had seen the institution of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist cannot be doubted, if one considers the general context of his symbolism (cf. Cana: 2,1 ss., the unity of water and Spirit; 3, 5, of water spirit and blood; 1 Jn. 5,6 with explicit reference to Jesus Christ who is "he who has come in water and blood"). The opening of the heart is to indicate the gift, for public use, of what is the most personal and the most intimate that Jesus has; all may enter into the opened, emptied space. Furthermore, an official proof had to be given that the separation of the body and blood (as presupposed by the form of the Eucharistic banquet) reached the very depth... The (new) temple, like the new well-spring opened to whoever wants to draw from it, is a sign of communion: the body given is the place of the foundation of the new alliance, of the new convocation of the community: space, altar, sacrifice, banquet, community and their Spirit at the same time.

23 The Church originating from the pierced heart of Christ on the cross is a theological truth and reality so polyvalent that it would require a book to analyze it completely and sufficiently. It suffices to emphasize here the birth of a true chosen people from the new alliance realized by the only fully acceptable representative on earth of this new Covenant: Christ who was pierced on the cross (here we must remember the image so dear to the Fathers: the birth of the new Eve (the Church) from the side of the new Adam (Christ) fallen asleep on the cross). In the people of the new Covenant, the "holy remnant" of the old alliance is brought to a fulfillment which is a surpassing, and in this transmutation, both creative and gratuitous, a kind of pre-church represented in Mary, John and the pious women, must be presupposed.

24 The Church, inasmuch as she is generated by the extreme love of God for the world, in the very moment in which the Father gives the sign of this love to humanity: the Spirit, the blood and the water of the pierced Christ, is herself love and must be love. This love, her essence, is her only commandment (Jn 15,12). It is significant that in John the love of the disciples for Jesus is expressed, (ten times) with "φιλειν", that is, the appropriate term for human love, whereas mutual love among Christians is
expressed, without exceptions, with "αγαπη", which is the appropriate term for divine love. "Friendship" is the bond of union between Christ and His disciples, as willed and proved by Christ himself, in giving up his life for his friends (Jn 15,13-15). On the other hand, the bond that unites the disciples among themselves is "brotherhood": feeling themselves brethren in the following of the same Master (Mt 23,8), all members united under the same head, forbearing one another, according to the law of love as willed by Christ (Rom 12; 1 Cor 13; Eph 4,11 ss.; Col 3,13).

25 According to the prophetic invitation of the Father recorded by John (19, 37), we lift our gaze to Christ pierced on the cross. We understand that a coherent exigency of faith is that the sinner, "inasmuch as sinner" (and such we all are) is really and not imaginatively hung on the cross of Christy the sinner presents to me a Christ who dies for my sin while I, without any existential participation, profit by this death and attain the life of God's love.

26 Paul expresses very clearly this exigency which he feels and realizes, as every christian must: "It is no longer I who live: (no longer as an I closed up in self), but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20) and he has already said decidedly what type of life with Christ he intends: "with Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal 2,19) "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2, 20); "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church" (Col 1,24).

27 To be Christians means to attain to and to live with Christ transfixed on the cross. If this exigency, the "form of Christ", St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "My little children with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4,19) becomes realized in Christians, the same experience of St. Paul is necessarily achieved: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20), "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2,19): Christ loves, acts, suffers in me. He has made me his collaborator; even more, an instrument of "His" redemption, of his saving mystery for all men. The issue becomes spontaneous for every Christian: "always carrying in the body the sufferings and death of Jesus" and not only "our" sufferings, through which not our life, but "the life of Christ may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4,10 s.), for the sake of His body, that is, the Church (Col 1,24). Thus only will the life of the Christian assume an universal "ecclesial", dimension.

28 The doctrine we have expounded synthesizes effectively the charism of P. Dehon, of his Work and of every SCJ religious who wants to be consistent with his vocation: love, availability of service (oblation), reconciliation with God and among the brethren in love (reparation) up to the immolation and the gift of ones life, in union with the divine Victim.
Within the Church, we are not privileged nor extraordinary souls. We only emphasize an authentic, christian, ecclesial dimension. We are called, therefore, by charism or service to bear witness, to be a reminder first by our life and then by our word to our brethren, often distracted and preoccupied with the cares of their family, their work, their earthly commitments, are easily forgetful of God, of the Gospel, of their soul and even that they are Christians. The Christian life is not consistent and much less authentic without the experience of Christ Crucified, according to Paul's doctrine and exhortations to the early Christians who, in greater part, were common people, engaged in their daily and often ordinary duties of life.

Evidently, as H. Urs von Balthasar points out: "There are undoubtedly gradations in the participation in the Suffering of Christ's death". It is what P. Dehon also asserts in his Spiritual Directory: "All can and must be practical victims" (that is, to participate concretely in the sufferings of Christ) by docility in following grace, fidelity in the accomplishment of ones own duties and generosity in embracing sacrifices" (P. III, chap. V. n. 98). "In the state of victim (that is, participation in the sufferings of Christ) there are different grades: Simon of Cyrene carries the cross with Jesus, not without frowning and cursing a little. The Virgin Mary and St. John carry the cross morally and have a heart pierced like that of Jesus" (App. I, III). Between the "patience, a little compelled, of the Cyrene, and the generous oblation of Mary and of John" (App. I, V), there is place for all categories, grades, shades of participation and solidarity with Christ transfixed on the cross.

(Translated from Italian by Sr. A. Konyok, csjb)