



A special vow,
unique or
inspirational

Fr. Jose Luis Quintero Sánchez, C.P.

Jubilaeum

An initial question as a provocation: ***Has the time come for us to stop calling the unique and characteristic vow of the Memory of the Passion or the Consecration to Passion, the fourth Vow?*** This vow, if we want to refer to the Consecration to the Passion or the *Memoria Passionis*, which expresses our being and ministry, is not listed in fourth place either in the Constitutions of the Congregation approved in 1984, nor in the Formula of Religious Profession (Const. n. 96). In both places it is located in first place. The Constitutions explicitly speak of it in Nos. 5 and 6, followed by those that refer to the Evangelical Counsels. It is true that it was located in this order in the formula of the pre-reform version

of Profession of Vatican II and in the previous versions of the Rule. It is also true that the way that we refer to it does not guarantee the way we live it. However, it is also true that becoming conscious of certain inertias, sometimes the result of what is comfortable, of what is “*already known*”, may help us to rescue and rediscover the uniqueness that has been lived distinctively and heroically by many of our brothers from the beginning. This is what the reworked Constitutions wanted to highlight, in creative fidelity, according to the spirit and mandate of the Second Vatican Council.

There was something they wanted to tell us and to inspire in us by situating it in first place ...

The following reflection is only intended to be an invitation to reflect – hopefully for at least for a moment – on the gift that the Holy Spirit offered to St. Paul of the Cross and which he, as a founder, lived, formulated and bestowed on the Congregation, thus explaining the reason why God inspired it in his Church.

Together with the personal and community experience of the charism of the Memory of the Passion, there are numerous reflections and studies that offer us insights and a means of discernment so that “*in creative fidelity*” we can fulfill our being and mission derived from this specific vow. Many of these reflections and studies, in addition to the most classic ones prior to the Second Vatican Council, emerged in response to the Council’s invitation to prepare a renewal and updating of the theology of religious life and its charisms. Inside the Congregational Magisterium there are some Circular Letters from the Superiors General: Frs. Paul Mary Boyle, José Agustín Orbegozo, Ottaviano D’Egidio and Joachim Rego. There are also some monographic studies by Frs. Constante Broveto, Enrico Zoffoli, Fabiano Giorgini, Carmelo Naselli, Antonio María Artola, Stanislas Breton and others that may exist in other areas of the Congregation and with which I am not familiar. Many of them are collected in the series History and Spirituality Notebooks published by the General Curia and which we can access on the webpage www.passiochristi.org in the “*documents*” category. In my opinion, the Circular Letters of Fr. José Agustín Orbegozo have recreated an essential and constitutive dimension of our life and apostolate containing great depth and insight, harmonizing biblical reflection and spirituality.



1. Consecration to the Passion, (*Memoria Passionis*), the Paschal Mystery in some texts of the Constitutions.

a. “*We express our participation in the Passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian, and apostolic. Through this vow we bind ourselves to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ. By word and deed...*” (cf. Const. 6)

b. “*We seek the unity of our lives and our apostolate in the Passion of Jesus.*” (cf. Const. 5) “*We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives.*” (cf. Const. 65) “*In the light of this, we seek to incorporate this vow into our daily lives by living the evangelical counsels.*” (cf. Const. 9)

“*In the midst of the people of God we constantly endeavour to live out our commitment to poverty, chastity, and obedience as religious in community. Observing these evangelical counsels, both individually*

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and as a community, enables us to contact Christ at a deep level of His Paschal Mystery.” (cf. Const. 9)

c. “By this vow our Congregation takes her place in the Church so as to dedicate herself fully to its mission.” (cf. Const. 6) “To our own Congregation the Church has entrusted a special share, of her apostolate.

“She urges us to keep constantly alive in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion, in which the love of our Saviour is so eminently expressed; and she looks to us by our apostolic labours to render more and more fruitful that redemptive love.” (cf. Const. 62)

“Guided by the teaching of the Church and our own consecration to the Passion of Christ, we strive to make our lives and apostolate an authentic and credible witness on behalf of justice and human dignity.” (cf. Const. 72)

2. Some elements that are implied in the special vow.

a. The title that begins the section explicitly dedicated to the special vow is: **“Consecration to the Passion”**. It is true that it has received other formulations in the history of the Congregation since the time of St. Paul of the Cross such as *“grateful memory”*, *“pious remembrance”*, pointing out undoubtedly the impossibility of compressing in one formula the dynamism of the Spirit that inspires different charisms. In keeping with other formulations of the most recent theology and spirituality we have assumed or assimilated the formulation of the vow of the *“Memoria Passionis”*. We could highlight the word **“Consecration”** in order to become aware of the dimension of **“God’s consecrating action”** which acting in us enables us and forms us. We affirm this from religious consecration which is the action of God that grants us the gift of the experience of the Evangelical Counsels, inspiring in us docility and commitment in our response. We could say something similar about consecration to the Passion. First of all, it is the Lord in his Passion who consecrates us, making us part of his Presence and Action in it and therefore prepares us and sends us so that, by remembering, He will make us **“memory, grateful remembrance, memorial of his Paschal Love”**. In responsible gratitude, we remember with our life and apostolate in order to allow Him to “remember” us. Our “calling to mind” is a response to his Consecrating Action in His Passion. This grace of participation and conformation precedes our action, which is a response in docility and free ap-

propriation sustained and enabled by his grace.

b. In this way, the charism of the Passion which is the dynamism of the Spirit inspires the way we live the gift of the Evangelical Counsels and, primarily, our Baptismal Consecration. If we look for a moment at the biblical texts that accompany the description of the vows, they all have as an inspiration and constitutive element the Lord in his Passion, in his Paschal Mystery. Poverty is characterized by the sign of Him who became poor by giving *“even his life for us”* (cf. Mk.10:45; 2 Cor. 8); the vow of chastity *“enables us to share with the Church in the universal love of Christ, who, came ‘to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.’ (Mt.20:28)”* (cf. Const.18); the vow of obedience immerses us into the Father’s plan of love, *“Christ freely accepted the role of servant, and becoming our brother was ‘obedient unto death.’”* (Ph.2:8) (cf. Const. 20).

c. The specific vow is the unique charismatic element that is the reason for our existence in the Church and our participation in the mission that comprises it. It is central to any discernment for identifying places and modes of pastoral action. It not only indicates locations and forms of action but also the types of presence. It is this vow that consecrates us to his Passion and enables us to perpetuate it in the history of humanity.

