

Perception, Experience, and Submission in the Diagram of the Seven Works of Christ's Passion

By: Paul Goehrke

There are three main parts of this diagram, arranged in three columns. The column on the left is labeled "Seven Canonical Hours." It is a chronological listing of the hours of a monk's day, starting in the morning (matins, in the lowest position) and ending at night (compline, in the highest position). The middle column is also chronological, listing the "Seven Works of the Passion of Christ." In this way, each of the seven canonical hours is associated with an event in the passion narrative. In the right-hand column the diagram lists the "Seven Instruments of Remembrance." These are the five senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch), as well as agreement and free will. The items in this column are also linked to moments in the passion story.

It is the "Seven Instruments of Remembrance," that interest me most, specifically the reasoning for the order of the senses and the two additional categories. Unlike the canonical hours and the works of the passion, the senses are not bound by chronology or narrative structure. What methodology is at work here? A close analysis of the column reveals that the senses are broken down into three categories: senses at a distance, senses of contact, and what I will refer to as senses of a higher order.

Hearing and sight, in the first and second positions, respectively, are to be considered senses of distance. Sensory input for both hearing and sight comes without direct contact with the object being perceived. In the third through fifth positions, we have (in order) smell, taste, and touch. All three of these senses depend on proximity and

contact. The last two categories, agreement and free will, do not fit into the modern categories of sensory perception. For this reason I refer to them as senses of a higher order. These last two are the “senses” that separate man from beast. A dog can remember the sound of his master's voice, and a horse can recall the whip striking his backside, but only man has the capacity to bring himself into accord with another and be aware of his own freedom to make choices. These are the gifts only man was given because only man, among all creations, was created in God's image.

A monk engaging this diagram would do so with the caption below it in mind: "Prudent man, here contemplate, here meditate." This address is buttressed by the arms of the diagram, the diagonal lanes that link one column to the next. Within each of these lanes are specific instructions on how and by what means one should contemplate Christ's passion.

The diagram is a meditative complement to the daily liturgy. At each of the hours in which he was obliged to chant praises to God, the monk would also reflect on a certain moment of Christ's passion in a way that accorded with a particular bodily sense. As it is structured, the diagram proposes sensations of increasing intensity as the day goes on. In the first two hours the monk hears the noise of those calling for Christ's death and observes his flagellation. As the day progresses, the senses at a distance become senses of contact and the student becomes more involved, smelling the odors of Jesus' crucifixion, tasting his suffering in his mind, and experiencing the Savior's death with his touch. In the final hours of vespers and compline the diagram features senses of a higher order. It is not enough to experience Christ's sacrifice; one must *embrace* it. This can only be done

with the divine instruments of agreement and free will. The monk is first enjoined to consent to Christ and not to grieve, for Jesus died willingly. Then he is put to the ultimate test. The caption for free will reads, "As I made a choice on your behalf, make a choice for me."

The purpose of the Beinecke diagram is to bring the monk to submission to Christ through a series of meditations. It relies not only on the structure of the monastic day and the drama of the passion narrative to do so. It also depends on the ordered progression of the Seven Instruments of Remembrance. The movement from distant perception to an ever more direct experience of Christ's sacrifice creates the conditions for submission to the Savior. With complete self-sacrifice comes the transcendence of earthly concerns, a foretaste of salvation to come.