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**Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality**

# **CONDITIONS FOR BECOMING PEOPLE OF PRAYER IN THE TEACHING OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS**

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**Correction:** In booklet no. 9, in the article "Solitude: In search of a Value" by Harry Gielen, C.P., what is printed as page number 35 should be page 34, and vice versa.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This study is an attempt to stimulate reflection on some of the factors which provide the conditions for prayer, from its first stages through its gradual development to mystical union with God. It attempts to focus attention on the Christ-and-Passion-centered nature of the Passionist vocation, in order to facilitate the development of that personal relationship of espousal with Christ which is prayer, and which is expressed in keeping alive the memory of His love. Thus, Christ becomes the unifying principle of our lives. The whole of our affective life, and of our ministry, centers on Him.

Paul of the Cross used to describe the Passionist vocation in terms of growing ever more aware of the love with which Jesus laid down life on the Cross for us.

To discover this love is to be captivated by it, and drawn to make the gift of one's own life to Christ, and to others for his sake, in a giving which knows no limits, even to the point of delivering oneself to be 'flayed,' as our Holy Founder put it, if it were necessary to save a single person (1).

Right from the beginning, Paul used to encourage the young candidate to consider how Christ gave Himself for him, personally, and for the salvation of every individual. He impressed upon him, too, that most people were completely unmindful of this personal, saving love of Christ for them. Paul urged the candidate to let himself be penetrated right to the depths of his soul by this love; he encouraged him to make a radical and unconditional response to it, by freely opting to share the experience of Jesus Crucified, as a prelude to sharing His glory. This would eventually lead him "to undertake, from the fullness of his love, great things for the glory of God and for the defense of the Church, sparing no effort to this end, even at the cost of his own life" (2).

The humble obedience of Christ, and his self-emptying poverty, were the attitudes of Christ which the Postulant had to especially contemplate and embrace, as both gift and demand of love. Paul saw these qualities of Christ exemplified in the Christological hymn of the Letter to the Philippians (Phil. 2:5-11), and in the 'Sign' which was the visible expression of the charism of the Congregation.

The Word, undertaking the work of our salvation, divested himself of his glory, and assumed our human condition; he became a slave, and lovingly took our human experience upon himself, with all its limitations and contradictions. In this way he redeemed us and glorified his heavenly Father.

Hence, formation should help the young Passionist to enter on a new way of life through which he will be conformed to Christ, willingly divesting himself of his former ways of thinking as well as his possessions, embracing Jesus' attitudes of humility, of poverty, and of obedience,

He is thereby enabled to appreciate, and make his own, the 'mindset' of the Passionist Community, learning it from Christ Crucified. Only thus is the 'knowledge' of Jesus revealed to him, captivating him, and enabling him to experience what it means to be "plunged into the heart and Sacred Passion of Jesus, his Spouse" (3).

This interior journey is both the condition and the fruit of prayer; a prayer which focuses on the divine person of Jesus in his human experience of suffering.

Through this doorway one enters into the heart of Jesus, to the discovery of the love which blazes there, passing, thence, to the contemplation of the Blessed Trinity, letting oneself be drawn into this mystery until one is merged with it.

Current studies, aimed at identifying the difficulties encountered in religious life today, stress the failure to form religious in the specific identity of their respective Institutes, whether in the initial phase of formation or subsequently.

This lack results in an insufficiently grounded sense of identity, an inadequate appreciation of what it really means to be a religious, and, specifically, what it means to be a religious in one's own particular Institute (4).

The charism which God gave our Holy Founder, recognized by the Church in approving the Congregation, can only be lived with all its practical consequences when the Passionist keeps the love-inspired sufferings of Jesus continually in mind.

Unless one is convinced of this basic value of one's life as a religious, and finds expression for it in what one is doing, one hasn't that capacity for progress in prayer in the measure that our Holy Founder desired it. He saw a particular, God-given value and theological motivation behind a Passionist's prayer, stemming from the 'apostolic' nature of Passionist life.

Fabiano Giorgini, C.P.

## **1. ONE'S LOVE FOR JESUS MUST BE SUCH THAT ONE IS RESOLVED TO SHARE HIS EXPERIENCE OF PASSION AND GLORY.**

### **1.1 A Christ-and-Passion-centered Understanding of the Passionists Vocation**

According to St. Paul of the Cross, the first condition for a Passionists religious to be a man of prayer is that he be: a) certain that God has called him to this Congregation, and b) sincerely resolved to be conformed to Christ in his Passion.

Right from the first stage of postulancy, Paul introduced the candidate to the person of Jesus in his experience of Death and Resurrection, even before introducing him to the apostolate or the benefits of community living. He thus started him off with a Christ-and-Passion-centered understanding of his vocation. From this ensues both the necessity and the possibility of that loving relationship with Jesus which constitutes prayer.

In the 1736 text of the Rule he writes: “The servant of God who desires to enter this penitential retreat should, before he enters, carefully examine whether he is really called to this life. He should do this:

- by prayer and fasting;
- by frequenting the Sacraments, withdrawing from worldly affairs, and seeking advice from his confessor and other suitable people;
- He must examine whether he is resolved to suffer much;
- to be despised and mocked;
- to suffer calumnies and the like for the love of Jesus Christ.” (1)

These interior dispositions of the Postulant imply that he is entering into a deep relationship with Jesus, whom he experiences as someone living now, and having an influence on his personal life. Jesus thus becomes the ‘Supreme object of his desires,’ his own ‘Crucified Lover.’ There develops a loving relationship with Jesus, expressed in the dialogue of prayer, and in a keen desire to share Jesus’ experience under the impulse of this love.

This loving disposition to freely share the experiences of Jesus constitutes the fundamental condition for Passionists prayer. This prayer will be actively sought and conscientiously practiced for the intimate relationship with Jesus which it brings. It will, moreover, be proposed to others as a means of overcoming their own limitations, and of living in the fullest sense of the word.

Thus, prizing Jesus as his own personal ‘Good,’ the Postulant will find the courage to put into practice Jesus’ counsel to “sell everything you have and give the money to the poor; then come, follow me” (Lk. 18:22).

In fact, it was Paul’s desire that the Postulant, after carefully examining his call, and his willingness to plumb the depths of Jesus’ experience, should not only leave home, but abandon any security against his return: “If he has anything left he should sell it, or give it as an alms to the poor... Let him remember the counsel of Jesus: Sell everything you have and give to the poor” (2).

This is a self-emptying by which one divests oneself of self-interest, of the desire for recognition, and of the security that possessions give, an emptying which renders one capable of knowing Jesus as gift of the Father in prayer.

Yet again, in a circular letter to Superiors, Novice Masters, and clerical friends who were guiding young men to the Congregation, Paul expresses this Christ-and-Passion-centered vision of vocation. He says the Postulant should examine:

1. Whether his motivation for entering the Congregation is right and pure, namely, to save his soul and pursue holiness, crucifying the vices and desires of the flesh by observing the Rule, and to be a true imitator and follower of Jesus Christ. If this motivation is lacking in any way (and he should examine himself carefully about this) he would not receive God's grace to persevere, and he would place his soul in great danger, besides causing harm to the Congregation.
2. Whether he shows readiness and courage to undertake the observance in its entirety. This involves:
  - A Lenten style of life, but with food adequately and prudently provided.
  - Eggs and dairy products four times a week, including Sundays, in the Retreats away from the coast.
  - Every possible assistance and charity in times of sickness.
  - He should consider whether he is willing to remain in solitude, two or three miles out in the countryside, without going out unless charity or obedience demands it.
  - Dress: a woolen undershirt against the skin; drawers for decency; a habit of coarse material, with a mantle; sandals only, i.e., no socks.
  - Rising at midnight for Matins; recitation of the psalms while standing; an hour of meditation in winter, and a half-hour in summer; an hour of meditation at Prime; an hour of meditation in the evening after Compline.
  - Discipline three times a week, but without drawing blood; four times a week in Advent and Lent.
  - Sleeping in the habit on a straw mattress, with a woolen blanket, in a poor cell.
  - Silence apart from community recreation.
  - Being obediently subject to the Superior, like a simple, humble child; this is a short-cut to sanctity.
  - Willingly submitting to the corrections and mortifications which the Superior, the Spiritual Director, and the Novice Master will give in a kindly manner."

He continues:

"Let the Postulant take care to reply frankly to all these questions...however, there is no need for him to be fearful. Let him trust that all will be made easy with God's help, as those who have already been Clothed find, coming, as they do, from every sort of background, many of them very correctly and delicately brought up.

This Congregation may seem frightening from a distance, but, seen from close up, it brings consolation and joy. This is evident from the fact that the Superiors are hard put to stop people doing too much, rather than too little. That would hardly be the case if it were as austere as some mistakenly believe and report it to be.

The Postulants, then, mustn't be fearful. Let them take heart and come with good will, with a right intention, and with the above qualities, and they will find out from experience how sweet is the yoke of Christ, and how light his burden. They will experience true peace of heart, and, on their arrival, they will see this peace shining in the faces of their fellow-religious. They will see how kindly the Superiors treat them,

how gently they give corrections, and the mutual affection which exists among all the religious, who are all united as in one single heart in Christ Jesus” (3).

It is this personal relationship with Jesus in his experience of Death and Resurrection which attracts one to the Congregation, and encourages one to develop that loving dialogue with him which leads to mystical union with him. This is both a demand and a condition of prayer. It is also the fruit of prayer.

## **1.2 An In-depth Sharing in the Humility and Obedience of the Incarnate Word**

It was Paul’s desire that the Postulant show evidence of these dispositions to the Novitiate Community before entering on his formation to Passionists life.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, first and foremost demonstrated a great humility, whereby, though rich he became poor, and while being by nature divine, he deigned to appear in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-11). The Postulant must take on this attitude of humility and dispossession, making it something real in his own life. His life is thus transformed as he adopts the dispositions of Jesus Crucified whom he comes to know through his prayer.

Before beginning his Novitiate, the Postulant is to be tested:

“...so that it can be seen whether he is willing to be despised, whether he is really resolved to die to himself, to the world, and to his sinful inclinations, in order to live only for God, in God, and through God, hiding his life in Christ, who for our sake and for our example, willingly chose to become the reproach of men and the outcast of the people” (4).

According to our Holy Founder, this firm resolve to share in the experience of Jesus is the condition which enables the Passionists religious to enter on that path of prayer which is meant to lead him eventually to mystical union with Jesus. This resolve to share the experience and dispositions of Jesus alone guarantees sufficient openness of heart to let him come to know Jesus through his prayer.

Clearly, if these dispositions were required in the Postulant, then they were expected to be present in an eminent degree, and continually developing, in the Professed. They found a reminder of those demands in the ceremonies of Clothing and Profession.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Superior encourages the Postulant “to carry his Cross, pointing out the great joy to be found in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ” (5). Suffering and joy. The result of living contact with Jesus.

The conferring of the Habit, of the Cross, and of the Crown of Thorns are ‘signs’ recalling the Passion of Jesus. Their meaning is explained in the words which accompany them in the rite, stressing the vital relationship with Jesus which must continually grow:

- “Receive, dear Brother, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Deny yourself, so that you may share with him in eternal life.
- Remember often that you are dressed in mourning, in memory of the Passion and Death of Christ Our Lord.”

With the conferring of the Crown of Thorns, humility and obedience are stressed, in imitation of Jesus:

- “Receive, dear Brother, the Crown of Thorns of Christ Our Lord. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and be subject to every creature for His sake” (6).

These interior dispositions, which must already be present in the young candidate, and which must develop throughout his life, are directly in line with the Christological hymn in the Letter to the Philippians (2: 6-11) which Our Holy Founder wanted Passionists to proclaim at the beginning of every hour of the Divine Office (7).

This constant effort to focus one’s gaze on Jesus, together with the resolve to share in his experience, themselves already constitute prayer. They dispose the Passionist for the gift of mystical union, which awaits him as he journeys with Jesus towards Calvary and Resurrection.

This journey with Jesus towards Calvary also explains the austerity of Passionist life and provides motivation for Community living. This becomes more attainable and more profound to the extent that this interior union with Jesus grows within one, bringing peace and reconciliation with all one’s brothers.

It was Paul’s desire that the Clothing ceremony should conclude by stressing that Passionists Community life was a source of joy, even though this was realized by carrying the cross with Jesus: “Let the Superior, together with the rest of the brethren, express their joy to their new brother, encouraging him to carry the Cross with Jesus” (8).

Thus, the religious are enabled to acquire an authentic understanding of the dispositions of Jesus through their prayer, which, in turn, is deepened in the measure that they courageously undertake to share his lot.

## **2. HE RELIGIOUS MUST TAKE ON JESUS’ ATTITUDE OF OBEDIENCE, AND LIVE “BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT”**

### **2.1 What this Attitude of Jesus Entails**

Speaking of the manner of forming the Novices in prayer, Paul wrote to Fr. Peter, the Novice Master: “The Master’s whole concern should be to form (the Novices) in a firm habit of virtue and true humility of heart, a knowledge of one’s own nothingness and contempt of self, and, above all, complete denial of one’s own will in everything; internal and external mortification of one’s passions, preferences, one’s own opinions, likes and dislikes, etc. These virtues are the foundations on which the spiritual edifice is built. They are fundamental for obtaining the gift of prayer and union with God. Otherwise, one is just building on sand” (9).

Sixteen years earlier he had written to Fr. Fulgentius in the same vein: “Let us try to make sure that they acquire solid interior virtue; a firm foundation of humility, simplicity and purity of intention; a clear conscience, with interior self-possession, and with a firm basis of recollection. How much I want our religious to work at being interior men; men who know how to weather pressures, trials, and interior suffering. This is so necessary to purify the soul, so that our divine rebirth in Christ Jesus can be constantly renewed in pure faith and love. But the secret lies in knowing how to suffer these pressures in silence and hope” (10).

It can thus be seen that the conditions for becoming men of prayer can be reduced to one single condition. The firm resolve to embrace the experience of Jesus in the stark reality of his Passion. Through this, one comes to appreciate and experience the love which caused the Passion.

In the Rule, too, while Paul recommends that the Master take care to instruct the Novices in “holy prayer,” he is at pains to stress that he must, at the same time, instruct them “in the practice of the virtues, particularly contempt of self, ensuring that they practice denial of their own will and judgement, making them overcome their dislikes, and mortify their sinful inclinations” (11).

In Paul’s mind, it is clear that a religious can live authentically by Jesus’ spirit, only if he forms a relationship with him which entails sharing his humility and his obedience, even to the death of the Cross. Thus, he always conducts himself “as one who lives in God’s presence, and seeks only to please him.” This mode of acting “as one who lives in God’s presence” means making the Father’s will one’s own, as Jesus did; it means letting go of oneself, in order to let oneself be possessed only by the Father in Jesus.

Paul sees this conformity to the will of the Father as a way of “paying gentle and loving attention to the presence of God in all that one does.” Such an attitude is “a way of praying always, and of perfuming everything one does with the sweet balm of holy love” (12). Thus lived Jesus Himself in the presence of his Father, nourishing himself on his divine will (Jn. 8:29).

For our Holy Founder, it is impossible to enter into authentic prayer without entering into the obediential attitude of Jesus, because prayer means establishing an intimate relationship with him, and the man who doesn’t embrace the characteristic attitude of Jesus cannot enjoy intimacy with him in prayer.

Prayer, in fact, is none other than an opening of oneself to the mystery of God’s will; recognizing it, loving it, and putting it into practice by renouncing one’s own will. In other words, dying mystically with Jesus on the Cross, and coming to birth again in Him as a son of God.

## **2.2 Attaining ‘Mystical Death’ Entails Making Oneself Available for a Deepening of One’s Prayer**

In his Treatise on ‘Mystical Death’, Paul stresses: “Jesus, one must die and obey... it is your will that I die with you on the Cross. Mystical death...in blind faith I must run to the source of the divine pleasure... not seeking myself, but only that God may do as He will. Doing his holy will I shall become as nothing... I shall offer him always the gift of my pure and naked will...to die from sheer love of him... I shall die completely to myself, in order to live only for God; and for God I will surely die, for without Him I cannot live” (13).

All this is to carry to their ultimate consequences the most prominent qualities of Jesus’ life; humility and obedience, motivated by love. “A holy death, which permits one to live by the true spirit of Jesus” (14). It means choosing to lose one’s life for Jesus, who gave his life for us; it is a total and radical acceptance of Jesus. This makes prayer possible, in terms of a loving exchange with one’s Crucified Lover.

Paul put this reality of ‘Mystical Death’ before the Passionist in the Profession ceremony. There is a meditative reading of the Passion of Jesus according to St. John. In that very moment when

the Passionist hears, in an attitude of profound adoration, that Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit,” the final decision matures to offer himself in sacrifice with Jesus, “the better to be united with God” (15).

As he offers himself to the Father in union with Jesus, the faith which inspires the Passionist leaves him no other course than to live his own God-given human experience in the self-same spirit which inspired Jesus, his Spouse. This attitude of obedience is, for Paul, “the foundation stone of perfection.” Thus, he can say, “Blessed are they who do everything in holy obedience, in imitation of Jesus Christ, who became obedient to death, death on the Cross” (16).

In many different ways, Paul puts stress on these Christ-like qualities of humility and obedience. He holds them to be essential for learning the wisdom of the Cross, and to be disposed for mystical union in prayer.

‘Mystical Death’ is in direct relationship with prayer, since it is in prayer that one comes to ‘know’ Jesus; it is in prayer that one gains an appreciation of, and desire for, intimate loving union with him.

As a logical consequence, one desires to share his death, caused by sin. This one does by putting sin to death within oneself, in whatever form it assumes, recognizing it as the cause of the suffering and death of Jesus. One desires to take on the virtues of Jesus, the New Man, in order to come to life in him and through him.

It is especially by this radical assumption of Jesus’ humility and obedience that ‘Mystical Death’ becomes a reality. The attitude of pride and self-sufficiency is the root of sin in all its various guises.

In prayer, Jesus Crucified imparts his own interior dispositions to the religious. In the measure in which the religious then incorporates these dispositions into his concrete daily living, he is transformed mystically in Jesus. He enters into a high degree of unitive prayer. He receives the gift of peace and interior serenity as a pledge and guarantee of his betrothal with Love Crucified, and finds that he, too, is crucified with Jesus through love.

This seems faithful to Paul’s line of thought. His advice to the Novice Master — the point from which we started — was aimed at forming the Novices in prayer, and leading them in the way of unitive prayer.

In that same letter, Paul reaffirmed: “Affective prayer, in pure faith, the prayer of deep recollection or infused prayer, is a free gift of God. No one should presume to aspire to it by dint of his own efforts, so to speak. The Master’s whole concern” should be to prepare the Novices for this gift of God, encouraging them to take on those dispositions of Christ of which we have spoken.

In this way, the Novices could even experience “Mystical Death.” Our Holy Founder sent his treatise on this to the Novice Master, so that he could explain it to them “after they had made some significant progress in prayer and virtue” (17).

### **3. RECOLLECTION AND PRAYER**

### **3.1 What Recollection Entails, and Why it Is Necessary for Prayer**

Recollection means concentrating all one's spiritual faculties – understanding, will, imagination, attention, and affections – on a person or an object which interests and attracts one. Paul of the Cross considered it logical that the religious should concentrate these spiritual faculties on God, for Whom he lives, and Whom he wishes to proclaim to others.

Given the disproportion that exists between the transcendence and immensity of God, and our limited human capacity, the religious should naturally attempt to “recollect” himself completely on the person of God. He should make the greatest possible space in his life for God, removing from his already restricted world, anything which impedes his complete receptivity to the Incarnate Word.

Our Holy Founder defines recollection thus: “A frequent stirring up of one's faith, keeping oneself, as much as possible, in loving, gentle attention to the presence of God in everything that one does.” Recollection, thus understood and put into practice, is like a fragrance permeating all one's activities, which are motivated solely by theological charity (18).

For Paul, the recollected religious is an ‘interior man,’ a person who has ‘an interior spirit;’ that is, one who acts by the instinct of faith. His actions flow from theological charity, and are never superficial.

Thus, he urges the Novice Master so to form the young men that they act “with an interior spirit, affection of heart, and purity of intention; that they conduct themselves always as people who live in God's presence, and seek only to please Him” (19).

The reason for, indeed the necessity of recollection, derives from that personal relationship of ‘betrothal’ which the religious should have with Jesus. Jesus attracts and captivates a person, inviting him to center all his affections and attention on Himself, as happens when human beings fall in love. From this is born that loving exchange which constitutes unitive prayer, and which gradually develops in depth and intensity.

But a religious can make no progress in prayer, nor can he maintain this desire for dialogue with Jesus, unless he separates himself psychologically from persons, from things, from the wisdom of this world, and from his own purely human wisdom, in order to possess the wisdom of Jesus and the gift of ‘knowing’ Him, rediscovering himself in Jesus, in order to share his Passion and the power of his Resurrection (Phil. 3:8-12).

Therefore, it was our Holy Founder's wish that the ascetical formation of the Novice should teach him how to guard his senses, particularly his eyes; to control his urge to be talking, and his curiosity to know what was going on in the world; to control his imagination by being selective, choosing those images which he finds more helpful in achieving and maintaining interior recollection (20). This should continue after profession.

Paul used to remind all the religious that progress in prayer was impossible without a conscientious effort to maintain recollection during the day, remaining in real internal and external solitude, practicing mortification, and giving the spirit of Jesus room to breathe within oneself (21).

### 3.2 Solitude, Silence, and Prayer

To foster recollection, Paul wanted external solitude for his religious, to help them establish and deepen this loving relationship with Jesus. Thus, “the servants of God, after their apostolic labours,” could withdraw “from the bustle of the world to recollect their spirit by prayer and fasting. Their love for Jesus thus rekindled, they are ready and eager to go out again to sow the holy seed of God’s word, promoting in the hearts of the faithful a devoted remembrance of the Passion and Death of Jesus, our Sovereign Good” (22).

For the same reason, he reminds the missionaries of the necessity of remaining in solitude “at the feet of the Crucified,” when they come back from the missions, “without seeking to go out; as if there were no other places nearby.”

He also recommends that the Superior should not, “without strict necessity,” allow the missionary to go out, “so that he may have more opportunity for recollection and rest at the foot of the Cross” (23). Paul reminded all the religious that “dealings with the world destroy interior recollection,” and without interior recollection they are not “capable of receiving heavenly insights to acquire true wisdom,” in other words, they are not capable of applying themselves to prayer (24).

For solitude to maintain and deepen recollection, it must be wed to silence, which, according to Paul, “is the soul of a well-ordered community, and creates recollection” (25). This involves more than not speaking during the ‘great silence,’ or speaking quietly, when necessity demands it, at other moments of the day. It includes avoiding noise in the way one walks, or opens and closes doors and windows, “so as not to break the silence and disturb the recollection of the religious,” as Paul writes (26). This golden silence, which quiets both speech and imagination, fosters a loving dialogue with Jesus, preparing one for, and continuing, that more intimate dialogue of prayer.

It was for this reason that our Holy Founder gave each religious his own cell. Though this might be construed as a relaxation of poverty, Paul didn’t hesitate about it, because there was a greater value at stake – loving dialogue with Jesus. This was what the religious was to use his cell for. He was not to use it for his own comfort, with his thoughts still in the world; that would be an insult to poverty, and a betrayal of the purpose for which the cell was given to him.

Paul wrote: “When they are alone there, let them take care to dismiss from their minds anything that is not God, or of God. Let them keep the Crucifix continually before their eyes, lovingly, and often kissing the sacred wounds, the heart continually making acts of love towards our Sovereign Good. Let them often make ejaculatory prayers; offering these vocally in times of dryness is a wonderful help to recollection. Let them study the same way as they walk – one foot raised, and one on the ground – that is, with their mind on the book and their heart on God” (27).

Even during meals, stress was placed on communion with God by means of silence and spiritual reading. Thus one could remain centered on God, instead of being absorbed merely in the process of eating (28).

This union with God is to be fostered even during journeys undertaken for the ministry or for some other legitimate reason. Thus, when travelling, the religious should maintain “recollection and reserve.” He should keep silent in order to listen to the voice of God who is present in his own heart, and whom he can contemplate as he reveals himself in nature; present, too, Eucharistically, in the churches dotted around the countryside, where he can be adored with a genuflection, made in faith. The religious should converse about edifying things, so that they may be “inflamed with God’s love” (29).

As noted above, all this is at the service of prayer. “Let them remember,” wrote our Holy Founder, “that they will never make any progress in prayer unless they remain recollected during the day, loving internal and external solitude and mortification, and being faithful to the smallest observance of the Rule” (30).

### **3.3 Recollection, Mental Health, and Prayer**

Recollection, aimed at fostering a loving relationship with Christ, should not be the cause of any mental stress, since it helps fulfill a person’s deepest psychological needs. Paul resolutely insisted on maintaining serenity and peace of heart, and cultivating recollection in a spirit of love and mental relaxation.

To the Novice Master he wrote: “Be especially careful about these three or four things: 1) That they never strain, but do everything with peace of mind, without ever forcing the mind or heart; 2) that they never give way to scruples, or get down at heart. If this happens, they should come and talk over their temptations, scruples, and troubles with you straightaway. Novices are usually troubled like this, especially in the beginning; 3) that they don’t concentrate so as to force their mind to stay recollected in God’s presence. Instead, let them use little aspirations and prayers from the heart from time to time. They shouldn’t hurry this; they should give one affection time to perfume their spirit, without being anxious to pass on to another. I remind you that forcing the mind and the heart, and straining to concentrate, are the ruin of the poor young fellows — they are useless for anything afterwards... See that they get the food they need, according to the Rule... See that the Novices are happy and contented in recreation; whatever happens they should uplift the spirit, and not dissipate it” (31).

Our Holy Founder showed the same sort of concern for all the religious, even those not in formation. He urged them to seek help from the Spiritual Director or the Superior in handling the problems they would inevitably face, and to maintain their peace of heart, “because without this interior peace, one accomplished little or nothing, or else only at great cost” (32).

Solitary walk was provided with this psychological balance in mind. This was an opportunity for the religious to get some fresh air and exercise. It helped maintain and develop physical and psychological balance. No one was to exempt himself from this, even under the pretext of being more recollected: “Let them all go for a walk, to get some fresh air and to clear the head as an aid to interior recollection.”

He also urged them to listen to God’s voice speaking to them from nature: “Let them see the greatness, the beauty, and the majesty of God in the flowers and the fields, the sun and the sky. Outdoors, let them pour forth their heart to God...; they may take a little devotional book or the

New Testament with them, kindling their love for God with a word or a sentiment from these” (33).

A healthy mind, and a balanced nervous system help a person focus his affections on Jesus; they demonstrate the positive influence Jesus has on the man who entrusts himself totally to Him.

These quotes from the official sources of the Congregation show clearly enough that our Holy Founder regarded recollection as both a condition for a Passionist’s prayer, and its continuation. The whole structure or ‘ambience’ of the Retreat, and its day-to-day organization, were carefully orientated to prayer and recollection and to the study necessary for the apostolic ministry. Recollection and prayer, far from discouraging apostolic involvement, qualify one for it, and guarantee its success.

#### **4. APOSTOLIC LIFE AND PRAYER**

##### **4.1 “Apostolic Life” in Relation to Prayer in the Spirituality of Our Holy Founder**

Thus far we have discussed the basic conditions for devoting oneself successfully to prayer. We now look at apostolic life as demanding a life of prayer, and as the very fruit of prayer.

In our Holy Founder’s time, and in his spirituality, ‘Apostolic Life’ meant imitation of the life of the Apostles as they observed the norms Jesus gave them when He sent them out to preach, two by two.

Pledged to live with Jesus and to assimilate his teaching and his vision of the world, they go out to preach the Kingdom of God. Poor in human resources, but enriched by their faith and their experience of God, they are an effective sign of the living presence of Jesus.

Paul writes: The life of Passionists “is not unlike that of the Apostles; even more, it is totally conformed to these, and the apostles’ conduct is the norm for the Constitutions, which endeavour to form a man totally God-centered, totally apostolic, a man of prayer, detached from the world, from things, from himself, so that he may, in all truth, be called a disciple of Jesus Christ, and may beget many sons for heaven” (34).

Clearly, for Paul, being an apostolic man means living the conditions that allow one to be a man of prayer; only such a man is qualified to proclaim Jesus effectively.

In the Rule, our Holy Founder stresses the union of prayer and apostolic life. He says that Passionists must strive “to be tireless in prayer, for their own sakes, as a means to union with God, and also to set their neighbors on the same path, instructing them in the simplest way possible in this holy practice” (35). To set one’s neighbor on the path to union with God through meditation is the fruit of the religious’ prayer, and, at the same time, demands that he be a man of prayer.

With good reason was Paul able to say that in solitude, and within the ambience of the Retreat, Passionists have “every opportunity to sanctify themselves for the benefit of their neighbor... preparing themselves for battle, they go out into the field to wage war against the common foe,

to destroy sin, and to instill in the hearts of the faithful a tender remembrance of the Passion of Jesus Christ, our True Good” (36).

The more Jesus becomes the psychological and spiritual focus of the religious, the more concerned he becomes about the salvation of his neighbor; his prayer teaches him that Jesus considered each one of them worth giving his life for: “Let them all have at heart the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of their neighbor, and the deliverance of souls from Purgatory. To this end, they should frequently offer to God the Passion, Death, and Precious Blood of Jesus. They should be zealous in doing this, as something proper to our Institute” (37).

Paul’s attitude with regard to the relationship between apostolate and prayer was not new. All the itinerant preachers held that a deep experience of God was necessary if one was to proclaim his word effectively. There is, indeed, a relationship between the proclamation of the word and the effect of conversion brought about by faith within a person.

The preacher should also assist the faithful by means of his prayer and his penitential life. Uniting these with the sacrifice of Jesus, he begs the graces necessary for conversion and perseverance. Thus, Paul, following the example of so many other holy itinerant preachers, takes the Gospel seriously when it says: “This kind of demon cannot be cast out by any other means, except by prayer and fasting” (Mk. 9:28) (38).

In Paul’s view, all the time spent in the Retreat, dedicated to study and, above all, to prayer and penance, is orientated to the apostolate, because that part of the life is pure ‘apostolic life.’

In fact, speaking of preaching, Paul says: “We prescribe no particular rule for the spiritual exercises which should accompany a work of such great importance. Mindful that all the religious in the houses of the Congregation assiduously apply themselves to their spiritual exercises, let them strive to continue doing this during the work of the ministry”(39).

Prayer is a form of ministry; and the realization of one’s apostolic responsibilities is one of the conditions for living an intense prayer-life. For this reason, all the religious, even those not destined to preach, were to take the vow to promote devotion to the Passion of Jesus, and to cultivate its remembrance (40).

Because of this conviction, Paul, zealous though he was for the eternal welfare of every single person, was determined that the Congregation should not undertake just any kind of work. Nor should the apostolic task of preaching prejudice prolonged periods of intense contemplation, or a real community life, marked by humble obedience to authority and to one’s brethren, and by genuine brotherhood matured in prayer.

As far as Paul was concerned, remaining faithful to this rhythm of life was an act of obedience both to the Church which had approved the inspirations given him, and to God who gave the inspirations. It was also a real act of service to God’s people through an apostolic life marked by contemplation, focusing on the Passion of Jesus as the decisive revelation of God’s merciful love for human beings (41).

#### **4.2 Difficulties Experienced in the Course of Time in this Regard, and the Effect These Have Had on Formation and the Practice of Prayer**

Even a superficial glance at some aspects of Passionist life shows the difference between the life lived by the first Passionist Community and that of today.

In our Holy Founder's time, there were at least three hours of community meditation, as well as two hours or so devoted to the Divine Office; about three-quarters of an hour for the celebration of the Eucharist, and another half-hour given to the Rosary and Spiritual Reading in common. Added to that was the silence which reigned in the Community, even at meals when there was reading.

The 1970 Chapter Document prescribes at least one hour of meditation, with the individual religious free to choose the place and manner of its fulfillment.

It has been left to the Provinces to establish what hours of the Office will be prayed in common, although it is earnestly recommended that each Community pray at least Morning and Evening Prayer together, and perform some act of devotion to the Eucharist and to Our Blessed Lady.

Silence and communion with God do not characterize the atmosphere in our Communities in any evident way, nor do meal and recreation times evidence that here is a Community totally centered on the mystery of Christ's Passion.

Certainly, as a statement of principle, the 1970 Chapter Document recalls the inspiration which led to our foundation: "We seek the unity of our life and apostolate in the Passion of Jesus." The Church has given us "a special share in her apostolate, namely, to render fruitful the love of Christ as eminently expressed in His Passion...the ministry of the word shall be held in the highest esteem."

The Document also stresses that "the Paschal mystery is at the center of our life." This demands that we become "so expert in the knowledge of the Passion" that we may be able "to guide the faithful to a profound awareness of this mystery, which continues today in the lives of all mankind, leading them to a more intimate union with God, a deeper knowledge of themselves, and a greater sensitivity to the needs of their fellow men, whether they be groups or individuals" (42).

While the statement of these general principles is certainly of some comfort, no one can deny that the reality of Community life, as it is actually lived, is quite different. In particular there is a lack of cohesion between the elements of prayer, solitude, penance, apostolate, and community life.

The Chapter Document itself contributes to this lack of cohesion. It offers no clear direction in this regard (43).

However, this lack of cohesion predates the Special Chapter of 1970. Factors which have influenced it are the suppression of Religious Orders under Napoleon I, the suppression in Italy in the last century and in France at the turn of this century, the world wars, etc.

But of particular importance was the great expansion of the Congregation in the years 1839-1862, and in the period following 1863. You just have to look at the decrees of General Chapters to see the difficulties.

The expansion left certain negative trends in its wake. These stemmed not so much from contact with different cultural and pastoral situations, as from the fact that Formation was often neglected or shortened for the sake of getting personnel to staff new houses. At other times, there was not an adequate screening of vocations.

Furthermore, it would seem that it was in this period that the vocation to the priesthood began to be emphasized, at the expense of the religious vocation, and, specifically, the Passionist religious vocation. This trend was aggravated with the introduction of minor seminaries.

Finally, in the missionary apostolate and in South America, the number of parishes has increased, causing a further reduction in community life with all its negative consequences. And so, gradually, the balance between community life, solitude, prayer, and apostolate has seriously deteriorated (44).

Various documents, coming from the Holy See today, are inviting us to re-establish this vital balance between a community life conscientiously devoted to study and to the experience of God through the Passion of Jesus, and the apostolic work which is proper to the Congregation (45).

We have to be very careful in screening candidates for Passionist life, as Paul was. Like him, we must not flinch from showing them exactly what demands Passionist life is going to make on them. He was always quite frank with them about this, though he handled it with tact and sensitivity, praying that God would give them light, strength, and the necessary courage.

The Circular Letter of Father General, dated 25th March 1979, invites us to study carefully this whole complex question of our 'apostolic community.' It also helps us formulate some criteria for discernment, in the light of our Holy Founder's teaching, and that of the Church today, on the way religious are called to serve God's people.

It is only by restoring the conditions that our Holy Founder considered basic for a life of prayer within the Passionist Community, that we can hope to re-establish a balance between these various elements of Passionist life, particularly between prayer and the other aspects of Passionist life.

## **5. TEACHING PEOPLE HOW TO MEDITATE ON THE PASSION OF JESUS**

There was no doubt in Paul's mind that the principle cause of sin in the world was forgetfulness of the great mercy God showed in sending us His Son, who embraced the human condition in loving obedience.

On the other hand, whoever recalls, with a grateful heart, the love shown in the Passion of Jesus, is not only unable to sin, but grows gradually in intimate, loving union with God through Jesus (46).

These convictions are constantly reiterated in the Rule. They are present at the very beginning, where the purpose of the Congregation is defined, where the Rule speaks of the necessity of solitude for our houses as a means to this conformity to Christ, whereby one becomes his living 'memory', and learns to promote this memory zealously in the hearts of the faithful, right up to where it speaks of the specific vow to promote the Passion by means of a life lived in community, by preaching, celebration of the Sacraments, etc.

There is constant emphasis on the fundamental conviction that through this devotion, recalling the love of Jesus shown in His Passion, "the most obstinate sinners will yield themselves to God, and the hearts of all will be kindled with God's love" (47).

The specific service which the Congregation renders to God's people, in virtue of the approbation of the Holy See, is to promote this memory of God's love, shown in the Passion of Jesus, teaching all manner of people to meditate on this great gift of God.

This is to be a practical instruction, adapted to the educational and social level of the people concerned, so that, in love and gratitude to Jesus Who gave His life for them, they may be inspired to take on His own dispositions in the way they live their daily lives.

To be able to speak to people on their own level like this, one must show real respect and concern for each person. One must also respect their capacity for responding to God's love for them.

Passionist religious should regard this responsibility as part of their vocation. It should flow from their own experience of God, acquired in an intense contemplative life. "As they preach devotion to the Passion of Jesus, they should not do it unfeelingly, as if they were merely fulfilling a vow. They should instil this devotion with such power, spirit, efficacy, and zeal, as to penetrate the hearts of penitents" (48).

This demand of their vocation further underlines the necessity of Passionist religious being men of prayer, centered on the contemplation of Christ Crucified. They enter, thus, into an awareness of the fathomless, infinite love of the Trinity, the beginning and end of every human person.

The Passionist Community, a school of prayer, should be made up of people dedicated to prayer, and capable of creating an atmosphere which will sustain "those clergy and lay-people who might wish to withdraw for a few days to enjoy some blessed solitude at the feet of the Crucified" within the Passionist Community (49).

Paul of the Cross would say to us today, as he said in 1750: "Beg the Most High to give increase to our poor Congregation; to provide it with holy men who will go out, as heralds inspired by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim how much Jesus has done and suffered for love of men, the majority of whom are completely unmindful of this" (50).

## **6. QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

During the Course of Spirituality in which this paper was given, some questions were proposed for personal and group study. They may also be of some help to readers of this paper. The

questions were put to those attending the course, to encourage positive contributions on the current situation in the Congregation, in the light of our Holy Founder's teaching.

- 1) Over the last thirty years, have our Postulants been given an understanding of the Congregation, and the spiritual commitment it entails, in a way which faithfully reflects our Holy Founder's thinking?
- 2) Has a clear, interiorized understanding of "Passionist" vocation been expected of Postulants and novices, and fostered in them (as distinct from religious vocation in general, or that of a diocesan priests)?
- 3) The Congregation gives evidence of some difficulty:
  - a) about acknowledging that we must be 'men of prayer,' devoting prolonged periods of time each day to prayer; and,
  - b) about centering our prayer and our daily life on Jesus Crucified. This entails, dispossession, poverty, austerity, etc., as conditions for progress in prayer, if it is to grow into an intimate, loving relationship of betrothal.

Might these difficulties not stem from the fact that, unlike our Holy Founder, we have not clearly focused the attention of the Postulants and novices on Jesus Crucified, which demands a total self-giving?

- 4) The Clothing ceremony, with its own distinctive ritual, expressed the essence of our Passionist charism. By eliminating this ceremony, have we not, perhaps, impoverished the Christ-and-Passion-centered significance of Clothing, which encouraged the Postulants, novices, and even the professed, to enter into a living, personal relationship with Jesus Crucified? Have we not made, and are we not still making, a pedagogical error in eliminating the visible 'signs' which foster in us, and in others, a more attentive remembrance of Christ Crucified, to whom we are consecrated?
- 5) No.5 of the Chapter Document is an adequate expression of the Christ-and-Passion-centered thought of Paul with regard to sharing the experience of Jesus in our own personal lives; but is this understood, in practice, in the light of the teaching and practice of our Holy Founder?
- 6) Has initial and on-going formation paid sufficient attention to the importance of genuinely taking on the humility and obedience of Jesus, so that our contemplation may lead us to that mystical union to which each one of us is called?
- 7) Does this teaching of our Holy Founder influence the way we resolve questions posed by the problems of 'individuality' or 'subsidiarity,' so as to foster that atmosphere of brotherly love which nurtures prayer?
- 8) Do not Nos. 23-31 of *Evangelica Testificatio* translate, into present-day language, our Holy Founder's teaching?
- 9) In formation, and in efforts at community renewal, is it sufficiently emphasized that unless we live 'by Jesus' spirit,' and unless we acquire the dispositions with which he lived his life, we will never be capable of a genuine relationship with him, and therefore never

capable of profound prayer, with the risk of finding ourselves condemned to a never-ending and frustrating search for him?

- 10) In the initial and on-going formation of our religious, is our Holy Founder's teaching on the nature and practice of recollection and prayer clearly handed on? How is this received?
- 11) Number 45-46 of *Evangelica Testificatio* express, in an up-to-date way, the teaching so dear to our Holy Founder. Are these numbers sufficiently weighed?
- 12) In the light of our Holy Founder's teaching on the surroundings and atmosphere of the Passionist Retreat, geared to recollection, prayer, and study, and allowing admittance only to people who "might wish to enjoy some blessed solitude for a few days," it seems that numbers 33-34, 37 of the Chapter Document might not help to guarantee the community an atmosphere which truly favors and encourages recollection, prayer, and study. How do we see this situation, and what can be done about it?
- 13) Numbers 40 and 54 of the Chapter Document are an adequate expression of our Holy Founder's teaching. Do they, however, have any real influence on the lives of individuals and of the community?

### **Abbreviations**

Let.	"Letters of St. Paul of the Cross," with notes by Father Amadeo. Rome, 1924, Vols. I-IV, Vol. 5 edited by Father Cristoforo, Rome, 1977.
Rules and Const.	"Rules and Constitutions C.P." Critical edition of the text, edited by Fabiano Giorgini, Rome, 1958.
Decrees and Rec.	"Decrees and Recommendations of Passionist General Chapters," edited by F. Giorgini, Rome, 1960.
Customs.	"Customs, C.P." Critical edition of the text of Frs. Dominic, Seraphim, Bernard. Edited by F. Giorgini, Rome, 1958.

St. Paul of the Cross, "Guide."

St. Paul of the Cross, "Guide for Spiritual Renewal in Passionist Life. Regulations of 1755." Rome, 1980.

St. Paul of the Cross, "The Congregation"

St. Paul of the Cross, "The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus: What it is, and what it expects." Rome, 1978.

### Notes to the Introduction

1. Diary, entry for 4/12/1720, in Let. I,6.
2. St. Paul of the Cross, "The Congregation," Account of 1768, No. 5.
3. Diary, entry for 8/12/1720, in Let. I,8.
4. See, among others, G. Cozzelino, "A life centered on God. Theological notes on consecrated identity," Turin, 1978; V. Bosco; "Educational trends and the crisis in Religious Life and Priesthood," Turin 1980; P. Di Domenico and A. Manenti, "Problems and crisis in Religious Life," Bologna, 1980; J.M.R. Tillard, "Charism and continuity," Bologna, 1978; J.M.R. Tillard, "The call of Christ and the expectations of the world. Religious reconsider their call," Bologna, 1978.

### Notes to the Text

1. Rules and Const., 10/I/12-29.
2. Ibid. 10/I/36-55.
3. Let. IV, 234-237.
4. Rules and Const., 18/II/10-21.
5. Rules and Const., 20/I/7-13.
6. Ibid. 20/I/29-42.
7. Ibid. 68/I/25-36.
8. Ibid. 20/I/44-50.
9. Let. III, 439.
10. Let. II, 150.
11. Rules and Const., p. 160, No. 35.
12. Ibid. 76/I/44-54; cf. also p.160, No. 42.
13. Let. V, 10-13.
14. Ibid. 15.
15. Rules and Const., 18/III/4-44; 36/I/15-18.
16. Ibid. 40/I/23-30; cf. also 38/II/11-29; 120/II/20-30; "Let the brethren of this Congregation take care to be so obedient that their obedience will be blind. Let them have a very lowly opinion of themselves, seeking complete self-abnegation, so that they may reach great perfection... thus they will be more at peace when they are told to do things which go against the grain, or strike at their self-love – even foolish and pointless things. God will allow a

Superior to act like this so that the religious become humble and flexible, gentle and simple.” This lived ‘mystical death’ can be understood only through a profound experience of Jesus Crucified as one’s personal ‘Good’ and one’s personal ‘Love.’

17. Let. III, 442. Fr. John Baptist also wrote to Fr. Peter, the Novice Master, in 1764: In the Congregation “one strives above all, though one’s prayer, for humility of heart, so that God may be able to form us into illustrious sons who will form a wall and fortification for his Church in these times, defending his holy people as they seek to walk in the path of his truth.” (General Archives, B.I-I/1-3), Letter of ½/1764. We find this teaching expressed also in the account which Fr. Fulgentius Pastorelli gives of the holiness of Brother Giacomo Gianiel. This is an indication of how real this teaching was for the first generation of Passionists, cf. ‘James of St. Aloysius... deposition,’ Rome 1973, pp. 59-70. Fr. Fulgentius takes this occasion to urge the Religious to keep the Rule, because the holy life of Brother Giacomo shows that the Rule really does contain the means to perfection. He also reminds us that if we want to instil the Passion of Jesus “in men’s hearts, we must first make sure that it is indelibly inscribed in our own hearts, so that we may acquire the true spirit of our vocation.”
18. Rules and Const., 76/I/44-53.
19. Ibid. p. 160, No. 42. Fr. Fulgentius, the first Novice Master, shows how well he had assimilated this teaching himself in the way he speaks about Brother Giacomo, who was one of his novices. He writes: “He practiced virtue entirely for the love of God, seeking only to please Him. He sought God so ardently that everything he did was of God, in God, through God, for God, and with God, all done with an extraordinarily beautiful purity of intention. He adorned his least actions with the merits of the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ, spicing them with pious sentiments, appropriate loving aspirations, and acts of love directed to Our Lady, to Jesus Crucified, to God, and to his patron saints, so that he prayed continually, as Scripture counsels us. He would withdraw into the oratory of his heart, as into a temple of the Holy Spirit (‘You are the temple of the living God’), sometimes completely and rapturously absorbed in his God, the font of every good. He thus combined, in a wonderful manner, the active and the contemplative life” (“James of St. Aloysius...deposition,” Rome, 1973, p. 67).
20. Rules and Const., p. 160, No. 36.
21. St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide,” No.30. See also Nos. 60, 304, 309, 319.
22. Rules and Const., 8/I-III/1-20.
23. Ibid. 98/II/20-38.
24. St. Paul of the Cross, “The Congregation,” Account of 1768, No. 4. He also wrote: Recollection, and the ascetical life it implies, is indispensable in order to “profit from holy prayer, even more, to be men of prayer,” as behooves one called to a truly ‘apostolic life.’ Ibid. No. 8.
25. Ibid. Account of 1747, No. 10.
26. St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide”, No. 316.
27. Ibid. Nos. 45, 47-49. In order to help discern whether it was really necessary to leave one’s cell, Paul recommended asking Our Lady’s permission to go out, Ibid. No. 43.
28. Ibid. Nos. 81-85, 87; Rules and Const., 106/I-III/1-7.
29. Rules and Const., 129/I/24ff; St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide,” Nos. 145-151.
30. St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide,” No. 30.
31. Let. III, 438-440. Similar counsel is given in the Rule: Let the Master comfort the Novices “with utmost charity, when they are depressed or tempted. Let him always show them a

- peaceful demeanor, thus giving them the confidence to disclose their hearts to him, and encouraging them to walk in the path of holy penance,” Rules and Const., 26/I-III/51ff.
32. St. Paul of the Cross, ‘Guide,’ No.132.
  33. Ibid. Nos. 76-77. The Rule said: At the appointed time, after morning and afternoon study, “Let them devote some time to relaxing their mind by means of the solitary walk, going alone and in silence, without going any distance from the Retreat. They may perform some other pious exercise, providing it is not such as to tax the mind or cause distraction,” Rules and Const., p. 165, No.134.
  34. St. Paul of the Cross, “The Congregation,” Account of 1747, No. 3. Brother Giacomo Gianiel, writing, in 1750, to his brother, who was a priest, expressed this idea thus: The Passionist Congregation is a completely apostolic Institute, observing internal and external solitude, serving Almighty God in prayer and fasting, in silence and in hope.” “James of St. Aloysius...deposition,” Rome 1973, p. 38. In the same document we are told that Brother Giacomina was attracted to the new Congregation because he knew that the religious “withdrew to live a life of prayer and penance, immersed in solitude, pursuing their own holiness and the salvation of others,” Ibid, p. 75; cf. also p. 182.
  35. Rules and Const., 2/I/34-41.
  36. St. Paul of the Cross, “The Congregation,” Account of 1747, Nos. 6, 21.
  37. St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide” No. 323. Paul also said: “Since the purpose of our Congregation is to promote devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ, let the religious intercede with Almighty God for sinners, for the conversion of heathens, and for the Congregation, so that His holy name may be known and revered.” Ibid. No. 36.
  38. For Paul, penance, with fasting as its most favored biblical and patristic expression, was a basic means for becoming a man of prayer and, therefore, an ‘apostolic’ man. In the Account of 1747 he writes: “In order that the religious may be disposed for fervent prayer, from which all these goods and still greater ones derive, (e.g. peace, harmony, fervour), they should, in conformity with the Holy Rule, join penance to poverty. But it is a gentle, lovable, discreet penance... Let the food be lenten fare;” in this way the religious qualify themselves “to help their neighbor, to sanctify souls, and to convert sinners.” In the Account of 1768 he said; detaching ourselves from temporal goods and from dealings with the world, “the Holy Rule bids us to embrace that most efficacious means which Jesus Christ proposes, namely, to live in prayer and fasting, in order to overcome the common enemies.” St. Paul of the Cross, “The Congregation,” Account of 1747, Nos. 15-16, 21-22; Account of 1768, No. 8. For our Holy Founder, the spirit of prayer, fervour, and apostolic zeal depend, in large part, on fasting and abstinence lovingly undertaken. “One of the foundation stones of the spiritual edifice is a holy and prudent abstinence. If they are careful in observing this, they will one day taste the sweetness of the Lord... If we were to abandon this abstinence which the Rule enjoins upon us, gone would be all our fervour and our spirit of prayer, and the Congregation would be ruined. May God preserve us from this! This is necessary to preserve poverty, silence, and that recollection of heart from which every good proceeds, because this recollection binds the soul to God, the source of every good” Let. II, 88. In the Rule he had written: “The spirit of this least Congregation is to observe, in the best way possible, the holy law of God and the holy evangelical counsels. To observe these perfectly, it is necessary to be a man of great prayer; but how can one be a man of great prayer without abstinence? Fasting, when combined with deepest humility and contempt of self, is a very powerful means of raising the heart so that it may be united with God, and for putting the demons and their temptations to flight, as Christ told us when he said: ‘This kind of demon can only be cast out by prayer and fasting’” Rules and Const., 66/II/7-26. It should be noted that this

expression from the Gospel refers to physical and spiritual healing. Hence Paul applies it, not only to the personal spiritual healing of the religious, but to his healing as an ‘apostolic man,’ whose task it is to communicate to others the healing won for us by Christ in his Passion.

39. Rules and Const., 88/II-III/18-35.
40. Ibid. 58/II-III/50-61.
41. For examples of the refusal to undertake apostolic work which was not in conformity with the Rule, cf. Let. V, 135; Let. III, 417-420; “Solitude and ‘the desert’ in Passionist Spirituality,” by C. Naselli, Rome, 1978, pp. 31-39.
42. Chapter Document 1970, Nos. 5, 67, 68, 70.
43. Ibid. Nos. 3, 6, 74, 76-80.
44. In the absence of other written sources, cf. “Decrees and Rec.” pp. 132-140, 147-151. “Customs,” 55-72, 98-102. See also the Rule, 1959, No. 243, which introduced a distinction between ‘Retreat,’ and ‘quasi-Retreat,’ ‘Residence,’ and ‘House of Greater Solitude.’ This was an attempt to remedy, by external measures, the lack of balance between prayer, solitude, community-life, and apostolate. This was already a problem in the Congregation, and can be ascribed to the lack of clear criteria for discernment with regard to undertaking apostolic activities, and the selection and formation of our young men. Cf. “The apostolic structure of the Passionist Congregation”, by C. Brovetto, Rome, 1978, p. 17ff.
45. Among these documents, cf. “Mutuae relationes,” Nos. 11-14; “Evangelica testificatio,” Nos. 49-50, 52-53; “Evangelii nuntiandi,” No. 69; Pope John Paul II’s address to religious. For the priority to be given to proclaiming the word, cf. “Catechesi tradendae.”
46. St. Paul of the Cross, “The Congregation,” Account of 1747, Nos. 1-2; Account of 1768, Nos. 1-2.
47. Rules and Const., 58/I/64f. The same point is made elsewhere. Teaching people, wherever possible, to meditate on the Passion of Jesus “is a most effective means of destroying sin, and of leading souls, within a short time, to great holiness;” Ibid. 4/I/1-7; also 8/I/1-18; 56/I/55ff., etc.
48. St. Paul of the Cross, “Guide,” No. 227.
49. St. Paul of the Cross; “The Congregation,” Account of 1747, No. 26; Account of 1768, No. 26.
50. Let. IV, 228. For Father John Baptist Danei, “Apostolic life” demanded a very intense spiritual preparation: “Assiduous prayer and long-suffering patience are necessary to obtain the graces we need for the exalted task of apostolic ministry on the battlefield. I say this on the authority of Scripture, and from my own experience of these sad times we are passing through. Whoever is not well protected with the armor of which St. Paul and the other Sacred writers speak, or has not a double share of the spirit (cf. 2 Kings, 2:9-10), should not presume to undertake this work;” “Life of the Venerable Father John Baptist of St. Michael the Archangel,” by Giammaria Gioni. Rome, 1934, p.165. Father John Baptist wrote in 1763: “In assiduous prayer we should beg God, in his Goodness, to keep the Congregation free of restless people, the troublemakers, the spiteful, the dissemblers, the proud, the unbelieving, and everyone likely to cause upset and scandal, including the inept and delicate ones who cannot stand up to the observance. Let us ask Him to bless the Congregation with upright men who have a love for His revealed truth, and who will be a wall and rampart defending the Congregation against all those teachers of falsehood and enemies who have left our ranks, or are in the process of leaving.” Ibid. p. 166.