

THE GENERAL FORMATION PLAN (GFP) 2023

Catechesis

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The charism of the Memory of the Passion, core of Passionist formation

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It seems that the *"inspiration to wear a black tunic of poor, coarse 'arbagio' fabric"* dates to 1717; but as for the rest, Paul Danei was unclear. Still uncertain about which vocation to follow, it was after an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, dressed in black with the sign of the Passion on her breast, that he first learned that he should found a Congregation "where there is continuous mourning for the Passion and Death of my dear Son." It was after this revelation, followed other experiences of God, that progressively disposed him to accept His plan.

The "mourning" of which the Virgin Mary spoke expressed that mystery of participation in the sorrows of her "dear Son," which would constitute not only the dominant motif of Paul's life but would be an invitation to be communicated to others as well and, as such, to form a new religious reality regarding the physiognomy and intentions it proposes.

The God who showed Himself to the young Danei is Christ in His Passion, and the perfect union of love to which he aspired consisted in "presently feeling His anguish and being on the Cross with Him." By dying to



himself Paul aimed to rise again in God; **however, his rebirth was the conquest of a life that returned to the loving and sorrowful life of the crucified Christ**, the victim of atonement and the redeemer. In other words, for him it was a participation in the same love of Christ for sinners. In these yearnings for martyrdom and apostolate springing from deep contemplation, the future Congregation was realized. Its goal would be to give to the Church people inspired with the same zeal. This dying to be reborn to "deified" life implies "devotion" to the Passion of Jesus Christ, which is adherence of one's whole self to Him and in Him; this special devotion is "the most effective means of destroying iniquity," of combating sin and achieving holiness for every category of the faithful.

The "devotion" of the Passionist religious (and of each member of the entire Passionist family) is the effect of a particular gift, which penetrates the deepest fibers of one's being and remains there as an inspiring source, giving new psycho-spiritual energies. To be *memoria Passionis*, that is, to live the memory of the Passion, is the consequence of an extraordinary grace which enlightens so deeply that the mystery of the Cross remains "imprinted in the soul". It is from this that supernatural energies flow to be able first to **proclaim and teach** that the Passion of Christ is the greatest remedy for all the evils of the world.

The spirituality of the Passion

The ecclesial Magisterium identifies charism as the character proper to each Institute. (1) We could say that the charism is the genetic code of the Institute, it is the place where its identity is inscribed, where its spiritual heritage is contained. **A spirituality originates from each charism** (2) which is lived by those who belong to an Institute born from the spiritual experience of a Founder. The spirituality that flows from the Passionist charism can be called a 'spirituality of the Passion,' that is, a **spiritual-existential content** in which the charism is expressed, and which embraces the life of both the religious and the lay person in every single aspect. Only for the purpose of easier understanding, we speak of spiritual and existential aspects, because it is the human being in his totality that is transfigured by God's action in his person. The spirituality of the Passion is "a peculiar spirituality, that is, a concrete project of relationship with God and the environment, characterized by particular spiritual accents and operational choices"(3).

(1) CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Mutua relationes*, May 14, 1978, no. 11: "There are many religious institutes in the Church, and they are different from one another, according to the proper character of each (cf. PC 7, 8, 9, 10); but each one brings its own vocation that gift aroused by the Spirit, through the work of "distinguished men and women" (cf. LC 45; PC 1, 2), and authentically approved by the sacred hierarchy. The very "charism of the founders" (ET 11) reveals itself as an experience of the Spirit transmitted to its disciples to be lived, cherished, deepened, and constantly developed by them in harmony with the ever-growing body of Christ. This is why "the church defends and upholds the proper character of the various religious institutes" (LG 44; cf. CD 33, 35, 1, 35.2, etc.). This proper character, then, also entails a particular style of sanctification and apostolate, which establishes its own determinate tradition in such a way, that one can conveniently grasp its objective elements."

(2) CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Essential Elements of the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, May 31, 1983: "The gifts [charisms] determine the nature, spirit, purpose, and proper character of each institute i.e., its spiritual patrimony; they constitute the foundation of the sense of identity that is a key element in safeguarding the fidelity of every religious."

(3) John Paul II, *Post Synodal exhortation Vita Consecrata*, No. 93.

The essential aspects of Passion spirituality are found in the Founder's spiritual testament, where we read, "Let the spirit of prayer, the spirit of solitude, and the spirit of poverty flourish more and more in the Congregation; and be assured that, if these three things are maintained, the Congregation will shine before God and men" (4).

Regarding the spirit of prayer, we must first keep in mind the precise indications arising from the charism. On the other hand, it would be a contradiction for those who want to experience the Spirit in the light of a particular charism and not follow the kind of prayer it suggests. **Meditation is our specificum**, to which is added the official prayer of the Church; everything else comes after these first two points. The Passionist's meditation is addressed to the Father through the Passion of Christ: "*this is the door that leads the soul to intimate union with God, to interior recollection and to the most sublime contemplation.*" The spirit of prayer, therefore, springs from a strong desire for communion (the so-called union with God). Such an experience of communion with God, for the Passionist, is not to be confused with a series of feelings or a mystical vision; **it is an existential attitude that permeates the whole person, which must be present in daily life, as in the apostolate.**

The Passionist is a person who has a precise spiritual physiognomy: conformed to Christ, the victim of atonement and redemption, he has a sacrificial attitude, which leads him to relive the darkness of the agony of the Cross, that is, up to that prayer of suffering that made Paul of the Cross and all those who followed him along the path of reparatory immolation groan. This means staying in the retreat "occupied in holy meditations at the feet of the Crucified One."

The spirit of prayer is inextricably linked to solitude, which is physical, sought and loved, as a condition for the person's recollection. "To mourn for the Passion," as the Virgin Mary said to the young Danei, precisely means this: one who truly suffers because he or she is stricken by misfortune or shares in the sadness of a person or is a sharer in a collective misfortune, instinctively seeks silence, avoids companionship. This does not mean escape from the world, but it is a need from which it is not possible to escape and for which the only relief is silence and stillness.

Since in every reality of pain there is the crucified Christ, we, children of the Passion, are invited to seek Him in every suffering; **Christ experiences every pain together with man and humanity and, in doing so, shows the way.** This means that since He is the Lord of the history of each of us and of all mankind, the last word will be His about everything and everyone; therefore, **the mourning that the Passionist does is serene, and his sharing is a proclamation of joy.** There remains the need for solitude in order to continue to live passion and, at the same time, to go out to meet everyone "in order to teach the people with a living voice the devout remembrance of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ Our Lord, from whom, as from a source, all good comes" (5).

Directly related to the charism is the spirit of poverty. The solitude of Calvary is the image of the Passionist who participates in the poverty of the Crucified One. Therefore to remain at His feet means to live His own isolation understood as renunciation, death to everything. The spirit poverty, as understood by Paul of the Cross, is not only that of 'dependence,' that is, such as to resolve itself in an exercise of humility, in a disci-

(4) In the Italian language it is incorrect to use the term "value" in place of "spirit." The former, in fact, would only bring out the moral aspect of Passionist spirituality. Instead, as I have written, the "spirit" of which Paul of the Cross speaks, which is the way of explaining the charism, concerns the person in his totality: spiritual dimension (= life of faith), existential (= the virtues), praxis (=action), in short, the human being in his totality.

(5) Rule of the Congregation of the Discalced Clerics of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1775, 10, in Constitutions of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, edited by the CIPI Secretariat, Rome 1984.



plinary act, but of true penance: "I am most poor and rejoice exceedingly, because Jesus Christ also came into the world poor and was born in a stable; yet He was a God, Lord and Master of the universe. And shall not I, most vile creature, imitate the treads of my Lord?"

The poverty Paul wanted was to be "totally joyful, to maintain the fervor of holy prayer" (6). "Our Congregation," he explained to Brother Bartholomew, "must stand out in this aspect of being truly poor in spirit and naked and stripped of everything." Therefore, poverty concerns the person in all its aspects, but is motivated by the sharing of the atoning and redeeming Passion in an agapic mindset. This is what validly justifies a spirit of poverty.

In the Prologue of the new Rule, the apostolic aspect of the Passionist vocation also emerges, thus recalling one of the first inspirations received by the young Danei. It is, in other words, a mixed reality-- contemplative and active, where the contemplative aspect is guaranteed by conditions such as solitude, poverty and penance, typical of the spirituality of the Congregation.

Now, if proclaiming and teaching the memory of the Passion is the main goal, it is equally true that this could be done in so many ways and by infinite means, so that the Passionist could choose the ways he or she deems appropriate to achieve the goal. In other words, the main objective is to share the memory of the Passion. The rest is left to the sensitivity of the person, the places, and the times. However, to reason in this way would be a serious mistake (7). For if this were the case, there would be no need for the Passionist Congregation since it is the task of every Christian to proclaim one of the principal mysteries of our faith.

The proprium of the Congregation is the fourth vow, which is the first, because it precedes and illuminates in the formula of profession the other three vows of religious life. It is to be supported by the entire body of the Rule with its 38 chapters, from which a certain spirituality emerges, and a certain lifestyle is prescribed. It is all this that distinguishes the Congregation and its proclamation from any testimony of the *verbum crucis*, which is obligatory for all the baptized.

(6) Letters of St. Paul of the Cross, Founder of the Passionists, vol. IV, 220.

(7) It is even more so when it is stated succinctly that the Passionist charism is the Cross; this would mean that the Congregation does not have a true charism, but that it adapts to any form of service which the Church may need at a certain time or in a certain place. Where there is a Cross, there is the Passionist charism. This way of reasoning involves a total dissolution not only of the charism, but of Passionist religious life itself.

Not only that, but this is also what differentiates a truly Passionist apostolate from the pious and praiseworthy initiatives of religious who justify acting because, after all, it is proclamation of the Passion. The Passionist is "a man of prayer, a friend of solitude and detached from all created things"; on the other hand, the "fire of preaching" can only be kindled by "apostolic men, who come out of solitude and prayer."

Fidelity and renewal

Since it is "the charism that determines a particular type of spirituality, life, apostolate,

tradition" (8) **it is of paramount importance to study and restudy the founder and the literary sources. Ignorance of these is ignorance of the charism** (9). However, how can fidelity and renewal be combined? These go together, characterized by a tension which is constitutive and cannot be dissolved. To try to understand the relationship between these two elements, it is first necessary to understand the relationship that binds each Institute to its charism.

One aspect of this relationship must be a significant knowledge of the founder, his writings, and the history of the founding ex-




(8) CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Essential Elements of the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, no. 11.

(9) CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, May 19, 2002, no. 20: "the call to rediscover one's roots and choices in spirituality opens paths toward the future. It is a matter, first of all, of living in fullness the theology of the evangelical counsels starting from the Trinitarian model of life, [...] with a new opportunity to confront the sources of one's own charisms and constitutional texts, always open to new and more challenging interpretations."

perience. For any community member, ignorance of the founder and the founding experience of its origins is a lack of fidelity to oneself, one's vocation and spiritual identity and undermines any possible authentic renewal within the Institute. Once one recognizes the characteristics of the founding experience, which are meant to endure because they can still be embodied in the changed conditions of the times, one can set aside those elements related to the historical and cultural circumstances of the founding experience.

It is necessary to study whether that particular devotion, for example, was related to the founder's personal piety, whether it was inherited from the common custom of the time, or whether instead he wanted to inculcate it as a characteristic element for his religious family as the fruit of a particular experience related to the foundation project. If such components are not part of the heritage that the founder intended to deliver, they should be removed from the permanent and transmissible charismatic core.

It is from listening to the founder, his writings, and his mission, that that creative stimulus required for today and which maintains contact with the source can arise. On the other hand, the Spirit does not contradict itself; therefore, **any historical development of an Institute in its institutional forms**, for it to be authentic, must be in continuity and consistency with the original founding charism, otherwise it is to be rejected. It is a development that is nothing more than the clarification of that power of the Spirit that the charism had in it from its origins.

The gaze, therefore, must be constantly turned to the past, which means re-starting from one's original identity. Taking on the past allows one to creatively welcome one's present. We speak of welcoming, because the present is always a clarification that the Spirit works on the same inspiration of the origins. 

1.- Do I know the Founder, St. Paul of the Cross? his life, his writings?

2.- Do I really understand that to proclaim and teach the memory of the Passion it must first be implanted in me?

3.- Am I aware that any historical development in my congregation must be in continuity with and consistent with the original founding charism?



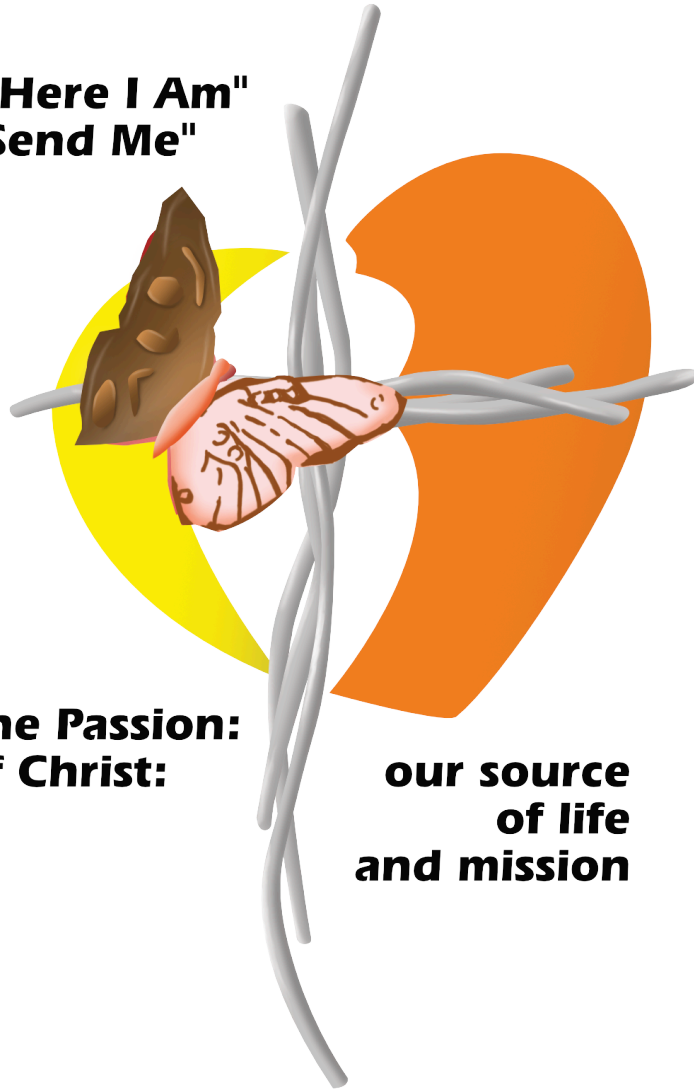
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**"Here I Am"
Send Me"**



**The Passion:
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48th GENERAL CHAPTER