

THE “EMOTIONAL” LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST
(Part 7: Christ’s compassion and a look at the formal and efficient cause of love)

Passionate words, physiological/somatic words, are used throughout the gospels to portray “emotional”¹ manifestations of Christ’s perfect love. These powerful and even motivating somatic feelings (as we have noted in the term *splagchidzomai*, translated “guts/bowels” in the KJV, cf., Acts 1:18; Philip 2:1; Col. 3:12; Philemon 7, 12, 20; 1 John 3:17) demonstrate the veracity of hylomorphism rather than some Platonic or Cartesian dualism, where the body and physical feelings are just not that important—certainly, not indicative of virtue or vice. Only in hylomorphism does it make sense to talk about virtue in one’s corporeal nature. Note how the sight of human distress aroused in the Lord visceral *feelings* of compassion (*splagchidzomai*).

Mark 1:41 And **moved with compassion**, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

Matthew 20:34 And **moved with compassion**, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

Luke 7:13 And when the Lord saw her, **He felt compassion** for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."

Mark 6:34 And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and **He felt compassion** for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

Mark 8:2 "**I feel compassion** for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat;

Matthew 9:36 And seeing the multitudes, **He felt compassion** for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 14:14 And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and **felt compassion** for them, and healed their sick.

Matthew 15:32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "**I feel compassion** for the multitude, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not wish to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.

¹ I use quotation marks around “emotions” to indicate to the reader my rejection of the modern concept of “emotions” that is so prevalent in society and in the Church. The modern concept is relatively new, reductionistic, physicalistic, far too broad, and falls within an amoral category. The many problems with using the term “emotions” as truly a definitive term is well recognized by contemporary psychologists and philosophers of mind. I use the term as a point of common reference before developing all of the attributes of man’s mental/physiological being: desires, affections, sentiments, passions, etc.

Let's consider some of the metaphysics of His compassion. First, a word about the reality of love and word usage among the Gospels. While the Gospel of John emphasizes the actual word "love," the synoptic gospels characteristically emphasize the product of the Lord's love: His felt compassion as His love resonated throughout His whole physical/hylomorphic perfect being. Moreover, it should be noted that the Bible explicitly warns a believer about shutting down his physical feelings: 1 John 3:17, *But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and shuts down his feelings against him, how does the love of God abide in him?* The implications (i.e., "love of God abide") could not be more far-reaching.

Second, with regard to love, it is important to understand its basic metaphysical structure. All instances of love (licit or illicit) are comprised of two causes: a formal cause and an efficient cause. The formal cause is located in the mind (e.g., the concept, image) and the efficient cause is located in the will (i.e., the desire). Both the formal cause and efficient cause are required before love of any kind can exist, be that love for God, Satan, or cinnamon rolls. It is self-evident and undeniable that without an object (image, concept) in the mind, it is impossible to have a desire/love for that object. In other words, love requires an object to love. It is also true that without an efficient cause, there can be no love. Think of the will as an appetite for the object in the mind. However, it really does not matter how accurate or even how good the object is in the mind. If the will has no appetite for it, then there can be no love for it. Love requires the efficient cause of the will, which is the appetite of the mind. However, the will has the power to turn from one good and focus on another good, from licit to illicit, from greater to smaller good, and vice versa.

An interlocutor might raise the objection that it seems like a person will always love what is greatest good in his mind—that the appetite/will will always find the greatest object in his mind the most desirable. This is indeed what Plato thought and what most modern liberals think: i.e., all one needs to do is to educate the people (put right concepts in the mind) and they will desire (will) to do what is good. This is manifestly false. Many believe God is the greatest Good, but will, nonetheless, often pick a smaller good over God out of preference for some immediate and limited, sensed good/pleasure.

The reality is that man lives in a sea of various and sundry infinite and finite goods from which his will can choose—he has many choices. He has the power to choose his good from among immaterial intellectual goods (truth, goodness, God) as well as his good from material sensed goods (food, drink, and physical pleasures). He has the power to suppress the Good of God and latch on to some temporal good. While he can pick his good, he cannot stop seeking and selecting *his* good. No evil is ever done unless the perpetrator sees it as a good in some way. Additionally, everyone is in the process of choosing and developing his appetites/tastes for *his* good. The more one indulges an appetite, the more that appetite is developed with respect to its object—the more that it is loved and treasured.

As we return to the above passages on Christ's compassion, it is important to note that it was not merely the physical human ills—the diseases and needs—, which *prompted* His response. These ills were rather looked upon as themselves rooted in spiritual destitution. And it was this spiritual destitution which most deeply moved His compassion for them. The cause and effects are very closely linked together as per Mark 6:34 and Matthew 9:36. In fact, the description of the spiritual destitute of the people is cast in very strong physical language: These people are compared to sheep which have been worn out and torn by running here and there through the thorns with none to direct them, and have now fallen helpless and hopeless to the ground.

Jesus physically *felt* "emotional" hurt or pain at the sight of afflicted human beings with regard to the physical ailments, as well as their hardened hearts against God, to the point that it caused

Him to groan and sigh deeply (cf., Mark 7:34, 8:12). Yes, Jesus experienced sadness, grief, and even depression (cf., Matt. 26:38).

While the spiritual conduitist may object and claim that if one is really in the zone of fellowship (a good conduit/channel by being confessed up), he will automatically have the divine fruit of supernatural joy and peace (Gal. 5:22) that will remove *all* feelings of sadness and sorrow. However, this is not true. It is certainly not the case that if a believer is feeling sad or depressed and confesses his sin that he will automatically become an efficient conduit of divine joy and peace.

To be sure, feelings of sadness and depression are not always sinful. As a matter of fact, many times it is only through such experiences that our faith grows richer and deeper as we seek and cling to God through the dark valleys. Is this not what we find in the majority of the Psalms? Is this not what we find with most of the prophets? Is this not what fits what we see in Scripture? It really is *not* about seven step programs to spiritual success and instant spirituality (conduit). It is all about concurrence: living with, before, and after God in the valleys of darkness as well as in the sunlight of every renewed morning of His faithfulness and love.

In the Sacred Romance,

Pastor Don