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THE PASCHAL MYSTERY AND DIVINE COMPASSION

By Antonio V. Romualdez

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Reviewed by Cory O. Villafania

The 2014 Year of the Laity has seen the launching of Antonio V. Romualdez's book, *The Paschal Mystery and Divine Compassion*, which makes a significant contribution to theology and Christian spirituality. Romualdez's work is a project of the 2B/3C Foundation, a group organized by the former students (the author included) of Fr. Catalino G. Arevalo at the Ateneo de Manila High School during his teaching regency there from 1948 to 1951.

In his Preface to the book, the author explains: "What I have tried to reconstruct in these pages are the reflections expressed by Father Arevalo" (xii)[1] in the Holy Week Lecture Series of 1999. The "reconstruction" is meant to capture the lecturer's goals for the conferences: "first, to try to understand the Paschal Mystery in more deeply personal terms, and second, to look upon the mystery of the Redemption … in a way that will lead to some understanding and appreciation of the Father's role in it" (xiv).

Fr. Arevalo asked Romualdez in 2008 to publish his "reconstruction" since he had worked "hard and a lot" on the draft of 2001 which

[1]Inline citations refer to Antonio V. Romualdez, *The Paschal Mystery and Divine Compassion* (Quezon City: Claret Publications, 2014).

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Fr. Arevalo himself corrected. The present book, therefore, is an integration of the reflections on the original Holy Week lectures along with "additional and more relevant scholarship on the lectures" which were deeply inspired by the mentor who taught the author with passion, faith, and conviction.

The contents of the book follow the sequence of the lectures given by Fr. Arevalo during the Holy Week of 1999.

Holy Wednesday—The introductory talk highlights the importance of "remembering" when participating in the Holy Week liturgy, very much like the *zikaron* (remembrance) of the Jewish Passover celebration. Remembering God's own loving message in Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection makes present what He did for us at Calvary and opens us to the future, to what God is going to bring into our lives.

Holy Thursday—The first lecture of the day answers the question "What is the role of the Father in the mystery of redemption—the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus?" (14) through a reflection on the Theology of Redemption[2] presented by the International Theological Commission under Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Fr. Avery Dulles' lecture on "The Death of Jesus as Sacrifice."[3] It clarifies the concept of atonement central to the Hebrew Scriptures as "the process whereby the positive creature-Creator relationship, after having been weakened, disturbed, or violated (by the creature), is restored by the Creator to its proper harmony."[4]

This is placed in contrast to the misconception that atonement is a "penitential action by which we can earn or make ourselves worthy

[2]Commisio Theologica Internationalis, "Quaestionis Selectae de Deo Redemptore," *Gregorianum* 78/3 (1997): 421–476; the Italian version was also published in *Civilta Cattolica* 146 (December 1995): 551–599.

[3]This was originally delivered as the Cardinal Pio Laghi Lecture at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, on March 21, 1996.

[4]Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London / New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 35.

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of God's forgiveness" (19). St. Anselm's "Satisfaction Theology," which says that only the sacrifice of God's own Son, equal to him in divinity and dignity, can make satisfaction for the wrong done to him by mankind, presents a "monstrous God" according to contemporary theologians. Rather, redemption is "the act of God forgiving on his own initiative as one who, by his being Love itself, washes away our sins" (29). The Cross is "that foolish love of God that gives itself away to the point of humiliation in order thus to save man" (43).

The second lecture is a reflection on the three major liturgical events of Holy Thursday: the Mass of the Chrism, the Washing of the Feet, and the Gift of the Eucharist, the common motif of which is communion, community, and service. The Mass of the Chrism presents the priest as the "minister of unity, that unity rooted in his oneness with his bishop, which itself is finally rooted in the Eucharist" (46). The Washing of the Feet also signifies oneness between Jesus and His disciples, a sacrament of how they love one another in humble service. Lastly, the gift of the Eucharist is presented as the "root and center" of "ecclesial communion" which, according to Pope John Paul II, lies "at the heart of the Church's self-understanding."[5] The Eucharist makes them "Church."[6] The most important thing about Holy Thursday and the Eucharist is "being given, and broken, and poured out for others" (62–63).

Good Friday—The lecture presents the self-emptying (*kenosis*) of Jesus "as a setting aside of those consequences of being God which would prevent him from being 'one like us in all things except sin'" (72). "Theologians today like to stress that God shows his power by abdicating power …. The only power he finally uses is the power of love" (76).

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[5]John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of the United States of America*, 16-IX-1987, n. 1: "Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II" X, 3 (1987), 553.

[6]At the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Aversa (Italy), on the afternoon of September 15, 2001, Cardinal Ratzinger said: "the Eucharist binds all men together, and not just with one another, but with Christ; in this way it makes them 'Church'" (http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFECCV2.HTM).

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Father and Son are so intimately united with each other that they have only one will. When Jesus looks at the Father, he sees only the Kingdom where all people are brothers and sisters. His teachings, his actions, and his whole life reflect this. "The Kingdom of God—the unfinished business of the Kingdom—is the placing of the poor, and the broken, and the marginalized at the center of our societies, so that we begin on earth the reality of the Kingdom" (86).

Compassion (σπλάγχνα) is what the Father and the Son have in common. The denominative verb σπλαγχνίζομαι means "to be moved from the 'guts' …. In the synoptic gospels … [it] is 'reserved' to God Father and to Jesus" (87). Such compassion was the reason for the Incarnation, for Jesus entering into all the dark and broken spaces of our lives, filling them with his love, taking them upon himself, and healing them to bring forth new life. Compassion was also the reason why he was killed. What Jesus taught was "not primarily about acts of worship or cult but about living as brothers and sisters in peace and love and sharing what we have with those who have not. He had to be killed because his preaching was too dangerous" (108). The Cross, therefore, is the full revelation of the love of God that will not be killed by death; it is His glory, the triumph of His mercy and compassion.

Holy Saturday—The lecture presents a theological reflection on the Resurrection and stresses that only in faith can we truly accept Jesus' rising from the dead.

> In the resurrection, everything that he [Jesus] had put aside at the incarnation because he loved us, because he wanted to share our lives, flowed back into him, and this is the Jesus who lives today, the Jesus in whom the fullness of the divinity dwells, whence everything of the divinity flows into us. (120)

The Risen Jesus who lives in all of us makes possible the *communio sanctorum* or the "communion of holy goods," enabling us to share one another's burdens, bear one another's sorrows, pray for one another, and making us more and more the Body of Christ, the Church. There is no scientific proof for the Resurrection; there is only a Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an Archbishop Oscar Romero, a Richie Fernando,

and so many more who have given their lives to the poor for love of Christ—all shining testimonies that Christ is alive!

Mr. Romualdez's book challenges us in this Year of the Poor and the Year of Consecrated Life to ask ourselves: Are we willing, like Christ, to abdicate power as the world sees it, in order to place the marginalized at the center of our societies, and there serve them as brothers and sisters? Can we be vulnerable with them so that we can love them from the standpoint of weakness, through which God's compassion flows to them and makes them whole?

This great work believes so; it is a book of faith.