

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PERSONALITY OF CHRIST<sup>\*</sup>

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The invitation to study and then give a report on the personality of Christ aroused in me perplexity and alarm.

Perplexity, because it is always arduous and hazardous to express opinions on the psychology of men who belong to history, with whom there is no possibility of a consultation or a direct psychodiagnostical study. Some have tried, with varying success, to delineate the personological traits and psychodynamic motivations of great men of history, art, culture. But I have been requested to describe the psychology of the Son of God, a limit-case, a man in whom human nature is united with divine nature. While the psychologist can be sufficiently expert in the first instance, he is obviously inexpert in the second.

Alarm, because never did a lecture assignment appear to me so perilous and forbidding. Forasmuch as I possess the gift of faith, I have always experienced God as *God*. I doubt that I ever allowed myself to humanize him to the point of making him an object of diagnosis.

However, this meeting is dedicated precisely to the study of Jesus' *human* nature. In the light of the Gospels and the Shroud, illustrious colleagues have preceded me and will follow me in an examination of the human aspects of the Savior—his height, weight, constitution, physiognomy etc.—and I finally accepted the invitation, trusting more than ever before to divine Providence, besides the comprehension of my audience.

I will speak of the personality of Jesus with all possible objectivity and equanimity, with the experience of a psychologist as well as the humility of a believer. I take courage from the hope that my words might help us all to feel Jesus closer to us, more similar to us, more a brother, and thereby make him loved the more.

All great leaders of history have reinforced their charisma by confessing to their followers some little weakness, such as fear or quick temper, and have always drawn advantage from the avowal of their purely human vulnerability.

If a God approaches us to the point of possessing, like any mortal,

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sentiments of aggression, of anger, of despair, it means that the distance between God and ourselves is not, then, infinite, and that therefore even the major prerogative of God, holiness, is for us a goal which ought not to be impossible of attainment. Medical and theological literature is almost nonexistent on this topic. It seems that no one in all the centuries ever had the courage to reflect on the personality of Jesus, save in apologetical key.

I re-read the Gospels, this time with the viewpoint of a psychologist, and I made notes of the points in which certain human sentiments of Christ emerge. The aim of the evangelists was not to penetrate the profundities of Jesus' psyche; they did not make psychological analyses; they were content to be witnesses. But we all know that a personality is revealed through acts and behavior.

I do not pretend that my reflections are complete and definitive. My intention is merely to open a discourse which others, more worthy than myself, if they like, could carry further.

### **Life With The Father**

In the life of Christ, Galot says, there is almost an obsession, a fixed idea, which polarizes his thoughts and sentiments: the Father. Especially in reading John, one feels that Jesus "lives for the Father" (Jo 6:57) and that this love constitutes the basis of all the earthly adventure of his incarnation, indeed the motive and the purpose of his earthly existence.

We all know the dogma of the Trinity and we know the cathartic significance of the divine plan through which the only son was sent to earth to sacrifice himself for the remission of sins and the salvation of mankind. But let us try—with all respect, of course—to interpret this constant presence of the father in psychoanalytical terms.

The Freudian concept holds that in the subconscious depths of every human being there comes, during infancy, the "introjection" of the paternal figure, leading to the development of a new entity, the so-called "super-ego", destined to represent in each one of us the father, the law, morality, duty, the fatherland, ethics, tradition. The acceptance of the super-ego guarantees the psychic equilibrium, whereas rejection leads to neurotic conflict.

In the attempt to apply psychoanalysis to Christology, one could say that in the man-Jesus, the super-ego was accepted in totality. His ego lived in function of the super-ego, completely at its disposition, almost annulling itself.

This is not exceptional. It occurs in all the religious (for they renounce the demands of the ego, subscribing to the vows of chastity and poverty) and in all the heroes of whatever ideology who sacrifice all or part of themselves and their own egos in favor of an idea.

In Jesus, there are two brief moments, so very human, of weakness and of doubt; the first is the anguish of Gethsemane, when he requests the father, if possible, to remove from him this cup: and the other on the cross when, in dismay, he asks, "Why have you abandoned

me?". But in both cases the submission to paternal authority, freely and courageously chosen, abides unimpaired. In fact the moments resolve, the first in "Not my will but yours be done", and the second, "Into your hands I commend my spirit". This gives evidence to a perfect psychic equilibrium, capable of withstanding the shock of events as dramatic and prostrating as those of the passion.

It also explains the fundamental humility of Jesus; in his desire to glorify the father he does not want the homage of men to become fixed on himself. To the rich young man who throws himself at his feet calling him "good Master", he responds: "Only God is good" (Mk 10:17). Jesus is able to annul himself, directing the glory toward the father.

At this point, the psychoanalytic interpretation terminates and enters a new dimension. In an ordinary mortal, a super-ego inflated to that degree can bring on a crisis of the entire psychism, provoking grievous and neurotic inhibitions in the ego. Basically the psychotherapy of neurotics aims precisely to foster the maturity of the ego, to help it grow to the point where it can defend itself from the tormenting pretensions of the super-ego. The neurotic patient experiences the super-ego as hostile and constraining. But in Jesus—always in the hypothesis of an identity between God and the super-ego—the superego is accepted, it is welcome and pleasing, recognized in its divine, its superhuman essence—which is to say, above and beyond every human interpretation of existence; for in Jesus, the psychic equilibrium is perfect, without a shadow of neurosis.

### **Mary and Family Life**

The figure of Mary appears rarely in Jesus' public life and always in the background. There are no points of departure for psychoanalytical reflections. One can certainly not speak of the Oedipus complex. On the contrary, if anything, one might detect a certain harshness, sometimes bordering on inconsiderateness.

We recall the day when Mary, with other relatives, went to find Jesus, could not reach him for the crowds, and passed the word of their arrival. Someone says to Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are outside and are asking for you" and Jesus replies: "Who is my mother? and who are my brothers?". And glancing around at those who sat about, he said: "Here is my mother, here are my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister and mother" (Mk 3:21). Well, it is true that the cousins had come to fetch him back to Nazareth because they were afraid that he had gone mad, but it is equally true that Mary did not share this suspicion and, if anything, she had come to protect her son against their intentions (Galot).

And again, Luke 11:27, when a woman cried out, "Blessed the womb that carried you and the breast that suckled you", Jesus replies: "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and put it in practice".

Theologians agree in considering this severity only superficial. His love for his mother was infinite but deliberately consigned to his own inner being, almost as if he had left it in the house where he had lived with her for thirty years.

It is a good rule for the psychologist to withhold his opinion on the behavior of others until after he has at least tried to put himself empathetically in their shoes, in order to understand them better.

At the moment that his public life begins, Jesus enters into a new existential dimension, entirely devoted to his mission. To better understand that, it is enough to think of what happens to a man who becomes a priest. Naturally he still loves and respects his parents and family, but from now on his new and wider family must come first, and he dedicates himself to the many members of that family, endlessly at their disposal. Renouncing the love for the mother is an obligatory step, unquestionably distressing, for those who choose to serve at the altar of God.

It cannot be said that in the personality of Jesus the instinctive love for his mother is lacking just because, in the few encounters recorded in the Gospels, he does not pronounce sweet words or show any formal gestures of affection. True love can very well dispense with the superstructure of appearances.

These considerations also serve to clarify what would seem to be a demythologization of the *family*, particularly surprising in view of the sacred character which the family enjoyed in Hebrew culture.

Luke 14: "If any man comes to me, and does not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

Matthew 10: "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me."

Luke 9: "He said to another: Follow me. And the man answered; Lord, first let me go to bury my father. And Jesus said to him: Let the dead bury their dead. But you go, and preach the kingdom of God."

In psychology, family sentiment is a constant in every human being. Its absence would be an abnormality. But in Jesus' case, the discourse is different. Because his family really is different. He grows up beside one father and then at a certain moment lives with another. Human the first, divine the other, but they are still two.

In psychiatric practice, one meets with countless cases of "children of divorce". These children are inevitably confused to have two fathers or two mothers. Their family life can certainly not be limpid. Jesus is not a child of divorce but his experience *sui generis* could not fail to influence a certain alteration in family life.

Above all else, he must follow his destiny. Starting on his mission, he must renounce the family of Nazareth to give himself to the vaster family of all humanity. Far from denying the institution of the family, he exalts it.

### **Aggressiveness Toward His Parents**

Two episodes emerge: the twelve-year-old Jesus amongst the doctors in the Temple, and the adult Jesus at the Wedding in Cana.

It is a special kind of aggressiveness; calm, rational, and above all momentaneous, for immediately afterwards Jesus resumes his filial role: that is, obedience. It is an impulsive reaction but immediately corrected. This is aggressiveness only in form, without the least rancor; a civil encounter between two personalities and assuredly not a clash between two generations. An example of how it is morally possible and psychologically correct to disagree without going too far, to expose one's own opinion without dominating or abusing the interlocutor.

Let us read the two passages.

*Jesus among the doctors.* "And his mother said to him: Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have searched for you in great anxiety. And he said to them: Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? And they did not understand the words he said to them."

Whether he should or should not have done it, Jesus took this liberty without permission. He had disobeyed, had committed an inconsiderate act toward his parents. And even doubled the dose by reproaching them. It would appear to be one of those youthful escapades that every psychiatrist hears about, every day, from worried parents. We see here the apparent arrogance of the child coupled with the complete incomprehension of the parents. But the epilogue is different; different and educative. An adolescent who says to his parents, "You mind your business and I will take care of mine" is reprehensible but the words of the Child, as we read them in the Gospel, are comprehensible and pardonable. From Jesus' words emerges that serenity which will be the dominating motif of his whole life.

*The Wedding in Cana.* "And when the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no more wine. And Jesus answered saying, Woman, what has that to do with me? My hour has not yet come." But then, after Mary told the servants to do whatever he would bid them, Jesus ordered them to fill the six stone jars with water and he changed 500 liters of water into optimum quality wine.

This episode calls to mind endless cases of spats, often even violent, between thirty-year-old bachelors and their mothers with whom they are still living. "What do you want of me, woman?" "What has that got to do with me?" Such altercations, frequent and grievous, hurt the one who receives the brunt.

In contrast, Jesus' words do not rise from hostility or spite but only from surprise which, here again, is immediately corrected in submission and obedience. And the first miracle takes place precisely on this occasion after an apparently sharp exchange, and precisely at the invitation of the "assaulted" mother.

What happened at Cana? Why does Mary ignore the protest of her

son and order the servants to do what he bids, knowing in herself what Jesus will do?

It was a "parturition", says Dolto in his *Psychoanalysis of the Gospel*; the public Jesus is "delivered". Jesus resists because to be born to public life causes him distress. For Jesus is a man, and a man feels anxiety when he finds himself faced with important decisions which involve his destiny and engage his responsibility. At Cana, Jesus experiences anxiety: this is the moment in which he must lay aside his tranquil private life to initiate a public life which will terminate in the drama of Golgotha.

"My hour has not yet come" is not a nice way to say No. In psychoanalysis it is a *denegation*, the term used to define a defensive mechanism which subtends precisely the desire for that which one is rejecting. Mary seems to interpret this message from her son's subconscious and takes the initiative to dislodge that intrapsychical conflict and to liberate her son for his destiny. It sets an example for so many mammas who, instead, are incapable of cutting the psychic umbilical cord of an only son whom they do not want to grow up and whom they never leave.

And maybe it was in that moment, at the Wedding in Cana, that Mary truly became the Mother of God (Dolto).

### **Jesus' Humor**

Humor is a complex and durable sentiment. It represents a constant in the personality, a "fundamental" affective state, even though it can vary in the encounter of events rich with emotive resonance. Some people are prevailingly depressed, others are almost always placid. Humor contributes to stabilize the style of a life.

The humor of Jesus was elevated to the keynote of serenity—a serenity which never abandons him even during the trial—in tonalities of joy, good-heartedness, readiness to understand and to pardon. Perfectly in line with that message of love which is the leit-motif of Christianity.

Maybe mankind was ill-prepared for a messiah so different from the splenetic thunderers of catastrophe and punishment of the pre-Christian tradition of which the Baptist was the last example. Maybe the value and the success of the Good News are also rooted in this profound serenity of Christ, the man who said "I want mercy and not sacrifice" (Mt 9:13); the man who countered the vindictive and terrifying image which emerged from Mosaic law with that of a good God, of God the Father; the man who demythologized the rhetorical formalism of pharisaic prayers by suggesting that one pray in solitude, in humility, in joy.

It was Benedetto Croce, Messori recalls, who pointed out the mistake made by those who, like Carducci and Goethe, had imagined Jesus to be "an adversary of joy and a spreader of gloom". Those writers ought to reconsider, Croce said, and come to recognize that what Jesus loved and wanted was joy.

In contrast to the Baptist, who lived on grasshoppers in the desert, Jesus never disdained the pleasures of a dinner party and even in company not exactly edifying. As a matter of fact, he was also rather an expert of the technic of oenology. "No one puts new wine in old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the skins and the wine and the skins will both be lost", Mark has him say. And Luke adds: "No one who drinks old wine wants the new, for he says, The old is better".

His first miracle consisted of furnishing at Cana another wine to a merry company of guests already a bit high, and it was most exquisite wine. John, who is the author of the most "spiritual" Gospel, nonetheless remarks that in this deed Jesus "manifested his glory". It is a miracle on the borderline of blasphemy, Messori remarks; however it is significant that the first miracle was performed in a happy and festive atmosphere.

In the discourse on the mountain, which is a bit the "Magna Carta" of Christianity, one of the things that Jesus teaches goes like this: "When you fast, don't look glum like the hypocrites, who assume a wan mien so that men will see that they are fasting. You instead, when you fast, perfume your hair and wash your face so that it does not appear to others that you fast, but only to your Father, who is in secret". In other words, mortification of the body should be accompanied by joy, not by mournfulness.

True, he also says that to follow him one must "deny himself and take up the cross every day". But in another place he extols the man who ordered a feast to be made on the return of the son who had squandered his inheritance on prostitutes.

### **Sociability**

It seems to me gratuitous to attest Jesus' goodness. Nevertheless I must speak of it in this effort to make an "identikit" of his personality.

There are different kinds of goodness. The true kind is impregnated with humility. For instance, Jesus is not bothering to choose an impressive example when he compares himself to a good shepherd, capable of giving his life for his sheep. Sheep-herding was in fact rather scorned by Palestinian townsfolk because it was the occupation of a rude and nomadic people.

Another characteristic of true goodness is the faculty to understand and help without every violating the secret intimacy of others. Jesus never placed anyone in a crisis by words, gestures or glances. Never twitted a single Pharisee for the shadowy details of his past. Never put those quibblers with their backs to the wall, even though they tormented him with their malicious questions. Never took advantage of his knowledge of men as if it were a privilege which permitted him to crush them. His judgments were consistently, characterized by faith in a better future, even in regard to Judas, whom he kept among his intimates until the very last moment. This is what it means to love before being loved; the test of true goodness.

His disciples are his friends. He knows them thoroughly and they

know him. But he offers his friendship also to everyone else, even to those not disposed to accept it. Like the sower who scatters the seed not only on good soil but also on the stones and on the street. Maybe it was a waste. But Jesus is not afraid to squander himself. His generosity knows no limits. He is ready to share even his glory with his disciples; in fact he declares "I am the light of the world" (Jo 8:12) but then adds: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). Even while he reveals himself as the Son of God, he does not elevate himself above the others but tends to lift others to his own level: "Who receives you receives me" (Mt 10:46).

Jesus loves the poor, the unhappy, the oppressed, and he helps them with deeds. He feeds them in body and spirit. He cures them, resuscitates them, restores them to active society. Jesus also loves crowds. This is not the love for crowds of a political leader seeking votes and power, but the true love of one who asks for nothing and gives all. They reproach him for speaking in parables, as if he wanted to hide something, but parables seem to him the only way to teach and to make himself understood. The cultural distance between him and the others is enormous. He himself recognizes this: "I still have many things to tell you but you are not yet able to understand them" (Jo 16:12). But he goes on talking; if they do not understand now, they will later.

In the characterological constellation of the human personality, a place of importance belongs to the social tendencies; that is, the dispositions toward one's fellow man and toward human solidarity. In Jesus we find a sociability which is warm and sensitive. He never refuses an encounter, not even when he knows that his interlocutors are captious and hostile. His goodness makes him respect everyone's liberty of thought but at the same time makes him seize every occasion to renew his message of love. A love equal for all, disinterested, profoundly motivated, and if he does favor anyone he favors the weakest: "Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the persecuted ... "

A love which does not disdain pagans and sinners; he goes forward to meet them, he talks and eats with them. The Pharisees are scandalized, but the explanation is clear: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick" (Mt 9:12). And they have to admit that he is right. Only a goodness this disconcerting could open a breach in sinners of the calibre of the Magdalen and Zaccheus.

Finally, this love must be distinguished from the passive and contemplative love of the hermits. It is sustained and animated by an enormous energy, a part of a vast design; a love that is action. Galot defines it thus in a few happy words: "A fighting love, an exacting goodness."

### **Anger**

Matthew 21: "And Jesus entering the Temple threw out all those who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money-

changers and the chairs of those who sold doves, saying, It is written, My house shall be called House of Prayer; but you have made of it a den of thieves!"

Matthew 11: "Then he began to upbraid the cities because they had not repented in spite of the miracles he had done there. Woe to you, Corozain! woe to you Bethsaida! in the day of judgment more clemency will be shown to Tyre and Sidon than to you! And you, Capharnaum, will be cast into the depths of hell."

Matthew 20, 23, 24: "Do not imitate the scribes and Pharisees, generation wicked and adulterous, people full of pride, of arrogance, of pretentiousness. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, stupid, blind, whitewashed sepulchres, serpents, race of vipers, full of rapine and refuse, of hypocrisy and iniquity ... You are heading for a place where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Here is an unexpected Jesus, quite unlike the figure we meet in all the other pages of the Gospel, quite in opposition to his invitation to turn the other cheek. But it is not a countersense. There is no reason to be amazed. Everything has its limit. To accept everything and always to submit, without discretion, is a sign of simpleness rather than goodness. No human being is exempt from outbursts of anger, pardonable on the ethic and social planes only on condition that it is comprehensible and justified. Sometimes, when anger is occasional, and especially when it is exceptional, it is a sign of energy, of courage, of assuredness of one's self and one's own ideas. The inability to become angry is not the apotheosis of meekness and it is not a virtue, any more than insensibility is chastity. Anger (it is actually the theologians who say so) is one of the maximum and fundamental powers of human nature. According to Auden, it is even a virtue, even when a sin, because it conquers sloth. Gregory the Great said that reason rises up more valiant against evil when anger serves it faithfully.

What is more, Jesus' anger was justified by the obstinacy with which the Pharisees sought to prevent him from performing good actions. As when they accused him of not respecting the Sabbath because right on a Sabbath he had cured a paralytic and restored to a man the use of his ankylotic hand.

His anger is motivated, Mark explains, by the hardness of those hearts and therefore by the hope to make a breach in at least some of them. It is not anger against men but against the mentality of a sect. Still another instrument, however uncustomary, for sowing love.

### **The Temptations**

More than sin, the man of faith fears temptation, because this is a proclivity down which one rolls without being able to stop himself. For this reason, in the Our Father we pray that we will not be led into temptation. But as long as we live temptation lurks in every corner. No one can escape it. And not even Jesus escaped it. It is one of the sweetest pages of the Gospel, there where Jesus appears so much like

us, so much a victim of instinct, so afflicted by the pangs of hunger, so exposed to the assaults of the tempter. Here he shows in full the fragility of human nature and, above all, his own vulnerability. He too found it difficult to defend himself. And defending himself, he made known to us the surest weapon: recourse to the law, to faith, to that which "is written."

"If you are the son of God, since you have been fasting for forty days, tell these stones to turn into bread.—It is written: Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God."

"If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, since anyway your angels will save you.—It is written: You will not tempt the Lord your God."

"I will give you all the kingdoms of the world, if you will fall down and worship me.—It is written: You will adore the Lord your God and serve him only."

There are many kinds of temptation. Here I will consider one, the one which, in a psychological profile, can be described as an obsession, a phobia arising from uncertainty. There is an ideo-affective content which generates doubt, anxiety, depression. There is a compulsion, a coercion, an enticement to do something that is irrational or prohibited, useless or senseless. We think of the "temptation" to wash our hands, even knowing that they are clean because we just washed them a few minutes ago; or that of grabbing a sharp object to wound someone or ourself; or of throwing ourself off a balcony, etc.

Patients who suffer this phobia teach us an empirical and automatic system to defend ourselves, putting into action the defense mechanisms defined as "rites". Often it is enough to count, or to touch wood, or pronounce a magic word.

This reference to clinical psychiatry is mentioned only to confirm the validity and efficacy of the formula that Jesus employs and proposes in defending himself from temptations: the prayer and the appeal to that which "is written".

Let it be very clear that I do not indeed intend to lower the prayer to the level of a rite or a magic word, but only to reflect how that psychic act of prayer can, in pathological cases, also possess therapeutic value.

The conclusion of the episode demonstrates the clear difference between prayer and defensive ritualism. Obsession recurs punctually, temptation no.

Biernaert is right when he says that "the person who has passed through temptation is not the same as he was before." In the final analysis, therefore, temptation is a test more than a peril. Overcoming it, one feels "more worthy of God" (Lumiere et vie, 1961, cited by Biernaert).

### **The Despair of Gethsemane**

Jesus says: "For this the Father loves me, because I give my life to take it up anew. No one takes my life from me but I give it myself. I

have power to give it and power to take it up again" (Jo 10:17).

All the same, when the moment draws near in which, according to the scriptures, he must leave his human nature; that is, must die—and what is more, in the manner which we know—Jesus falls into the most profound depression. He feels abandoned by his disciples who sleep, by the Father who does not respond to his desperate invocations, by his own conviction that he has, himself, the power of life and consequently the power to give it in order to take it up again.

True, death is a part of life. True that for believers, death is a birth to eternal life. But it is also true that death has always been and will always be the most dramatic and most anguishing event in human existence. The human nature of Jesus did not escape this impact. He suffered like any other man and struggled to avoid, if possible, that bitter cup. Agony derives from *agonia*, Greek for combat; agony is the fight for survival. The real struggle of Jesus was an interior conflict (today we would say intrapsychic) between the instinct for survival and the duty to fulfill his mission. His psychic constitution, even as efficiently and soundly structured as it was (I would say it was perfect as his physical constitution was perfect), nevertheless was confined within the limits of human nature. It was, yes, sustained by superhuman motivations and by a rationality which remained lucid right up to the very end, but on the psychosomatic level it gave way.

I refer to the hematidrosis: "And his sweat became like drops of blood which fell to the ground" (Lk 22). This psychosomatic disturbance occurs when a violent emotion cannot express itself or cannot flow out through the normal channels of behavior. Such was the sweat of blood of Jesus.

In situations which strike terror, the hypersecretion of the sweat glands is normal. We say of someone that he was "so frightened that he broke out in a cold sweat". But at Gethsemane, the sweat of Jesus was mingled with blood.

Aristotle and Galeno had already mentioned "bloody draining from uninjured parts of the skin". Accurate analyses, La Cava tells us, have demonstrated the presence of hematic globules in cases of hematidrosis brought on by physical effort or strong emotion. The physiological explanation of this phenomenon is described thus by the anatomists Sterzi and Favaro: "Every sweat gland is wrapped around and penetrated by a dense web of veins and a web of nerves, each one of which is intimately connected with the others. An emotive excitement of the nervous system can influence the veins through the vasomotor terminations and provoke diapedesis; that is, the issuance of blood corpuscles through the capillary walls, so that the sweat contains hematic globules".

Jesus' depression was not limited to this somatization which seems to anticipate the announced subsequent spilling of blood; it also takes on the traditional character of a reactive depressive state. Not the unmotivated depression in which the patient cries and despairs even while saying that he has no reason for it—this is pure pathology; but a

"situational" depression which is the normal emotive reaction to an overwhelming event.

"My soul is sad to death." We find in this expression the two fundamental sentiments of depression, that which the Americans call "hopelessness" (despair) and "helplessness", the realization that nothing and nobody by now can help.

### **The Heroism of the Passion**

The details of the passion are too well known to be repeated. La Cava writes that a scourging was, in itself, something so terrifying, because of the screams of the victims and the mangling of the flesh, that Pilate ordered this penalty hoping it would satiate the Jews and move them to pity. As we know it did not turn out that way.

Then came the coronation: a crown of thorns beat onto the cranium by blows of canes. The forehead, the temples, all the skin of the scalp\*, possess a rich sensitive innervation derived in part from the trigeminal. These are among the most painful in the human body. The pain which those thorns must have produced in Jesus surpasses anything we could possibly imagine. Never in history was torture more cruel and atrocious.

Nor was that all. To the physical pain, itself such that only an obviously exceptional psychic structure could support it without fainting, was added the moral suffering, all the more intense given the sensitivity which many times Jesus evinced. The abandon of the disciples, the insults of the crowd and the soldiers, the false testimonies, the accusations of the priests, the slaps and blows, the spitting in his face, the mockery of the coarse red tunic, the tendentious interrogators, the "crucify him" of the rabble, the denial of Peter . . . I would say that only a man-god could endure all that. The limits of human resistance were, theoretically, already amply exceeded. Elements of comparison are non-existent, for after him no other person in all the history of mankind was ever subjected to an equal fate. I admit, as a believer, that suffering that torture was a man, not a god, but we must acknowledge with La Cava that "the power to patiently support so many physical pains and the strength of nervous inhibition which enabled him to tolerate with calm and serenity such atrocious moral traumas, stand to demonstrate the perfection of Jesus' psychic organization".

I purposely avoid every disquisition on the psychophysiology of pain. To do so would seem to me to defile the sublime significance of the sufferings of the Redeemer. For the rest, what more can I say? Every scientific study on pain is based on clinical experiments, but of these none comes even a bit close to the entity of the pains endured by Christ. I might only add that, for historians, Jesus manifested his

\* See "The Coronation of Thorns in the Light of the Shroud", by Dr. Sebastiano Rodante, in SPECTRUM #1, Dec. 1981. [Ed.]

messianic nature in the performance of the miracles testified to by the evangelists; but for medical men, the confirmation of Jesus' essence as "Son of God" is seen precisely in his inconceivable capacity to support the most cruel torture of all time, documented, moreover by the Gospels and the Shroud.

Was it heroism? Certainly. How else define it? But what a difference from the thousands and thousands of heroes of all the ideologies of all the ages! To no hero ever befell so bitter a fate. And this too we can comprehend. What is it, in fact, that ignites in a man the spark which makes him a hero? Only a motivation which transcends the existing *hic et nunc*. The motivation of Jesus was the salvation of all humanity, the establishment of the new and eternal alliance. A goal infinitely beyond any within the reach of man.

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