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Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality

COMMENTARIES ON THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS C.P.

Chapters III and IV

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OUR COMMUNITY AT PRAYER

Rev. Frederick Sucher, C.P.

In the first fifty-five years of our Congregation, our Rule underwent constant revision. We have complete texts of five versions, brief fragments of the text written during the forty day inaugural retreat of Our Holy Founder.

That Rule was conceived in prayer and all versions have maintained the primacy of prayer for Passionists. In our own time there have been three revisions, 1930, 1969 and 1982. How do the most recent Constitutions express the tradition of prayer inculcated by St. Paul of the Cross?

Our Prayer continues to be solidly Paulacrucian in the following aspects:

1. Our prayer is communal
2. Christ-centered
3. Trinitarian
4. Apostolic
5. Liturgical

1. Our Prayer is Communal

Chapter 3 of the Constitutions is entitled “Our Community At Prayer.” The title is significant: Prayer is envisioned as a shared ideal, a common value, a social reality. Prayer is meant to be a language in which Passionists communicate with God, with one another and with those to whom we are sent to minister. Prayer is integral with the charism of St. Paul of the Cross and belongs to the charism we share with him.

The motivation and the legislation on prayer derive from his life and the words he felt inspired to incorporate in the revisions of the Rule he supervised. Unless we diligently pursue a life of prayer, we are hollow men and belie our religious habit.

Each Passionist Community is called to be a “school of prayer”, a place where anyone entering hears the call to a deep experience of God. These ideals become values to the extent we invest the time and effort needed to realize them. The Constitutions must, therefore, designate the times for prayer. No. 51 calls for “prolonged periods” - “at least one hour...every day”.

The Rule of 1736 emphasizes the communal aspect of our prayer: “...one of the principal ends of this least Congregation consists not only in being tireless in holy prayer in order to come to a holy union with God, but also to show the way to our neighbors, teaching them in the easiest way possible...”.

The connotation of the Italian is instructive: “stradarvi I nostri prossimi” “to be on the path with...” - “to guide”. In the text of 1741 this becomes “incamminarvi I nostri prossimi” the root meaning is once more guidance in the way. The Latin of 1746 is “ducere”, to lead. The strong implication is that we teach prayer by sharing it inside and outside the community. In the 1982 Constitutions this communal aspect comes out strongest in No. 52, where we reflect on the

difficulty of persevering in prayer and the aid we must give to one another by fidelity to our prayer and our willingness to support one another. No. 61 insists on the utility of spiritual direction for progress in prayer.

2. Our Prayer is Christ-centered

“Moved by the Spirit of God, as adopted sons, we cry out ‘Abba, Father.’ In union with Christ, we praise the wondrous works of God. We contemplate Christ’s saving work for us” (Const. 38).

In the whole of his human life, but most intensely in his dying, Jesus affirms his sonship, his loving attachment to his Father. The Spirit of Jesus directs our prayer to identification with Jesus’ “I always do the will of him who sent me” (Jn 5:30); “not my will but yours” (Mk 14:36). We try to become one with the Christ of Gethsemane, the Christ of Calvary. We find our way to him through contemplation of the Scriptures, the image of the Crucified and in the poor and suffering around us.

We enter into the eternal adoration and submission of the God-man to his Father as we stand at the altar of Eucharistic sacrifice. We come to know the power of his resurrection because we have welcomed the fellowship of his suffering.

The direction given our prayer is identical with the prescriptions of St. Paul of the Cross: “Take yourself to prayer...clothed with the sufferings of Jesus....I do this...loaded down with the ropes, chains, blows, scourges, wounds, thorns, cross and death of my Savior, I fly with him to the Bosom of the Father” (Letter no. 1647, v. III, p. 831).

“Love is an unitive virtue and makes one’s own the sufferings of the Beloved” (Letter no. 285, v. I, p. 489).

“The point you do not understand is how to make your own through an operation of love the Sacred Sufferings of Jesus. His Divine Majesty will make you understand it when it pleases him. This is a work all divine and when the soul is entirely immersed in pure love...in a moment it finds itself immersed in the sea of the Savior’s sufferings...” (Letter no. 1137, v. III, p. 149).

The identification of our prayer life with the prayer life of Jesus recalls the sermons of St. Augustine to his parishioners on praying the psalms with Jesus.

“Therefore, as soon as our head begins to pray, let us understand that we are in Him, that we may unite our prayer with Him as we share in his tribulation” (Ps. 54).

“No greater gift could God bestow on men than to give them as their head His Word, by whom He made all things, and to unite them as members to that head. Thus the Word became both Son of God and Son of Man: one God with the Father, one Man with men.

“Hence, when we offer our petitions to God, let us not separate ourselves from the Son; and when the body of the Son prays, let it not detach itself from its Head. Let it be He, the sole Savior of His body our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, who prays for us, who

prays in us, and who is prayed to by us. He prays for us as our Priest; he prays in us as our Head; He is prayed to by us as our God. Let us therefore hear both our words in Him and His words in us...

“We pray to Him in the form of God; He prays in the form of the slave. There He is the Creator; here He is in the creature and He changes not but takes the creature and transforms it into Himself, making us one man, head and body with Himself.

“We pray, therefore, to Him and through Him and in Him. We pray with Him and He with us; we recite this prayer (of the Psalm) in Him and He recites it in us” (Ps. 85).

3. Our Prayer is Trinitarian

Nos. 38 and 39 show Jesus as our way to the Father. Our Constitutions let us know clearly that Passionist prayer life is an entry into the deepest mystery of all “to discover the true God” (Const. 49). With Jesus we are moved by the Spirit to praise the work of creation. In Jesus we see the magnificence of the love of the only God, Father-Son-Spirit, for us personally and for every man and woman sent into this world, created in the image of the Son, called to know the fulness of the divine life pulsating within.

Our prayer is revealed to us as nothing less than an entry into that life in and through Jesus Christ. We begin here on earth to live consciously of the fulness of God’s own life.

We are about “prayer”, not merely prescribed “prayers”. All our “prayers” are meant to be ways of touching the deep current of the divine life flowing through as the gift of Jesus, “our Way, our Truth, our Life.”

The 1982 Constitutions are succinct, but they are packed with dogmatic truth and the highest inspiration to the fullest living of a prayerful life in God, Father-Son-Spirit.

4. Our Prayer is Apostolic

“Since we have been called to unite ourselves to the life and mission of Him who ‘emptied Himself taking the form of a servant’ (Phil 2:7), we contemplate Christ through persevering prayer. By giving His life for us He reveals God’s love for all people, and shows the path they must follow as they make their way towards the Father. Faithfulness to this contemplation enables us to show forth His love more fully, and to help others offer their lives in Christ to the Father” (Const. 5).

The present text of the Constitutions echoes the earliest versions when it joins so closely our own personal prayer with our apostolate – even with an apostolate of sharing our prayer-of-the-sufferings-of-Jesus with God’s People. Whatever else our dedication to the Passion of Jesus and to the poor in whom we see the Passion of Jesus continued may direct us toward – it is beyond question that we try to help all to know the meaning of the sufferings of Christ in the life of Christ and in their own life.

Whatever gifts of prayer we have – whatever prayerful experiences of the depth of God’s love revealed in the sufferings of the Son of God, these are not mere decorations for our

amusement – they are valuable insights and strengths to be shared with those to whom we are sent.

As No. 38 of the Constitutions puts it: “Our prayer thus takes on a hidden apostolic fruitfulness for the People of God, and echoes our solidarity with our brothers and sisters, especially the poor and suffering.” Our prayer on the Passion nerves us to face the suffering of the poor. We cannot relieve all suffering. We can be strengthened by the sufferings of Christ to try to remedy injustices in the social order, but even more we are called upon to help each individual to understand the union of all suffering with the Suffering Christ. We are called upon to learn that lesson in our own lives and then share it with others. “We express our participation in the Passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian and apostolic” (Const. 6). There is no part of that vow that will be fulfilled without a profound spirit of prayer. We are failing not only our-selves, not only the Congregation, but the very People of God to the extent that we fail to “know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ.”

5. Our Prayer is Liturgical

Our prayer is both deeply personal and the prayer of the Whole Christ. The wholeness is celebrated in the “Prayer of God’s People”, the Liturgy –the word literally means “act of the people”. “We, your people and your ministers” – we the Passionist worshipers are “church” as we publicly express our union with Christ and one another – as we act out our prayer in daily Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours.

No. 42 of our Constitutions reminds us that “the Eucharist is thus...the supreme expression of our worship.” The Eucharist makes our prayer and our living and dying with Christ most real. In this there is an expression of our faith and a challenge to make that faith prove itself in our life and works.

This challenge is not something new to us. The Corinthians failed badly. In our own way we can fail to live up to the challenge of what Eucharist means. We are asked to make daily Eucharist possible and actual.

The Liturgy of the Hours extends the praise and thanksgiving of the Eucharistic celebration through the day. The strong invitation of the Constitutions is for us to make it a lived union with Jesus, our Head, our Priest.

Granting that our prayer goes beyond our lips, we will “manifest our conformity with Christ Crucified in our lives:

- through our readiness to spend ourselves and be spent in apostolic labors;
- through our acceptance of the burdens inherent in the common life;
- through our patience in coping with human weaknesses in ourselves and in others;
- through our sharing in the lot of the poor” (Const. 57).

Overall, the Constitutions treat our prayer life in a synthetic, compressed manner. The phrases need careful reading – they need to be made the center of our prayer. In the present text we have Paul of the Cross and Paul of Tarsus appealing to us not to receive our grace, our vocation in vain. At the heart of our vocation to be Passionists is a call to deep personal prayer, a call to share this prayer as brothers, a call to spread that prayer as apostles.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Our prayer is Communal

- a) What evidence do we have that St. Paul of the Cross wanted our prayer to be communal and/or shared?
- b) In what manner have Passionists shared prayer in the past?
- c) What methods of teaching prayer and sharing prayer are succeeding among us presently?

2. Our Prayer is Christ-Centered

- a) In what ways did St. Paul of the Cross emphasize our entry into the Prayer of Christ? Christ's presence in our prayer?
- b) Does St. Paul of the Cross follow St. Teresa of Avila and insist that our prayer never take us away from the humanity of Christ?
- c) What has been the history of Christ-centered prayer among us?
- d) How do we see ourselves bringing people to prayerful union with Jesus?

3. Our Prayer is Trinitarian

- a) The street-preacher, Frank Sheed, maintained that instructions on the Holy Trinity drew the closest attention. Does prayer as entry into the life of the Holy Trinity seem too high for today's Catholics?
- b) Are our present Constitutions realistic when they invite us to this experience of prayer?
- c) Does our experience measure up to the ideal of the Constitutions?

4. Our Prayer is Apostolic

- a) How does St. Paul of the Cross identify our prayer and our apostolate?
- b) Can we say that: "His was an apostolate of bringing people to God through prayer on the Passion"?
- c) Has prayer been consistently a part of our apostolate?
- d) Has the apostolate been historically part of a Passionist's prayer?
- e) What are concrete means of assuring union of prayer and apostolate?

5. Our Prayer is Liturgical

- a) How did St. Paul of the Cross celebrate Liturgy? Can we detect something of his experience? his theology?
- b) How do we integrate our tradition of prayer into the liturgical revival characteristic of our times?
- c) Are there any problems in harmonizing the aspect of sacrifice and the aspect of communal banquet in the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy?
- d) How can we improve our Passionist Liturgies?

OUR COMMUNITY AT PRAYER

Rev. Octavio Mondragón, C.P.

Introduction

Passionist religious life is one way of living the Christian life at its root level. In the life of the Church and in religious community life, prayer has always been a source of both attraction and fulfillment.

Union with God through Jesus Christ is the ultimate goal to which all religious life and Christian life is directed.

The purpose of this presentation is to comment, inasmuch as it is possible, on the biblical-theological aspects found in Chapter 3 of the Constitutions of the Passionist Congregation.

The passion and death of Jesus Christ, the high priest, have been the foundation of those values which are proper and common to the life of prayer. They are at one and the same time its basis and its challenge.

May the Lord grant that this effort of mine prove to be helpful; that it be of assistance in reflecting upon and assimilating all the potential riches contained in the prayer life of the Passionist community.

Prayer and the Priesthood of Jesus Christ

The basis of all Christian prayer is solidly founded on the personal experience of Jesus Christ. "It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted." (Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10).

For the Christian, prayer means to encounter God in and through Jesus Christ. "It follows, then, that his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him." (Heb 7:25).

In the Christian it is the Holy Spirit who affects this encounter with God in and through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:15-17), thus permitting him to enter communion with God the Father.

Prayer is, then, a spiritual process. Its purpose: to make present to and in the Christian the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I have chosen a text of Scripture which Albert Vanhoye maintains is both extraordinary and unequaled in all the Bible, namely Galatians 2:19-21.

(The ideas expressed by Albert Vanhoye, S.J. are taken from a course in Exegesis of Galatians given at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in 1980-81.)

Prayer Means to be Crucified with Christ

“With Christ I am crucified” (Gal 2:19).

This is, indeed, a bold assertion, one which demonstrates an effective and spiritual identity based on a twofold conviction: first, that Jesus has brought others with him into his death; second, that this event reaches beyond all bonds of history and is always present in the here and now.

Living out his own personal history, the Christian finds he is also actualizing the passion of Christ, the condition of his sharing fully in the Resurrection: “...to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death (present). That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead (future sharing)” (Phil 3:10; cfr. 2 Cor 1:15; Col 1:24).

Man cannot be directly united with Christ in glory. He must first be united with him through the cross. He must first so experience this mystery that he, like Christ, comes to accept death and complete emptying of self. Only then will God draw him to himself in glory.

Contact with the risen Christ is always conditioned by union with Christ crucified. The death of Christ is made present to me here and now, influencing my very existence in a decisive way, completely taking over my life, so involving me in its dynamism that it leads me to the risen Christ and, through him, totally transforms me.

For anyone seeking perfect fulfillment, it is first necessary to go through the process of negation, death and a total giving of self. For the Christian, the initial moment of his crucifixion with Christ and his death is that of Baptism (Rom 6:3-11).

In the celebration of the Eucharist, parallel with Baptism, the crucifixion is renewed: The man who shares in the cross of Jesus and remains in its presence, recognizes a Lord who has set him apart, who frees him from the powers and forces which govern this world. He is thus brought into contact with the eternal. To be crucified with Christ means to experience freedom from sin; it means to die with Christ Jesus to all that is not God.

The celebration or renewal of the death of Jesus Christ renders us a “memorial” of the passion and death of Christ in the Church for the world.

Prayer is the Process of Self-Emptying in Order to Belong to God

“Through the law I am dead to the law, so that now I can live for God” (Gal 1:19).

The Christian is one who has been crucified with Christ and, therefore, shares the condition of Christ, dead to the law by means of the law, in order to live for God (Rom 7:4ff).

Christ died not to remain in death, but to possess new life. He died to rise again. His new life is not on an equal plain with life on earth, but rather places the humanity of Christ in a totally new relationship with God. To live for God is not merely an intentional attitude but a way of living which is precisely determined by one’s relationship to God, that is, to live as belonging to God (2 Cor 13: 4; 1 Cor 15:44).

Once the Christian puts on Christ through Faith-Baptism-Eucharist, he enters into the dynamism of the mystery of Christ to the point of totally belonging to God. This is the essence of the Christian personality. From this moment on the Christian character of his life ought to be manifested more and more by his intellectual convictions, by the steadfastness of his will and in the actions of his daily life.

The emptying of self consists in being constantly faithful to the renewal of the death of Christ inasmuch as he becomes a sharer in the saving work of God. "If anyone wants to become a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24; Mt 10:37ff).

To be crucified with Christ may mean to be simultaneously associated with the passion of Christ as well as with his glory. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to go with him into the shadow of death, but, at the same time, experience the resurrection and the power of Jesus Christ who lives now.

"All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead" (Phil 3:10-11).

Prayer Means an Intimate Relationship with Jesus Christ

"...I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This phrase is, indeed, an extraordinary one. For it deals with a man, Jesus Christ, who lives in another – the believer – in so concrete a manner that the very life of the believer is attributed more to Christ than to the believer himself.

Prayer is the personal encounter of the Christian with the person of Jesus Christ. It is experiencing the living presence of the risen Christ at every level of one's personality.

This permanent reality, this condition is accompanied by the ability to continually accept the gift of the presence of Jesus in us. It is the total openness of one's being, that basic, fundamental availability which the Scriptures refer to as poverty – evangelical poverty.

The encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, who pervades our entire being, establishes our communion with God in a concrete way. We effectively experience the salvific work of God as communion with him in Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of that new life, that new creation which the Holy Spirit confers on the Christian (2 Cor 5:17).

In the Eucharist, God unites us to himself in Jesus Christ. Through it the community is formed in a unique way and we become Church. The community thus established celebrates and gives witness to the living presence of the kingdom of God in the world.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, is the exemplar of this intimacy with God in the daily fulfillment of his mission. "But he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray" (Luke 5:16).

In the prayer of praise, as expressed in the existential situation of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, is revealed that which God is for her and for us, namely, the holiness which issues from the mercy of him who is called “Father” (Luke 1:46-55).

Paul of the Cross has left us the witness of a life of profound intimacy with Jesus Christ, one of communion with God, one of intense interior contemplation. Since the time of the first Rules, Paul of the Cross insisted that his religious encourage the practice of intimacy with God so that their entire life be lived immersed in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Passionist, thus absorbed by this mystery of Jesus Christ, becomes a man of interior life, a man of profound prayer, one able to teach the people the ways of communion with God.

It seems to me that Chapter 3 of the Constitutions incorporates the experience and wisdom of our Founder and presently puts them into practice according to the mind of the Church. It places before us the model of a praying community which will form Passionist religious according to the charism of Paul of the Cross.

Prayer and Conversion

“The life I now live in this body I live in faith, faith in the Son of God...” (Gal 2:20).

When Paul speaks of the “sarx”, the flesh, he is referring to an earthly existence, a limited one subject to suffering, sorrow, temptation, despair and death. It is impossible for us to overlook this reality for it is personal, communitarian, ecclesial and social. We are not dealing here with a mere sociological statistic but rather with a theological truth.

Prayer places this concrete situation directly within the framework of the theology of the need for redemption, for humanity has need of redemption. Thus the necessity for conversion.

Conversion means personal and communal penance, reconciliation with God, a continual personal and communal review of life in light of the Word of God and the teachings of the Church.

Just as many founders experienced it in their day, today, too, conversion leads to actual and continuous solidarity with the sufferings of mankind. In a particular way, it identifies with the sufferings of those who experience the most serious effects of evil and those who, even in our christian-human condition, live in wretched poverty.

Our prayer makes us deeply aware of the need for redemption and brings that need into the healing presence of God. In the liturgical celebration of reconciliation we experience that forgiveness, mercy and peace of God which, in turn, give shape to the concrete activities of our religious life.

Consequently, it is necessary to stress the importance of continual conversion, for evil is so prevalent in our times. More importantly, though, we must ever keep uppermost in mind the conviction that God has established his reign in our midst (Luke 12:21).

Our prayer must be intercessory, uniting us with Christ, who always intercedes for us before the Father, and through him, uniting us also to the intercessory prayer of the Church (1 John 2:1ff).

Through the purifying action of prayer, we take on the attitude of “servants” who offer their lives to God for the salvation of the world. Others have served as models for us in this, namely, Jesus Christ the innocent Servant of Jahweh, the Virgin Mary, Moses, Jeremiah and many others.

Through prayer we also take upon ourselves the sufferings of humanity, interceding before our God for the good of the Church. “It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Col 1:24).

And, finally, recognizing the need for redemption, we can easily identify with others for, ultimately, at the foot of the cross, we are all sinners.

Prayer as a Faith Experience

“The life I now live in this body I live in faith, faith in the Son of God...” (Gal 2:20).

Faith is a gift of God. Our prayer is a response to that gift. Rather than any method or system, faith which leads to prayer is God’s gift to us.

Christ does not impose himself on anyone. Rather he offers himself, giving me the opportunity of living in faith. This means he lives in me and I live in him.

On the one hand, faith means I accept the life of another to the point that my very life belongs more to him than to myself. Not everyone can accomplish this, for it requires the extraordinary ability of giving one’s life. But with Christ it is possible for he has given his life for me and, by his death, has attained a new life which he, in turn, communicates to me.

On the other hand, faith allows anyone to share in the relationship of Christ with God. Actually, faith in Christ is not limited to Christ alone but, in Christ, leads to communion with God.

Again, this is not for anyone to achieve, for it requires a perfect relationship to God. It is possible for Christ because he is the Son of God and his nature has been exalted and raised to Divine Son ship through his death.

Prayer which gives expression to the life of faith, reconciles all the powers of the human spirit. It concentrates them in such a way that they become an intensive, creative force which frees religious life from all apathy, complacency and any ideologizing of faith.

Prayer - a Loving Encounter with Jesus Christ

“I live in faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

To fall in love means to live authentically, to experience the most intense self-transcendence. There are different kinds of “falling in love.”

The most profound of religious experiences is falling in love with God in Jesus Christ. To be in love with God means to love him totally, without restriction, unconditionally. “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength”(Mk 12:28-34; Dt 6:45).

This peak experience is a gift. We can fall in love with God only because he first loved us; Christ has given us the proof of his love for us by giving himself totally for us. “This is the love I mean, not our love for God, but God’s love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes away our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).

Being in love with God brings with it a profound joy, an intense peacefulness, rendering us capable of bearing every humiliation, ridicule or suffering (cf. Rom 8:31-39). Prayer, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, steepens us in the love of God. This love must become part of our very existence as it did in Jesus Christ.

Prayerful encounter with Jesus Christ gives us the capacity to love others in him, to love others as God loves them, especially the most poor and the most needy (Mt 11:25-26; Ps 146; Lk 1:46,55).

Love for the most needy is the gauge by which we know whether or not our prayer is truly a loving encounter with Jesus Christ in communion with the Father. “This has taught us love – that he gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers...” (cf. Jn 3:9-21; Mt 25:31-46). Herminio Gil, C. P., writes: “The experience of God converts us immediately, for Christ has entered our human condition and has rendered us not only brethren to one another, but brethren to Christ himself. The faces of Christ, then, are revealed in the poor, the little ones, the ordinary people, workers and the elderly...for these become the privileged means by which we encounter the Absolute. True love of neighbor is, then, the measure of one’s love of God. Without love of neighbor, love of God becomes pure fancy, even a lie” (Herminio Gil, ‘Espiritualidad del Sacerdote Religioso’ CLAR, Bogota, 1981).

Prayer gradually develops within us the truly God-centered life of Faith, Hope and Charity. In it we find the power and the sustaining force for our religious commitment based on the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Prayer and Liturgy

The liturgical renewal of Vatican II serves as a guide that we live the Christian mystery more intensely. “For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.” (SC n. 5).

The prayer of our community thus enters into the life of the Church.

“From that time onward the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery, reading those things ‘which were in all the scriptures concerning him’ (Lk 24:27), celebrating the Eucharist in which ‘the victory and triumph of his death are again made present,’ and at the same time ‘giving thanks to God for his inexpressible gift’ (2 Cor 9:15) in Christ Jesus, ‘in praise of his glory’ (Eph 1:2) through the power of the Holy Spirit.” (SC n. 6).

“The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church, however it is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows” (SC nn. 9 and 10).

(This is precisely the theological-liturgical orientation of Chapter III of the Constitutions. More than a law, however necessary that might be, the prayer of the Passionist community must be considered from an ecclesial-liturgical point of view. For through prayer the Christian community puts into effect the saving action of God.)

Celebration of the Eucharist is the very heart of the life of the religious community. For it, this moment of history becomes the history of salvation. In the Eucharist we celebrate the memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; we experience the potential of becoming authentically Christian and Passionist.

The Congregation of the Passion desires to be for the Church and for the world a continual “memorial” of the passion and death of Christ. In the daily celebration of the Eucharist it discovers both the summit and the source for its validity and efficacy as a religious community, for by the Eucharist it both experiences the mysteries of Christ and gives witness to them.

The celebration of the liturgy is, then, the foundation of our entire prayer life. From the Eucharist, the gift of God in communion with men, issues the necessity and vitality of our praise as expressed by the Liturgy of the Hours. Praise and thanksgiving are the preparation for and the continuation of that dialogue into which we enter in the presence of the Eucharist.

From that same Eucharist there is begun and directed, as the actual experience of the salvific working of God in Christ, the dialogue which permanently disposes us to listen to the Word of God in spiritual reading and in mental prayer.

Finally, the Eucharist gives rise to constant dialogue with the Church. Through it we become attentive to the documents of the magisterium, sensitive to tradition and, above all, open to what mankind and the signs of the time tell us.

I began by saying that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is the foundation for all Christian prayer. Now, in concluding, let me reiterate: the prayer of the religious community is a sharing in the priesthood of Christ who ultimately offers salvation to all who, through him, approach God.

Conclusion

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is the unique sustaining power and reality for the prayer life of the Passionist community.

Through his priesthood, by celebrating the Eucharist, we renew the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; we enter into the mystery of Christ and are crucified with him. Through his priesthood we become so involved in the mystery of Christ crucified that we totally become “the possession of God.”

Encountering the person of Jesus Christ in prayer makes us profoundly aware of the need for conversion which, in turn, makes us sensitive to the need for universal redemption.

Jesus Christ, who so loved us as to give himself for us, leads us to the love of God, making him present to us, praising him in the liturgy, offering him in love to all, especially the most poor and the most needy.

The celebration of the Eucharist, the center of all Passionist community prayer, makes it possible for us to be the “memorial” of the passion and death of Christ in the Church for the world.

Editor’s Note: Father Mondragón has extensively referenced this commentary. Some of the references have been incorporated in the text of the commentary; the remainder can be found in the original Spanish translation in this same series of *Passionist History and Spirituality*.

APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

Rev. Harry Gielen, C.P.

Chapter Four of our new Constitutions reflects a serenity that did not always characterize the discussions which produced it. It is the result of a protracted and often painful effort on behalf of the Chapter members to combine two fundamental dimensions of the apostolate of our

Congregation: the respect for the original inspiration and the exigencies of today's concrete needs in their tangible variety all over the world. To some this final text may sound too general, but it should be realized that it is meant to serve as a guideline not only for Western countries but equally for our expanding communities in many parts of the Third World.

The Chapter is clearly divided into 4 parts:

- 1) Introduction (62-63)
- 2) The Passion in our Apostolic Activity (64-66)
- 3) Community Dimension of our Apostolate (67-69)
- 4) Areas of our Apostolic Activity (70-76)

1. Introduction

The two introductory paragraphs sketch in a concise and dense way the theological background of our apostolate.

A close look at par. 62 makes us discover not less than 20 key ideas that are evoked by the very term of Passionist apostolate. The list of these key ideas is as follows:

- 1) The Church
- 2) was founded to spread the Kingdom of God
- 3) to make everyone sharers in
- 4) redemption and salvation
- 5) and thus establish the right relationship of the entire world
- 6) to Christ.
- 7) Religious
- 8) who are deeply involved in the Mystery of the Church
- 9) take part in her apostolate in a distinctive way
- 10) by a total dedication of their lives for Christ and the People of God.
- 11) To our own Congregation
- 12) the Church has entrusted a special share of her apostolate.
- 13) She urges us to keep constantly alive in the hearts of the faithful
- 14) the memory of the Passion
- 15) in which the love of the Savior is so eminently expressed.
- 16) We have inherited from our Founder
- 17) the precious legacy of his teachings and personal example.
- 18) This is a source of inspiration to the entire Congregation
- 19) and challenges each member to play his part zealously in the
- 20) apostolic endeavors demanded by our times.

This paragraph certainly ranks among the richest in content of the whole Constitutions. It is a worthwhile effort to look at our apostolate from the right perspective which is no other than Christ's ongoing mission within the Church for the benefit of today's world. But as such it reflects an approach which stems from a 'deductive' theology. It could be an inspiring challenge for a community discussion to describe our apostolate starting 'from below', by way of an 'inductive' theology.

The final version of par. 63 shows the scars of long discussions during the Chapter sessions. It refers to important aspects of our apostolate, but without presenting them in a clear and

synthetic way. What we discover in some Vatican II documents is also revealed here, namely, that a given discussion sometimes comes to a conclusion not by way of harmony, but by way of juxtaposition of important elements.

The following aspects are stressed in this paragraph:

- 1) The apostolic nature of religious life (the implicit reference to P.C. 8 is somewhat distorted).
- 2) Participation in the apostolate on behalf of all the members according to gifts and circumstances.
- 3) The importance of the ministry of the Word.
- 4) This Word, as the good news of salvation, creates community among all believers.
- 5) The example of Jesus who ‘went about doing good and healing all’ invites us to be ‘doers of the word’ through preaching and through involvement in the needs of people.

This very outline confirms the initial remark that this paragraph is far from excelling in unity and clarity. What seems to be aimed at is ‘a theology of preaching,’ but it is obscured by heterogeneous elements.

2. The Passion in our Apostolic Activity

The introductory statement of this section links the Passion of Jesus with his resurrection. Within that context there is room for a religious institute to stress the central value of ‘the word of the Cross’ in Christian life.

The renewed theology and spirituality of the Cross, both in Western and in Third World countries, is a real challenge for our Congregation to get inspired by rich insights. We tended to present Jesus’ Passion as an abstract ‘mystery’, without relating it to the whole of his life and to his radical commitment, thus prescinding from the causes of his death. The return, in contemporary exegesis, to the Jesus of history should be reflected in our reading and preaching of the Passion event. To neglect the historic roots of this event is to strip it of its character of scandal, which should not be obscured by a mere spiritual proclamation.

Par. 65 contains an important statement which is at the heart of a renewed theology of the Cross: “We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the centre of our lives. This entails a loving commitment to follow Jesus Crucified, and a generous resolve to proclaim His Passion and death with faith and love. His Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever present realities to people in the world today, ‘crucified’ as they are by injustice, by lack of a deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence.”

The following excerpt from the final document of the German Synod of Catholic Dioceses (1975) should be meditated and taken to heart especially by a religious community that strives:

“to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with the Passion of Christ”, “The message of Jesus also applies critically to ourselves, of course, who look in hope to his cross. It does not allow us to focus on the story of his suffering in such a way as to forget the anonymous history of suffering in the world, in our concentration on the cross of Jesus to forget the many crosses in the world, in our concern with his Passion to be silent about the many

torments and countless instances of anonymous death, the sufferings passed over in silence, the persecution of untold thousands of human beings tortured to death in this century because of their faith, race or political attitude... But in the history of the Church and of Christianity (and we may add, of our Congregation) have we not separated Christ's hope-giving suffering too sharply from the single Passion story of mankind? By linking the Christian idea of suffering exclusively to his cross and to ourselves as his disciples, have we not created free zones in our world where the suffering of others goes on unhindered? Have not we Christians often shown an appalling insensitivity and indifference to this suffering? Have we not relegated it to a 'purely secular realm' – as if it had never been told us that the One on whom our hope is fixed comes to meet us precisely here in this 'secular' history of suffering and judges how seriously we hope in him: 'Lord, when did we ever see you suffering... Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' Only as we are alert to hear the dark prophecy of this suffering and apply it fruitfully to ourselves, do we hear and confess aright the hopeful message of Christ's suffering."

Par. 66 evokes three pastoral practices of promoting the grateful memory of Jesus' Passion: by teaching the people, after the example of Paul of the Cross, on "how to meditate in the best and easiest way upon the Passion of Christ" by valuing and renewing the expressions of 'the religious devotion of people today;' by exercising the ministry of spiritual direction of individual persons.

3. Community Dimension of our Apostolate

Recent developments in religious life have emphasized the importance of the community dimension. This dimension is not so much opposed to the prevailing trend, particularly in Western society, towards self-realization, as in fact it has been provoked by it. The very search for the authentic self reveals our dependence upon others. As M. Buber puts it: "People offer each other the heavenly bread of the true self."

But it remains true that an inevitable tension will exist between the demands of our life in community and the personal gifts of the brethren. This tension is reflected in the parallel way in which the community demands and the personal talents are referred to. Whereas par. 67 tells us that "we should have special concern for those forms of the apostolate that are enriched by, and in turn nourish, community life," we are at the same time exhorted, in par. 68, to "be generous in recognizing the gifts of every member of the community, and esteem and encourage the apostolic service undertaken for the Church and for the benefit of others."

On purpose no explicit mention is made of the brothers in the area of the apostolate. The overall concern to avoid making a division between priests and brothers is reflected in the statement of par. 68 which is meant to include all the community members without distinction: "All the religious should be given suitable opportunities to make use of their various gifts in the many different apostolic works that the Congregation carries out for the welfare of the Church."

A separate paragraph draws our attention to "the need to collaborate responsibly with people of good will" (69). In the situation of today's society and Church we are increasingly dependent upon others in the pursuit of "all that is true, noble and just." More than in the past both religious communities and individual religious have to rely upon the efforts of others, indeed of all

Christians, in view of the common task of establishing the Kingdom of God. Being part of the Church themselves, religious should be particularly concerned about the kind of Church they want to serve and to promote: “If we do not want to turn into a tiny church composed of a dilettante elite or into a cowed and intimidated minority then the task is laid on us of turning more and more from being a Church for the people that seems intent on protecting and sheltering them to being a Church of the people, in other words to work towards the people learning more and more to understand itself as the agent in this Church, as the agent of its history before God” (J.B. Metz).

4. Areas of our Apostolic Activity

Six areas of apostolic activity are explicitly mentioned in this section:

- 1) Service of the Word, especially by the preaching of parish missions and spiritual exercises, described as remaining “our special and central activity.”
- 2) Work among de-christianized groups.
- 3) Involvement on behalf of justice and struggle for human dignity.
- 4) Ministry on the level of the local Church in cooperative and well planned apostolic activity.
- 5) Ecumenical activities.
- 6) The missionary task of proclaiming and establishing the Kingdom of God among all people, equally referred to as one of the Congregation’s “primary and central activities.”

The perspective from which these different apostolic activities have to be assumed and performed is indicated throughout the text by repetitive phrases, such as: “apostolic endeavors demanded by our times” (62); “a more sensitive response to the needs of their neighbors” (65); “a deeper awareness and understanding” (65); “to find new and creative ways” (66); “the signs of the times” (73); “we are open and available” (73); “adaptation to the changing needs of time and place” (76).

This repeated emphasis on openness and adaptation to the changing needs of time and place is in accordance with an authentic understanding of our ‘charism.’ Charism is essentially a relational concept, i.e., it points to an initial inspiration which keeps its vitality and validity only in as far as it is relived and recreated in ever new circumstances.

In a paper prepared for a meeting that was never held, Fr. Stanislas Breton attacks the fundamentalist attitude which identifies what is essential with what is past. It then becomes impossible to understand the radical changes of recent history imposed upon us in spite of ourselves. He makes a distinction between tradition as a support and tradition as a norm:

“Tradition as a support is the whole of the foundational events to which we refer when we speak of the origins of our Congregation. These events, collected in a tale that is more or less common to all, are a necessary part of a collective memory that binds us to a past, which is an indispensable element of our existence. If we would not have that memory anymore, if we suffered from total amnesia, we would become incapable of saying ‘I’ or ‘We’; we would be condemned to a life without depth, to a life dispersed in the discontinuity of fragmentary moments. To avoid such a fragmentation, such a schizophrenia, we have to project our present into a past in order to support it. That is tradition as a support. Far from underestimating its value, I stress its urgent necessity. But having said that, and it should be said, the tradition as a support could not claim to be the

unconditional norm of life, valid for all times and all places. And this for a very simple reason, which can be formulated as follows: any memory, even a collective memory, is necessarily historic. It is invited, therefore, under the impact of the occurring changes, to look at our very origins in a different way. The Founder and the creator are constantly recreated by their creatures. Thus, we are historically responsible for the new existence that we will give, by our action and our courage, to our very foundation. But to recognize this massive fact is to recognize at the same time that a new existence requires a new regulation of our being and of our acting; that we are in perpetual need to invent our Passionist essence, because we cannot dissociate essence and existence. Consequently, we have to admit that tradition as a support, however venerable it may be, cannot be functionally equivalent to a normative tradition.”

We do not choose ourselves the social and cultural circumstances in which we live and work; they are given realities, varying from continent to continent and from country to country. An accurate analysis of the concrete situation one is facing in a given area is a prerequisite that should determine the form of action to be undertaken. The concluding remark of this Chapter points in that direction: “Each Province as a whole, as well as each local community, is responsible for making a mature appraisal of its apostolic activity, and for assessing current forms of collaboration in case these need to be adapted to new circumstances of time and place.”

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- How would we re-write the introductory paragraph 62 when using an inductive instead of deductive approach?
- Which means do we apply and which efforts do we make in order to implement the concluding statement of par. 65?
- Do we promote apostolic involvement that tries to respond to the needs of the privileged addressees of the Gospel, the 'crucified' of our days?
- Do we really try to find "new and creative ways to enhance the prayer life of the people as well as our own?"
- Is our fidelity to our charism a question of repeating the same words or are we renewers of a tradition? Is tradition for us a fire to which we want to bring our own wood?

APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

Rev. Anselmo De Battista, C.P.

Background of Chapter Four

By its Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, the Council urged a return to the spirit of the Founder and adaptation to changed life situations.

Under the leadership of the then Superior General, Father Theodore Foley, the Extraordinary General Chapter of 1968 agreed on four fundamental principles for reviewing and renewing the section in the Constitutions treating Passionist Apostolate. The four principles are:

1. By reason of our Holy Founder's original inspiration, our Congregation is essentially oriented toward an active apostolate which the Church has incorporated into its own salvific mission in the world.
2. The apostolate of the Congregation must be distinguished through the special ministry the Church has entrusted it, namely, the conversion and sanctification of others through the "Word of the Cross."
3. The Congregation must regulate the kind of apostolic activity by which it serves the Church's salvific mission.
4. The Congregation must ensure a suitable apostolate for all its members, and provide for the planning and specialization of its ministries. (Report Four, nn. 351, 356-359, 377)

In the Chapter of 1970, these four principles were accepted as the foundation for Chapter Four of the Chapter Document. The Chapter of 1976 also confirmed these principles.

Since the Chapter of 1982 had the task of terminating the period of experimentation and putting in the new Constitutions only what was necessary to define the nature, character and end of the Institute (E.S., Art. 6), particular items regarding areas and forms of the apostolate were put into the newly formulated Regulations. This arrangement was considered necessary, not only as a matter of principle, but also because of the diversity in defining areas and forms of the apostolate. Father General, Father Paul M. Boyle, clearly brought this out in his opening discourse at the 1982 General Chapter. However, the four principles initially enunciated at the beginning of our renewal process still remain substantially the same supporting columns of the Chapter on the Apostolate.

My reflections on Chapter Four will, therefore, flow from these four principles.

PART I

"By reason of our Holy Founder's original inspiration, our Congregation is essentially oriented toward an active apostolate which the Church has incorporated into its own salvific mission in the world." (Report Four, n. 351)

The Passionist Community is apostolic because the Church is apostolic and, as all religious institutes, it participates in the Church's apostolate. However, the Church entrusts an important

component of its own apostolate to the Passionist Community: render fruitful the love of Christ as demonstrated in his Passion, so that its memory will remain alive and be perennially celebrated. This finality is attained above all by the ministry of the Word, a ministry which must be held in the highest esteem.

Our Founder experienced this spiritual tension, and his example can sustain us in our present efforts.

Our Constitutions treat the aspect of the Congregation's apostolic activity by beginning with an awareness that the call to the apostolate is common to every member of the Church by reason of baptism. Moreover, our Holy Founder considered his religious to be "apostolic workers" who were to reawaken in the faithful the memory of the Passion. The Constitutions, consequently, override the problem of the priority of activity over contemplation and vice versa. Let's examine these points more closely.

Apostolate: Essential Element in every Ecclesial Vocation

Numbers 62 and 63 of our present Constitutions refer to the concept which Vatican II proposed regarding the missionary aspect of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* reminds us that all the people of God who participate in the threefold power of king, prophet and priest are the subject of the Church's mission and messianic powers. Consequently, the call to mission is not limited to apostolic activity as such, since it precedes any form, whether to the active apostolate in itself or to contemplation strictly understood. The vocation to mission is the essential element and is presupposed in every case.

Our Constitutions are well aware of the ecclesiological formulation that Vatican II uses in number 2 of the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity as a point of departure (cf. Const. 62).

Apostolic Workers

By a specific vow, Passionists immerse themselves in the ecclesial dynamic of the apostolate in so far as they place themselves in the historical current of "apostolic workers." By the vow of keeping alive the memory of Christ, exclusively for an apostolic end and lived in community, Passionists draw all their strength for proclaiming the Word of the Cross from contemplation of the Crucified.

Within Historical Tradition

The Congregation is situated in the spiritual current of the "apostolic life." It was this current which gave rise in the middle ages to mendicant orders and, after the Council of Trent, to various institutes dedicated to evangelization.

Certainly, Bishop E. Cavalieri, who was an "apostolic worker" himself, had a great influence on Saint Paul of the Cross in this manner. Our Holy Founder remained with him for about six months beginning in August 1724.

Although there were differences in particular cases, the person of the apostolic worker was well defined during the time of St. Paul of the Cross. Essentially, the distinguishing marks of an apostolic worker were:

- absolute detachment from material goods; and gratuitous ministries;
- love of solitude for a greater union with Christ and for proclaiming Him to people;
- austerity of life to obtain mercy and perseverance for the people;
- frankness and charity in fearlessly proclaiming the truth;
 - ministry preferably to the poor;
- soundness of doctrine and competent, but simple, “apostolic” exposition (cf. F. Giorgini, *Storia dei Passionisti*, Vol. I, pp. 87, 90).

To these marks, which are common to all Institutes of “apostolic workers,” St. Paul of the Cross integrated well those which were particularly joined to the specific “munus” of the Passionist apostolic worker.

In the mind of our Holy Founder, apostles and evangelizers were those who gave primary importance to the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery as presented in the catechesis of the New Testament. As an example, we can recall Saint Peter’s five discourses in the Acts of the Apostles, and the preaching of the Apostle Paul who “boasting only in the Cross of our Lord” (Gal 6:14), proclaimed “Jesus and Him Crucified” (1 Cor 1:23).

Understanding Passionist apostolic activity as that of “apostolic workers” who are committed to keep alive the memory of the Lord’s Passion, we can draw the following conclusions:

- if the Passionist shouldn’t consider himself a monk, he should, nevertheless, feel the need and duty of prolonged periods of silence and contemplation while living in poor houses;
- the proclamation the Passionist delivers is not a simple explanation of a truth, but the manifestation of a message that is received and matured in one’s heart in the silence of contemplation;
- before being a preacher, the Passionist is a disciple of the Word to be proclaimed (Acts 4:20; 2 Cor 4:13), in that he has allowed himself to be drawn to and molded by this same Word (cf. *Evang. Nunt.* 18);
- thus a quasi-common destiny exists between the Word and the preacher through which the foolishness of the preaching (1 Cor 1:21) renders the preacher a fool in the eyes of the world, a fool for the sake of Christ (1 Cor 4:10).

To remain such, the Passionist must walk a road found in the original inspiration of our Holy Founder. We can, therefore, understand why he wrote in the Rule: “We prescribe no particular rule...which must precede and accompany so great a work, because our religious apply themselves (to contemplation and penance) continually at home in the retreat....Let them do likewise, as far as possible, even during missions....” (Rule 196-197). Missionaries returning home from missions “...should willingly remain in the retreat...occupied in holy meditation at the feet of Jesus Crucified....” (Rule, 221).

In Apostolic Communities

In treating the fundamentals of the Passionist life, the first Chapter of the Constitutions looks at the specific Passionist vow of keeping alive the memory of the Passion as eminently apostolic. In addition, it declares that Passionists must be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and must “live

their lives like apostles” (Const. 1), demonstrating the capability of living in apostolic communities in order to fulfill its valid and continuing mission (Const. 2).

The biblical background for the Passionist apostolate is the missionary discourse in Luke 10:1-12. To this are added specific characteristics of the Passionist charism which can be read in our Holy Founder’s letter of February 13, 1768, to Canon F. Pagliari:

“According to the lights our Divine Majesty was pleased to give me, our Congregation is founded on prayer and fasting and in genuine solitude according to the holy counsels of our Divine Savior. He wanted his apostles to retire into solitude after their holy missions: Rest awhile in solitude; and our divine Majesty gave the example, since after his preaching, he withdrew to the mountains alone to pray. Our Congregation is based on such a foundation. If this is overturned, the entire edifice will crumble, since it will not be the vocation God has given it....” (Letters, Vol. III, pp. 417-420).

Poverty, solitude, prayer and a penitential spirit are the characteristics of “apostolic workers” of the Congregation of the Passion, who also live in apostolic communities.

The title given to the fourth Chapter of the Constitutions, Apostolic Community, is significant. The previous Chapter Document had a limited title of Apostolic Activity. Thanks to this change in title from Apostolic “Activity” to Apostolic “Community,” a uniformity of language is maintained in the entire text of our Constitutions. Above all, however, the new ecclesial mentality, rooted in the Council, highlights the communitarian dimension of the Church as “sacrament, or sign, and instrument of intimate union with God, and the unity of all mankind” (Lumen Gentium, n. 1),

It is evident, therefore, that the community dimension of the Passionist apostolate occupies a striking place, not only for its inclusion in the title of Chapter Four, but above all for being selected as a fundamental criterion in discerning the authenticity and specificity of our apostolic work. Although it is placed immediately after it, the community dimension is equally as important as our charism.

Contemplative Apostles

In his letter of October 12, 1976, to our Superior General, Paul M. Boyle, Pope Paul VI wrote: “Saint Paul of the Cross was an authentic contemplative and an indefatigable missionary. Rather, he was an indefatigable missionary because he was an authentic contemplative.”

Our Holy Father’s words invite us to rethink correctly the problem of the relationship between activity and contemplation. Our own historians tell us that this discussion entered late in the Congregation. In fact, to separate apostolic activity from contemplation and from monastic observances is to betray the genuine end of the Institute. Apostolic activity, although noble, would then simply be a job.

Saint Paul of the Cross did not see the separation of contemplation and activity, but believed that contemplation and monastic observances are intrinsically complimented by the apostolate. This is confirmed in a few documents.

In the brief bulletin of 1747, our Holy Founder writes: “The primary end of this young Congregation is to prepare oneself by prayer, penance, fasting, lamentations and tears for the benefit of the neighbor, for the sanctification of souls and conversion of sinners”; and in the same document: “The (Passionist) life is not unlike that of the apostles. On the contrary, their life is the norm the Constitutions adhere to in forming a man totally of God, totally apostolic” (Notizia, 1747, n. 2).

We also recall the letter to Canon Pigliari: “...an apostolic worker who is a man of prayer, a friend of solitude and detached from everything created is more effective than a thousand others who are not such...” (Letters, III, p. 418; cf. Commentary of C. Brovotto in RSpP, n. 6 p. 14).

The expressions “zealous and spiritual workers” and “a man of God” have clear biblical derivations: Matt. 10:10; Lk 10:7; 2 Kgs 1:10.

In addition, the expression “man of God” is the classical name given to Old Testament Prophets. Recall the Prophet Elba whose prophetic voice is heard from the desert. And to be a proclaimer of the Gospel, the Apostle Paul’s disciple must be a “man of God equipped for every good

PART II

The second principle the Capitulars enunciated for the draft of Chapter Four is: “The apostolate of the Congregation must be distinguished through the special ministry the Church has entrusted it, namely, the conversion and sanctification of others through the Word of the Cross” (cf. Report Four, n. 356).

Numbers 64-66 of Chapter Four are based on this principle. The numbers take up again and concretize the significance of the special vow to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ as delineated in nn. 5 and 6 of these same Constitutions.

Charism of Saint Paul of the Cross

In full harmony with the Vatican Council’s proposal that each Institute have its own physiognomy and function (PC n. 2), the Constitutions affirm that the specific task of the Congregation of the Passion is to proclaim the Word of the Cross or, to use our Holy Founder’s words: “to keep alive in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion of Jesus.” We read in one of his letters: “The primary end of the Institute is to strive for one’s own perfection by complete detachment from everything created, living in rigorous poverty and in prayer and fasting.”

“The secondary end, but nonetheless as important as the first, for the greater glory of God and salvation of souls, is to work for the conversion of sinners by promoting in the hearts of the faithful devotion to the Passion of Christ. And this can be accomplished both on missions and other spiritual exercises by preaching the meditation after the mission sermon” (Letters, II, p. 262).

Paul of the Cross was convinced that meditation on the Passion was the most efficacious means for sustaining the people in their love for God and in avoiding sin. His missionary labor gave him first hand experience in this (Letters, III, p. 72).

Apostolic Creativity of Saint Paul of the Cross

The Founder's creativity in the apostolate did not consist in giving priority to a sacramental ministry, nor simply to increase the number of devotions to the Lord's Passion. Forms of devotion to the Passion were not lacking in the 1700's.

Father Costante Brovetto writes that neither can Paul's charism be reduced to presenting the Passion as a means of favoring the three classical ways of the spiritual life, namely, the purgative way, the illuminative way, the unitive way ©. Brovetto in RspP, n. 23, p. 26).

Paul, in fact, had a much higher vision of his charism. He held that the memory of the Passion is sought for its own sake; and that, even if it is a means and weapon for sanctification, it is, at the same time, an end which is identified with the Gospel itself and with the realization of more authentic holiness. Thus, our Holy Founder desired to enter actively into his world to change it; and he did this by meditating and instructing others to meditate on the Passion of Christ. For him, the diagnosis of, and cure for, evils in society and the world consists in this: forgetting the Lord's Passion is the beginning of all evils, while every good comes from remembering it.

“The Father of mercies has deigned to place a new Order, an Institute, in his Church in this deplorable and calamitous time. Every sort of iniquity openly floats before it and harms holy faith. Many areas of Christianity vividly experience iniquity, but the world slumbers in a profound forgetfulness of the bitter sufferings Jesus, our veritable Good, endured for it, since the memory of his most Sacred Passion is all but extinct in the hearts of the faithful. This new Congregation takes aim, therefore, to eradicate both disorders. By such a devotion it intends to crush vice, plant virtue and direct souls again on the road to heaven, for the Passion of Jesus is the most efficacious means for obtaining every good” (Notizia, 1747, n. 1-2; Letters, II, p. 213).

Paul of the Cross envisioned precise goals in the extraordinary proclamation of the memory of the Passion: above all the reform of the Church, and, therefore, the renewal of the individual from the interior disintegration due to sin to the heights of contemplation and sanctity.

Reform of the Church

According to Saint Paul of the Cross, the degree of forgetfulness of the memory of Christ's Passion is the most expressive indicator of the decadence of any Church, clergy or laity (cf. A. Artola in RSpP, n. 3, p. 30).

If this was the reason our Holy Founder embraced the method of keeping alive the memory of the Passion for his time, it is no less true for our contemporary Church. Hence the reason for wanting a well defined memory: the spiritual activity of meditation. We do not intend simply a strictly personal meditation for religious, however. What is also included is moving the masses toward this form of recalling or remembering the Passion.

For Paul, to be apostolic men signifies being and living in those conditions which permit growth as men of prayer. Passionists must, themselves, “be indefatigable in prayer in order to

attain a loving union with God, while at the same time teach the faithful the most simple method possible in so angelic an exercise” (early Regulations).

For the Total Renewal of the Individual

More than saving structures, Paul of the Cross aimed at liberating the person by his preaching. Thus he situated the individual on the horizon of life’s last ends. In other words, we can say that Paul anticipated that diagnosis and analysis of contemporary evils that Vatican II carried out and concluded that sin is the cause of tensions and divisions in the world, imbedding itself in the hearts of the people (cf. GS, 13b, repeated by Pope John Paul II in Div. Mis., 13).

One must be convinced that the imbalance resulting from sin which exists in people’s hearts and reflected in society can be eliminated if they are conditioned to recognize and live out the love Christ has demonstrated on the Cross. The goal is realized in learning to keep alive the memory of the Lord’s Passion.

This is a very difficult but extremely necessary apostolate and one which is least recognized as such today. Actually, nothing is changed if man doesn’t realize his true place in God’s designs. The real revolution is accomplished in a change of mentality – conversion – and not simply in changing structures. Genuine salvation begins from within, and later involves even exterior elements.

This apostolate touches the person who truly seeks conversion and who reflects upon, and is aware of, the love God has for everyone who lives in a society that considers man as merely part of a work force and a consumer produce (cf. F. Giorgini in RSpP, n. 15, p. 28).

Contemplation is for Everyone

Having posited these principles, it is evident that Paul of the Cross considers the call to contemplation open to everyone. He admits that higher contemplation requires a special call and has unique characteristics; but infused contemplation is a gift God gives to everyone.

He writes to a religious sister: “You say that you do not understand the contemplation God allows souls most dear to him. I reply that, if you are faithful in bearing patiently, meekly, with much resignation the sufferings of soul and body that God permits you, accepting them as coming from his hands, then our divine Majesty will certainly give you the grace to meditate and contemplate well on his most holy sufferings and imitate his divine virtues. This is an extremely profitable contemplation” (Letters, II, p. 267).

Although there may not be all the signs of infused contemplation, having the Savior’s love for suffering humanity is, for Paul, already contemplation. Thus he speaks of this to everyone, and he urges his religious to instruct others in meditation on the Passion.

PART III

The third and fourth principles regard the force of renewal which the Congregation must continually undertake to be updated in its apostolate according to the needs of the times.

These principles are:

“The Congregation must regulate the kind of apostolic activity through which it serves the Church’s salvific mission.”

“The Congregation must ensure a suitable apostolate for all its members, and provide for the planning and specialization of its ministries.”

These are difficult principles to apply, for we must remain faithful to our origins and to the ministry the Church has entrusted to us. However, we must also consider a changed society and one that is in flux. Therefore, we must operate with new forms and methods, but always so that society will accept eternal values.

In addition, the Congregation is international and, thus, immersed in an extremely diverse socio-cultural world in which some are more inclined toward conservatism, while others more to taking risks. Neither, however, should be harmful to the other.

The Chapter accomplished its difficult task by enunciating in the Constitutions values and guiding principles for a Passionist apostolate and even enumerated several specific areas of apostolic activity. On the other hand, the Chapter put the modality of carrying out certain apostolates in the Regulations. It also enumerated apostolates not well defined as yet, and set down criteria for accepting and carrying out new ministries. Experimentation and time will offer a more balanced evaluation, while, at the same time, maintaining the Institute in necessary dynamism and needful research. It remains to the provinces to undertake ongoing verification.

Principles and Criteria for Passionist Apostolate

Chapter Four of the Constitutions gives principles and values, as well as criteria for discerning the various apostolic activities that help to keep alive the memory of the Lord’s Passion.

Community Dimension of the Passionist Apostolate

One principle and a fundamental and sound criterion to keep in mind in discerning apostolic commitments is certainly founded on the community dimension of our apostolate. Numbers 67-69 treat this matter, as well as the community’s relationship with the individual’s charism and with the human community. In treating the specificity of the Passionist apostolate, we have already pointed out that “apostolic workers” live in community (cf. above Apostolic Communities).

According to the “mind” (mens) of the Founder, the apostolic structure of the Congregation is certainly communitarian. Accepting this reinforces the community dimension of the apostolate and the apostolic dimension of life at home. The Passionist is, in fact, formed by his community and finds his identity in the Congregation. He is influenced by: the tradition and spirit of the community, common prayer, the particular care placed on the awareness of and meditation on the sufferings of Christ.

The Passionist is sustained by his community. He is not a solitary worker in the Lord's vineyard, but a member of a group. He is sustained in countless ways: team ministry and co-responsibility for programs, by the interest and prayers of his brothers, by ongoing review of life and by humble criticism.

It should be continually emphasized that living alone while working in a particular apostolate, or even living with other Passionists while being closed to them, is contrary to Passionist spirit and structure.

Having said this, however, we must admit that no satisfactory solution has yet been found in harmonizing commitments connected with community living and commitments connected with apostolic activity. In speaking of "apostolic campaigns" and of spending prolonged periods in community "at the feet of Christ Crucified," our sound tradition offers one concrete example of how difficult it is in practically harmonizing one's communitarian and apostolic consecration.

Guidelines in Selecting Apostolates

Our Founder certainly knew that his vocation was not that of indiscriminately serving all the needs of the Church. Thus, he decided not to be hospital chaplain at St. Gallicano, nor to assist at the Shrine at Gaeta.

He had definite criteria for discerning his selection of apostolates. Regarding hospitality in our houses, he wrote to Canon Pagliari:

"Our Rule obliges us to receive only one or two retreatants in our retreats for only 10, at most, 15 days. There should be a separate building attached to the retreat for retreatants."

"If God provides, all will be done in time. Then you can send retreatants as you wish for 8, 10 or 15 days. But we can never receive convicts nor condemned criminals, since our retreats are religious houses and not prisons nor penitentiaries" (Letters, III, pp. 419s).

Number 28 of the Regulations gives principles for selecting areas and forms through which we can carry out our apostolic commitment in today's Church. It is the duty of Superiors and Provinces to know how to discern the apostolic areas in which to put our religious.

I would like to highlight two fundamental principles or criteria for fruitful discernment which seem to be the basis for those enumerated in number 28 of the Regulations. These can be deduced, it seems, from our tradition and can facilitate elimination of certain ambiguities relative to our charism and, particularly, to the ministry of the Word of the Cross.

a. Exclusive service in proclaiming the Word of the Cross

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priest, nn. 4-6 and the Synod of Bishops of 1971 (Sacerdozio Ministeriale, part II, nn. 1, 2) forcefully state that the proclamation of the Word belongs principally to the ministerial priesthood.

b. Extraordinary proclamation in the Church and to the World

As we have seen, our Founder thought of Passionist apostolate as an extraordinary intervention by which all of mankind is saved from the sin in which it is mired and restored to life in the Church according to the design of its Founder, the Crucified and Risen Christ. Thus the concern of St. Paul of the Cross for the reform of the clergy and the institution of an extraordinary pastoral practice such as parish missions: for these would bring the people back to God that they might live according to the basic truths of faith.

Fields of Apostolic Activity

The Constitutions highlight parish missions, retreats and foreign missions as “primary and central” Passionist apostolates.

Other than these, the Constitutions also make reference to:

1. Apostolic activity among de-christianized groups (71).
2. Involvement on behalf of justice and human dignity (72).
3. Availability to the local church, sharing its pastoral needs (73).
4. Commitment to ecumenical activities, both as individuals and as community.

In all these apostolates the Passionist must mark his activity by professional competence, experience and adaptation to the changing needs of time and place (76).

Certainly, all these fields of activity are of our tradition. If we examine some of his writings, we find that St. Paul, in his choice of apostolic activities, was more far-reaching than we ordinarily think.

In the “Breve Notizia” n. 22 of 1768 he writes:

“In conformity with the Holy Rule, by the vow of holy obedience, the religious are bound to respond to the desires, needs and requests of the Ordinaries, offering their talents to serve these Bishops for the benefit of their dioceses. It is the duty of the Discalced Clerics of the Passion not to omit any means and to employ every skill for the conversion of souls. They do this by parish missions, by teaching catechism, by preaching, teaching the people to meditate, giving retreats to priests, nuns and seculars and engaging in all kinds of other apostolic activities. However, let them not be so involved during the season of Lent” (Notizia 1768, n. 22).

According to the will of our Founder, even our Retreats should be outstanding apostolic centers. He makes further reference to this in “Breve Notizia” 1768, nn. 26, 27, 28:

“That the retreats be even more helpful to surrounding places, cities and regions, the religious are always ready to hear the confessions of those who desire to unburden their consciences. In addition, on feast days they sometimes go to neighboring towns and beyond to preach sermons, instructions, or meditations.”

“However, not to leave any stone unturned for the sake of the neighbor, a number of rooms are set aside in these same retreats which serve for retreats to ecclesiastics...and to the laymen who may wish to enjoy the pleasure of loving solitude for several days.”

“Finally, without any regard for self, these apostolic workers sacrifice themselves in all and for all for the good of souls. By Rule they should be ready to undertake missions even to infidels at the least sign from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” (Notizia, 1768, n. 26).

The areas of the apostolate are vast and many forms have yet to be discovered, particularly those which help us in ministering to the de-christianized. Discovery of these forms should be encouraged.

It seems to me that, in view of our apostolic vocation which the new Constitutions so clearly delineate, there remains nothing else but to be even more deeply committed to what Cardinal Pironio indicated to the Capitulars in 1976:

“Seek to live the joy of evangelization today and to be faithful to this call to evangelization. The Lord has called you in this moment of history to proclaim to the world the good news of Christ, dead and risen. Seek to be faithful.”