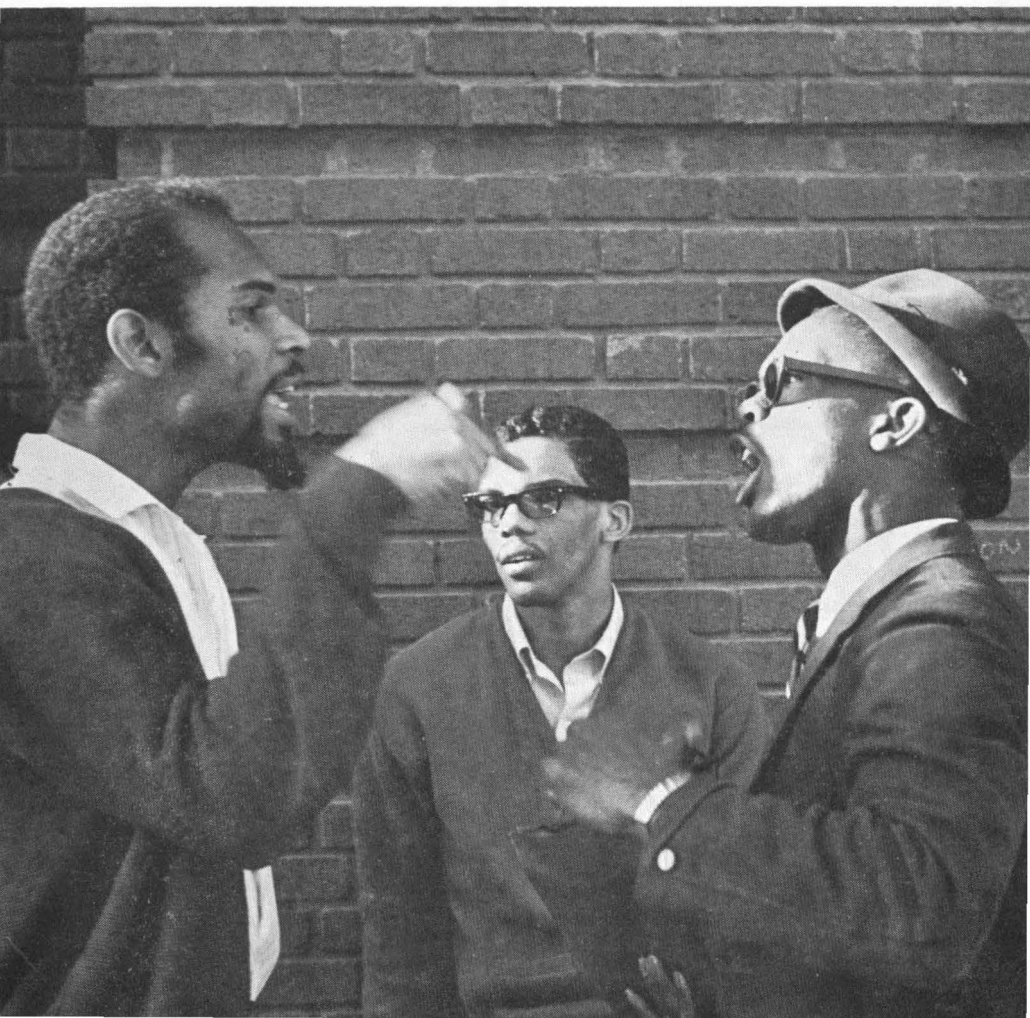


The Passionate Christian Life

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Part Two: The Individual Passions in the Life of a Christian

We live in an age of few emotional controls. Part of the reason for this uncontrolled age is a cultural one. Our culture as a whole has been in a state of reaction, a reaction to strict Cartesian-like dichotomies between body and soul, between reason and emotion. Such dichotomies led in the past to stringent attempts at "suppressing" the emotional side of man such that the "spirit" of man could reveal itself. This "spirit" was regarded as the "true" man. In fact, whatever was revealed was only the bare-bones of a man—a coldly rational disembodied "I".

In reaction to such a cultural heritage, our age has been influenced by everything from Freud to drugs in an attempt to re-emphasize the wholeness of man and the value of his emotional states. Often this new cultural attempt swings to the other extreme of Cartesianism. It emphasizes the passions of man to the detriment of his spirit.

What is called for today, then, is a re-affirmation of man as an integral being, a unity of spirit and matter. As such man can only act wholly; for example, when he thinks, he must also involve himself in thought passionately. His mind and his body are linked. One cannot function without the other.

An attempt has been made in the first part of this article on the *Passionate Christian Life* (cf: *Dominicana*, Fall, 1968) to offer a new Christian reflection on the place of the passions in the Christian task of transforming the world. Through an examination of certain sections of the Bible, it was discovered that the proper Christian attitude to the passions and emotions is *directional* rather than suppressive. When directed to the goal of Christian calling, the passions can be an immense aid. They are helpful in fashioning a truly human person. Through directed passions man lives a full and deeply human life.

It would be instructive at this juncture to look at the individual passions in particular, especially as they appear in scriptural writings. The most frequently mentioned are, as we might have suspected, love-hate, joy, and fear.

A possible objection could be formulated here however. What justification can be offered for regarding the mention of words such as "joy" or "fear" in the sacred text as purely psychological? Are we making a simple mistake in exegesis by reading psychology into the Bible? In answer it would be helpful to recall that the writings found in the Bible are about real persons, about human history as it unfolds before the eyes of the universe. And human history is carved out of

human emotions. Secondly the context often justifies an approach as we are suggesting. For example, St. Paul might mention his "joy", a passion, at the thought of seeing some of his friends again. Thirdly and most importantly, the frequent catalogues of virtues and vices found in the writings of sacred scripture and possibly borrowed from the Stoics, did not clearly distinguish between a passion and a virtue which directed the passion. This distinction came into being in later theological reflection. Thus Paul's "joy" we are able to say now, could be both human joy joined with the new energy or virtue of the Christian Life. But in sacred scripture it is described as one feeling. With these observations out of the way, we are now able to turn to scripture to discover what it reveals about the individual passions.

Naturally the Bible does not treat the passions with scientific precision. However some schema is needed for an orderly discussion. The Second Letter of Peter provides a good pattern for this discussion (2 Pet. 1:3ff). At the same time, care must be taken to remember that the passions permeate all the steps Peter mentions there. Having treated the passions individually, some important conclusions can then be drawn from the entire study.

The Individual Passions

The "new morality" of the New Testament is founded upon the "law of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2). Thus all moral action derives its power from the life-giving Spirit. The Christian is more and more ingrafted into Christ, his acts consequently culminating ever more in the joy of gratitude to the Father. In the last analysis the Christian life is a life of completeness. Because it entails a constant and proper use of all human powers, the life of a Christian will embrace all the passions, even those of anger and hatred! Due to the dynamic power of the Spirit which fosters growth, it would be expected that the life of another Christ grow in its passion as it grows in expanding perspective. And it does indeed. St. Peter's text emphasizes this growth:

By his divine power, he has given us all the things that we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to *know God himself*, who has called us by his own glory and goodness. In making these gifts, he has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through them you will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice. But to attain this, you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the faith that you have, understanding to your goodness, self-control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, true devotion to your patience, kindness towards your fellow men to your devotion, and, to this

kindness, love. If you have a generous supply of these, they will not leave you ineffectual or unproductive: they will bring you *to a real knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ. But without them a man is blind or else shortsighted; he has forgotten how his past sins were washed away. Brothers, you have been called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it. If you do all these things there is no danger that you will ever fall away. In this way you will be granted admittance into the *eternal kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:3-11)

Many of the ideas which we spoke of in the first part of this study are found again in this passage. Here is found the emphasis upon *knowing* God and his goodness in Christ. This knowledge is productive of a good life. Here too are found the positive and negative attitudes to the passions. The negative attitude allows us "to escape corruption in a world sunk in vice;" the positive attitude stems from sharing "the divine nature." The goal of the life recorded here is, of course, love and the attainment of the kingdom. The attainment of the kingdom is, as we saw in the first part of the article, the general kerygma or proclamation of all the New Testament writings.

In following the plan of this text, we will first discuss the meaning of the initiatory action of God and the basic passion of man. After that, we will treat the usual listings of the passions. In the last issue of *Dominicana* it was shown how knowledge is productive of a new way of life. The knowledge received produces a desire for the kingdom of God, so under this rubric we will treat desire and its opposite. "Self-control" in the passage above really applies to all the passions, but here will be discussed the special concern of anger. Self-control produces patience, or the ability to endure. This in turn is a likely idea under which to discuss the appearance of courage and fear. "True devotion" for the Christian is characterized by gratitude to the Father. Hence joy and sorrow will be discussed under that heading. Under "kindness towards your fellow men" love and hate will be taken up. "Attaining the promise of the eternal kingdom" is an excellent place to treat hope and despair. Note again: the Christian life contains all the passions at once; we have only taken this schema found in 2 Pet. as a matter of convenience. Then too, it might be recalled that the proper use of the passions is often identified in sacred scripture with what we have come to regard as virtue.

The One Who Has Called Us to Him: Openness to Love

Paul Ricoeur in *Fallible Man* lists what he considers the fundamental passions of man. Among these he places special emphasis upon the

need for a proper love of self, without which, of course, we cannot love anyone else. As our Lord said: "Love your neighbor *as yourself*." This is a difficult task, loving oneself. In fact, modern psychological research leads us to suspect that it is almost impossible unless we are first loved in the embryonic or early stages of our own human life. These theories and emphases are strangely reminiscent of the Christian doctrine of salvation. We are not able to love others unless we first love ourselves in the right sense. We discover a difficulty in loving ourselves properly unless first is recognized the love of God calling us to him and making us into new beings. Notice the progression. God loves us first; we then love our new selves in Christ; then and only then are we able to truly love someone else. God's calling us to him first tingles the very nerve-center of the passionate Christian life. Without this call, there simply is no life. And this is the call of love.

Christian Life Accompanied by Knowledge: Desire and Aversion

The first work of the Spirit is to cleanse by opposing the "flesh" (unredeemed man) and its cravings (Rom. 8:13). Summed up in these words of St. Paul, the guiding norm of Christian desire for good and aversion to evil is this: "If we live by the Spirit, let us conduct ourselves by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). The negative admonitions, the "don'ts" directed at the Christian, flow from the knowledge he has received about God acting in man's history. Because he has learned a new truth about God in Jesus Christ, he will not lust with the sensuality of the pagans which is caused by ignorance and hardness of heart (Eph. 4:7ff); nor will he crave after silly and wholly earthly things (1 Tim. 6:10; Rev. 18:4). This same new knowledge restricts the Christian's desire to fall under the power of false gods (Gal. 4:9) or to be the plaything of false desires (Rom. 1:24). He cannot be a slave of his undirected passions (Eph. 2:3; Tit. 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:18). Since God will judge him on the basis of this new truth he has received he cannot be false to God, seeking his own reputation (2 Tim. 4:3) or desiring to mold life according to his own wishes (Jude 2:16). The Christian is a free person! Yes, but free in obedience to the Spirit.

Directing the positive desires is the spectrum of what one learns from this new knowledge about God. As the Christian's life is centered in the Spirit, he will cry out for even more spiritual milk, desiring to know more about that which even the angels desire to know (1 Pet. 1:12ff). He will want to summarily respond to the grace

of Christ with an overwhelming apostolic zeal (2 Cor. 7:7; 1 Th. 2:8; Phil. 1:12; Heb. 6:11; Rom. 15:23), for God himself desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:1). Another reason for desiring what God desires is that He accomplishes and promises more than we could ever imagine or hope for (Eph. 3:20). As a result, the Christian both longs for the heavenly country promised him (Heb. 11:16) and longs for the companionship of all other Christians (see all of Paul's letters). Eventually God will satisfy all desires. In fact, he even used Peter's natural hunger and longing for something to eat to teach him about the common salvation open to all men (Acts 10:10)! That vision of edibles shows how readily God will initiate and fulfill all genuinely human desires.

The Christian Life of Self-Control: Anger

The New Testament gives many reasons for controlling anger, perhaps because uncontrolled anger was a common failing among the passionate mediterraneans. The central reason for control, however, is the example, the meekness of Christ. Another reason is the union of Christ with his Church. In view of Christ's example, the Christian should not let the sun go down on his anger (Eph. 4:26; Col. 3:8). One and all should pray without rancor (1 Tim. 2:8). Nor can a bishop be arrogant or quick-tempered since he is to be the blameless representative of Christ (Tit. 1:7). Even in the case of the positive use of anger as directed against what is truly evil (e.g., in Rom. 2:2 or Acts 16:18), it is good to exercise control over it at all times keeping in mind that man's wrath is not necessarily God's (James 1:19). Usually anger stems from some form of hatred and it is always better for the Christian to love. Charity unifies. It does not irritate (1 Cor. 13:5).

The Christian Life of Endurance: Courage and Fear

Self-control produces the ability to endure. This ability to endure or patience demands remarkable courage. Suffering and enduring its responsibilities without slackening, the Christian community stands fast in spotless integrity.

We can find at least three guiding principles governing this new strength. The first is a strong *hope* in him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). This is brought out in 2 Corinthians as well (3:12): "Since we have such hope, we are very bold!"¹ The second principle is *faith* in

the power and trustfulness of God: "He who calls you is utterly faithful and he will finish what he has set out to do" (1 Th. 5:20). The Christian endures because Christ was so great a master and example (Jude 3; 1 Pet. 4:1). Thirdly the community in Christ gives strength to its members and causes their spirit to rise (Acts 28:15). We would suggest that the proclamation: Grace is superabundant! contains all that has been said as the source of Christian courage. This conviction never leaves man wavering in courage.

What then is there to fear? Plenty. Suffering, shipwreck, the end of the world, revilings, even legalists, all are capable of producing great fear. Yet the sacred authors warn against such fear. The Christian should fear nothing in life or death, for the Spirit received is not that of slavery (Rom. 8:15). Having the assurance of faith that God is with him, the Christian can overcome these natural fears through the power of the Spirit granted him. Nevertheless, because of the supereminent power of God and its bestowal on those in authority, there is a kind of natural fear called "awe" which the Christian is asked to cultivate with respect to God (Acts 10:2; Rom. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:17). This reverence also is given to any kind of supernatural being (Rev. 1:17) and towards anyone in authority (Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:22; 1 Tim. 5:20). Besides this healthy type of fear it is also good to fear temptation (1 Cor. 7:2) and error (2 Cor. 11:3), but never to the point of neglecting to preach the "good news" (Phil. 1:14). In short: "God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:17).

The Christian Life of Gratitude: Joy and Sorrow

The fruits of love and hope will blossom into a life of joy and peace in the midst of trials. While joy and peace belong to the Christian life, they are not incompatible with Christian sorrow. The Christian might for example acknowledge God's gifts in joy while simultaneously expressing his sorrow for his own unworthiness. However sadness should never enter obedience (Heb. 13:17), nor should it take control of the person when he is overcome with suffering and illness (James 5:13); the reason is simple yet profound. Christ rose from the dead. It is this hope which sustains the Christian. Grief will come of course. Principally it comes from man's tendency to place more hope in earthly things than they might warrant (1 Th. 4:13). Not only can the Christian feel these types of natural sorrows, but he may also feel a sorrow which causes joy. Like St. Paul, he could be "sorrowful yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10). One reason for this joy in the midst

of sorrow is that the Christian might detect the need for inner discipline, even though humanly he would not like to face it (1 Pet. 1:6).

In any case joy stands out as a high point in the lives of new beings in Christ. Christians rejoice in the love of God, in their unity, in the continual presence of one another, in their new knowledge about God (Rom. 7:22), in their determination in the face of common trials (Heb. 10:34), in their common faith (Philem. 1:7; 1 J. 1:4; Rom. 15:32). Their common goal is to be joyful before God (Jude 1:24; Gal. 5:22). Because of the knowledge and guidance of the Spirit, therefore, the Christians are free from the animality of the pagans (2 Pet. 2:13) and are directed in joy and sorrow toward the supreme goodness of God (James 4:9). Unity of the Spirit in the face of trials seems to be the chief source of joy therefore, for the Christian. The community supports him in faith.

The Christian Life of Brotherliness: Love and Hate

Love and hate are the passions most often mentioned in the New Testament. And this comes as no surprise, since the outstanding virtue of the Christian life is charity around which are polarized both of these feelings. The influence of the virtue of charity keeps one from hatred (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom. 14:3-10), since hatred causes rifts and false judgements about the worth of fellow men. Both of these are contraries to the practise of charity (1 J. 3:13; Titus. 3:3). In hating one's brother one hates God himself (Rom. 1:30; the whole of 1 J) and such hatred extends from dislike of authority to God as well (1 Th. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:10; Jude. 2:8).

Nevertheless because God himself hates all evil by his very nature (Heb. 1:9), being conformed to Him we too should hate all evil practises (Rev. 2:6; 1 Cor. 11:22). Hence there is a kind of holy hatred which never should degenerate into a hatred of one's body (Eph. 5:29) on the one hand, or of a healthy chastening on the other (Heb. 12:12). As mentioned earlier, without the proper love of one's person, including the body, the Christian cannot truly love others. Even a holy hatred for evil must therefore stem from the more basic feeling of love.

God being what he is, namely Love, the Christian loves God and his brothers for this very reason. "God is love" is the kerygma *par excellence*. Any detraction from the tension of God-and-man-love is an aberration, a misuse of the passion of love. In this regard, the Christian must never love lies (2 Th. 2:10) or turn exclusively to this

world (2 Tim. 4:9; 1 J. 2). In latter times men will come to hate God himself (1 Cor. 16:22) and even lack the normal human affections of love, replacing in their stead whatever gives them pleasure (2 Tim. 3:2). The dismal contrast between sons of light (those who love) and sons of darkness (those who live in the darkness of hatred and faithlessness) is enough of a testament to the principal place love occupies in the Christian life (1 J. 3:10ff).

All the commandments are unified in love. Love hurts no one. Hence love guides the Christian life in multifarious ways. Christ's love of the Church is an example for marriage (Eph. 5:22ff). The fact of God's love for us first necessitates a return of this love back to him through one's neighbor (1 Pet. 3:8; 2 J. 15). This initial love of God for us turns men away from those passions which glue them to the earth (1 J. 4:20; 2 Pet. 1:7). Love produces spiritual health and is an example of God's love for all men (Tit. 2:2-4). As indicated in the last issue, the Christian's total response to life is that of "love in truth" (3 J. 1). Here "truth" signifies the immense love of God revealed in faith, and "love" means our witness to this love of God by its imitation. That this love involves the passion of love is plain from the various contexts of the numerous passages we have cited. All of the texts stress the inextricable connection between the love of God and the *genuine* love of other men.

The Christian Life of Promise of the Kingdom of God: Hope and Despair

There is little reference to despair in the New Testament. The reason for this omission should be obvious. If the Christian life is one of courage conquering discouragement and hope in the loving power of God, then all chance for despair would seem eliminated. It is still belatedly possible though. The evil man who hates God has alienated himself from enduring hope (Eph. 4:19), but such a man would no longer be a valid Christian who is living as it were in the basking love of God. Without the Spirit, then, man has no real hope (Eph. 2:12). This is quite an assertion, especially today when the value of humanism, even atheistic humanism, can be defended. What is meant of course is that the man without the Spirit would have no assurance of God's mercy, and consequently would lack some of the basic grounds for Christian hope. The Christian does have the hope of final mercy from God. For this reason, he is cautioned against placing his final hope in any created thing, money or personal gain for example.

These things are not the fullest measure of human achievement (1 Th. 4:12; Acts 16:19).

The real hope of one who confesses Christ is linked with courage, joy and peace, and therefore to the fact that God is not false (Heb. 6:18). He has promised eternal glory to the sons of God in Christ resurrected (Rom. 5:2ff; 1 Cor. 13:7). In brief, the phrase of St. Paul's "Christ in you, your hope of glory!" (Col. 1:27) expresses the norm and fullness of Christian hope.

There are also many passages in scripture where the natural passion of hope is taken as the analogue or basis of our supernatural hope, e.g., the natural hope of a farmer for a good crop (1 Cor. 9:10). By God's providence Christian hopes are surpassed by what God gives (Acts 3:5; Rom. 4:18). Trusting in this providence Paul's hope for his converts remains unshaken (2 Cor. 1:7; 1 Th. 2:19) where there was little cause for hope! Also his hope to visit or to send others to visit constantly permeates some of his letters (Phil. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:14; Philem. 4:22). This is true of other writers as well. See for example 2 J. 12 or 3 J. 14. As noted in the section on courage, hope breeds courage and steadfastness, for the reward is great. It is this Christian hope which confounds our enemies and sets them in confusion (Acts 23-28). God promises it.

Conclusion

Scripture treats the passions as immediately moral. Never indifferently. But that things have a goodness in themselves apart from any moral consideration, could be easily inferred from Paul's words: "I am convinced . . . that nothing is intrinsically bad" (Rom. 14:14).² Besides the implicit goodness of the passions, we could cite a few more important conclusions based on the way sacred scripture describes the passions. The passions can be used for good or evil depending upon their direction. The impetus of evil direction comes from *sarx* (unredeemed man) while the "life of the Spirit" governs the proper use of the passions. Sorrow can accompany joy in the Christian life, but the culmination will be a joyous obedience to the new knowledge received. The Christian life is a passionate life, a process forcing one toward ever greater love. Our final word, therefore, can be none other than that of St. Paul to the Church at Corinth. It constitutes a perfect summary of the discussion:

Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, live like men, be strong!
Let everything you do be done in love. (1 Cor. 16:13)

FOOTNOTES

¹ Also see: Phil 1:20; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 3:15; Rev 2:1; Eph 5:16; 2 Th 1:11; 2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15; Heb 6:12; and Phil 4:13.

² See as well: Rom 7:14-24; 1 Cor 11:14; Col 3:21.

SILENCE

His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1.18)

She could see the pain and confusion in his eyes,
She wanted to explain
but there weren't any words
and she hardly understood herself.
She could no more explain
than she could bring forth her baby.
It would come
when the time was ready
but now
she must believe
that the Spirit only hurt
to clean.

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