

ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS



***RESOURCE
MATERIALS***

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1. THE SPIRITUAL DIARY OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

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Although the original manuscript was unfortunately not preserved, a reliable handwritten copy of the diary is kept in the Passionist archives in Rome. Published in 1867 for the first time, it has since been republished and translated into other languages. Worth mentioning are the Italian editions of Fr. Stanislao, which included a detailed commentary and appeared in Torino in 1926; E. Zoffoli's critical edition of 1964, with its German translation of 1976; and three English translations.

Since, on the one hand, the diary is one of the most important sources providing insight into the doctrine of St. Paul of the Cross and since, on the other hand, its original text has not been preserved, it is necessary to relate something about the copy's origin and reliability.

Paul turned the original manuscript over to Bishop Gattinara, who in turn left it in the possession of Canon Sardi, a young friend of the saint. Two or three weeks prior to Paul's death, the Passionists asked Sardi to send the diary and other writings of the founder to Rome. In a letter dated October 14, 1775, Sardi replied that he hesitated to send the desired documents to Rome for fear they be lost in the mail (the documents included not only the diary but also many letters written by the saint to Bishop Gattinara and to Sardi himself).

Some time after the founder's death, Fr. John Mary of St. Ignatius again asked Sardi to send Paul of the Cross' writings to Rome. Sardi first deliberated with his friends, the Earl of Canefri and Fr. John Baptist Stortiglioni and decided to send the diary along with four or five letters of the saint (addressed to Bishop Gattinara) to the Capuchin Fr. Cherubino da Voghera, who was preaching in the cathedral at Todi. Fr. Cherubino was to deliver the papers to the Passionist bishop of Todi, Thomas Struzzieri, who was then to take the documents to Rome on his next occasion to travel there.

Fr. Cherubino, however, never received the documents. Inquiries and investigations at the post offices of Alessandria, Bologna, Narni, and Todi were to no avail. The original manuscript of Paul's spiritual diary and some of his letters had been lost en route.

Fortunately, Canon Sardi was a very prudent man, and he himself had made a handwritten copy of these important papers. In a written statement, confirmed by oath, Sardi testified that the respective copy was written "in his own hand" letter by letter in conformity with the original, except for superfluous errors made in the course of transcription. Later this copy became the property of the Passionist Generalate in Rome, where it is preserved today.

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2. THE RULE OF THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION

THE ORIGINAL 1720 TEXT

The original text of the rule composed by St. Paul of the Cross during December 2-7, 1720, during the time of his retreat in Castellazzo, has not been

preserved in its entirety. Only its Introduction, Epilogue, and a few lines of the text have been handed down to us along with the story that tells why. In the beginning of February 1775, Paul of the Cross made a customary canonical visit to the Passionist Monastery of the Presentation on Mount Argentario. At that time he commanded that all papers written by him and preserved in the monastery be burned. The rector, however, asked one of the priests to copy quickly a part of the manuscript containing the original Rule. It is this copy only that has been preserved, containing the Introduction, Epilogue, and a fragment of the Rule. Initially kept in the archives of the bishop of Alessandria, it was later brought to Mount Argentario, where it was preserved as a true jewel along with the other writings of the saint.

St. Paul of the Cross wrote the Rule for his own community without ever having seen a Rule of any other religious order, his experience being limited to familiarity with the statutes of a confraternity he directed in his native town of Castellazzo. Neither did he have any precise idea of the rights of the Church or of a Congregation.

It is understandable, therefore, that Bishop Cavalieri of the diocese of Troia, in which Paul spent some time, added notes and supplements to the founder's text. These additions pertained mostly to ecclesiastical law. Although the bishop himself belonged to a religious order called the Pii Operarii (Pious Workers), it cannot be concluded that the Rule and Constitutions of the Pious Workers exerted an important influence upon those of the Passionists. In fact, there were but a few places where the one text corresponded significantly with the other.

Importantly, the 1720 text **did not contain the fourth vow** requiring members of the Congregation to contemplate the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and to preach it above all.

THE CODEX ALTIERI TEXT (1738)

This is the oldest preserved text of the Passionist Rule. Its full title is “Regole e Costituzioni da osservarsi dalla Congregazione dei minimi Chierici scalzi sotto l’invocazione della Santa Croce di Gesu Cristo, e della sua Passione” (Rules and constitutions to be observed in the Congregation of the Least Discalced Clerics concerning the invocation of the holy cross of Jesus Christ, and of his passion).

Although it is now stored in the archives of the Passionist Generalate in Rome, it had, until recently, been kept in the library of the family Altieri (hence its name “Codex Altieri”). It is included in the critical edition of the various texts of the Rule published by Fr. Giorgini. Written in 1736 by St. Paul of the Cross, it was sent to Cardinal Altieri in Rome. Except for the notes incorporated by Bishop Cavalieri and Paul's own modifications added in 1730 to lessen the severity of the manner of life, it is essentially the same text as that written in 1720.

THE 1741 TEXT

The text “Regole e Costituzioni da osservarsi dalla Congregazione dei minimi Chierici Regolari scalzi sotto l’invocazione della Santa Croce e Passione di Gesu Cristo” (Rules and constitutions to be observed in the Congregation of the Least Discalced Regular Clerics concerning the invocation of the holy cross and passion of

Jesus Christ) was approved by Benedict XIV in a papal **rescript** after it had first been confirmed by a commission appointed by the Holy See. The rescript itself was written in such a way that, although the Rule had been approved, the Congregation was not as yet recognized as an ecclesiastical institution. Also, the new Congregation still did not have the right of exemption, its members being subordinate to the ordinary in the locality of their monastery. Neither could its members make solemn vows, a right which St. Paul of the Cross had so wanted and struggled to obtain.

THE 1746 TEXT

Because of the Congregation's spread, as evidenced by its new foundations, St. Paul of the Cross decided to apply again to the Holy See for approbation of the Rule by papal brief. In December 1744, the pope convoked a commission which consisted of three cardinals who were asked to review the Order's Rule. Their study completed, the cardinals gave an affirmative response in March 1746. On April 18, Benedict XIV issued the **brief** entitled "Ad pastoralis dignitatis fastigium". Thus, the Rule and Constitutions were once more approved.

The text, translated into Latin, was entitled "Regulae et Constitutiones observandae a clericis discalceatis Passionis Domini Nostri Iesu Christi" (Rules and constitutions to be observed by the Discalced Clerics of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ). Although many clarifications and additions were introduced into the text, its content presented very few basic differences from the 1741 version.

THE 1760 TEXT

On June 6, 1760, at the beginning of the pontificate of Clement XIII, St. Paul of the Cross again tried to obtain the privilege of solemn vows for his Congregation. The commission called to approve the Rule and to respond to Paul's request decided that the severity of life demanded by the Rule and constitutions militated against making solemn vows. The vote of November 23, 1760, but the members of this commission called for the addition of five supplementary stipulations to the text of the Rule. On November 25, 1760, Pope Clement XIII issued a **rescript** that confirmed the 1746 version along with the outcome of the vote by the commission of cardinals. Although the original papal rescript and the cardinals' vote have not been preserved, there is a document in the archives entitled "An authentic transcript of our Rule, which had already been approved by Pope Benedict XIV himself, in the year 1746, with additions provided by an extraordinary commission and again approved by Clement XIII by pontifical rescript of November 23, 1760."

THE 1769 TEXT

The founder of the Passionists saw God's providence at work in the election of his intimate friend Cardinal L. Ganganelli as Pope Clement XIV. As pontiff, Clement became a resolute protector of the Congregation. In May of 1769, only ten days after assuming the pontifical throne, he received Paul in a private audience. On that occasion, Paul handed the new pope a petition in which he presented his still unfulfilled desires for the Congregation, although by now he no longer asked for the special privilege of solemn vows.

Clement XIV received the petition favorably and sent it to the Curia for an examination and ecclesiastical opinion of its contents. About forty days later, two examiners, having completed their work, handed the pope their “consultative vote”. The pontiff gave his approval and ordered that a brief be prepared along with a bull by which the Rule of the Congregation was to be officially confirmed. These drafts were then to be sent to the founder for his approval. These pontifical documents are of great importance because they definitely demonstrate the protection afforded St. Paul of the Cross and his Congregation by Clement XIV. All requests made in Paul’s petition were fulfilled.

On November 15, 1769, the apostolic **brief** “Salvatoris et Domini Nostri” was signed. The Rule of the Congregation received solemn approbation, and complete authority to present and interpret this rule in a clear way was given to the General Chapter. Thus all of St. Paul of the Cross’ efforts in seeking papal approbation of his Congregation over the course of forty-eight years were crowned with success. On November 16, Pope Clement XIV issued the bull “Supremi Apostolatus”, which gave official approval of the Passionist Congregation as a pontifical institute having simple vows. The text of this Rule, as approved in the brief and in the bull, has been published in a critical work by Fr. Giorgini.

THE 1775 TEXT

The original of this text, preserved in the archives of the Generalate, was first published by the Vice General Fr. John Baptist of St. Vincent Ferreri in 1776; it is divided into thirty-eight chapters. Not completely satisfied with the 1769 edition, St. Paul of the Cross undertook a revision of the text, adding more exact definitions and changes. In this work, he was spurred on by a desire of conceiving “lasting rules to be put into practice by the strong and weak alike”.

Discussed and approved by the participants of the General Chapter of May 15-20, 1775 (held in the church of SS. John and Paul), this modified form of the Rule was again submitted to the Holy See by St. Paul of the Cross for its approval. On September 15, 1775, Pope Pius VI issued the **bull** “Praelara virtutum exempla”, which recognized the modified Rule in an official way. The 1775 text is preserved for its historical and inspirational value in the latest edition of the Congregation’s Rule.

3. THE LETTERS OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

Undoubtedly, the preserved letters of Paul of the Cross constitute a source of data superior to all other sources and are most helpful in reconstructing an exact and authentic picture of his doctrine. The approximately two thousand letters contain such a quantity of detail that, put together, they are like a mosaic revealing the characteristic features and principles of his thought. Nevertheless, these letters represent only a part of those written by the founder during his long life. Using the saint’s own statement that he customarily wrote twenty-four or even thirty letters in a week, we can easily assume that he may have written at least ten thousand letters in his lifetime. Fortunately, the vast majority of his letters which are preserved are originals, written by Paul himself.

That only a relatively small proportion of letters have been preserved may be explained in part by the founder’s instructions to his correspondents to burn his

letters. Consider, for example, Rosa Calabresi, who had in her keeping more than five hundred letters written to her by Paul over an eight-year period. During a time of severe illness, she personally burned all of them upon an order of the saint, who feared they might be read by others. Similar instructions were given to others.

Given the numerous works accomplished by the saint, his apostolic involvement and the tasks associated with founding a Congregation, it is easy to understand why he often used night hours for his correspondence. From hints dropped in his letters, it is also apparent that Paul, being pressed for time, often wrote in a hurry. In many cases, even the quality of his penmanship betrays this haste. Not infrequently, writing so many letters imposed a hardship upon him, especially during times of poor health, which was the case more often than not.

Those with whom Paul corresponded belonged to various social strata and held a variety of positions. For instance, among his correspondents are found an equal number of popes, cardinals, and influential figures in society and politics along with people in ordinary walks of life, e.g., mothers and fathers of families and young men and women. The greater part of his letters, however, are addressed to priests and religious, among whom the brothers and sisters of his Congregation occupy first place. It is amazing to see the founder's intuitive grasp of the concrete and respective situations posed by each of his correspondents.

Two categories of letters can be distinguished on the basis of content, i.e., those concerned with the management and spread of the Congregation and those written for the purpose of spiritual direction. Undoubtedly, the establishment of twelve monasteries, the number of missions conducted by Paul during his lifetime, and the repeated papal approbations of the Rule necessitated innumerable letters. Nevertheless, the majority of the preserved letters are those written for the purpose of providing guidance and spiritual direction. These latter are of two types: those containing pithy bits of information or advice; and those of much greater length which, for the most part, deal with situations involving the religious or mystical life of the correspondent. It is not unusual for such letters to extend to three, four, or five printed pages.

It is noteworthy that the salutations of Paul's letters connoted not just acquaintanceship but deep friendship. Too, it was not uncommon for him to speak quite openly about his spiritual life, both his cares and troubles and his joys and consolations. Obviously the founder had a pronounced need to open himself to others.

This readiness to communicate his interior life effected a sense of trust in everyone directed by Paul, the result being wholehearted submission to his direction and disclosure of even the smallest stirrings of conscience. These friendships and relationships rooted in trust were for Paul not ends in themselves but rather means by which he served those he directed and drew them more closely to God.

Since the greater part of the preserved letters are those written for the purpose of spiritual direction, we can easily reformulate Paul's thinking on different aspects of the spiritual life. Because of the amount of detailed information contained in the letters, it is also possible to identify characteristic features of his own personality. In fact, because the founder's letters are so distinctly colored by his own personal thoughts and feelings, they may be considered a reflection of his personality.

Although from a literary standpoint there is nothing extraordinary in these letters, they represent the single most important source of information on his thought.

4. SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

Seventy-three sermons and fourteen meditations on Christ's passion given by St. Paul of the Cross have been preserved. Of these, all but the last nine sermons were transcribed by the founder himself. They are bound in two volumes and preserved in the archives of the Passionist Order. Age plus frequent usage have left them in a bad state.

Apart from the original transcriptions, there is also a very good and legible copy of the entire set of sermons and meditations in the Passionist archives in Rome. Between the years of 1925 and 1929, thirty-two sermons and five meditations on Christ's passion were published in the "Bollettino della Congregazione".

Although the content of Paul's letters reveals his originality, his sermons and meditations are, for the most part, material of a different kind. He himself judiciously admitted in his letters that his sermons were copied from other sources. Since many witnesses have testified that the founder was an extraordinarily gifted orator and preacher, we conclude that these sermons were not memorized or read but functioned as background and reference material for his own original deliveries.

It is nearly impossible to determine all the authors or texts used by the saint. In one of his letters, he states he borrowed greatly from Svegliarino Cristiano. This is an Italian translation of a work entitled *Sermonarium*, a kind of anthology of sermons published by the bishop of Cadiz (Spain), Msgr. Jose de Barcia y Zambrana. A comparison of the sermons of St. Paul of the Cross with the above-mentioned text reveals that some of the sermons were transcribed in their entirety. In others, whole fragments were omitted, and not infrequently the succession of treated points was modified.

The subject matter of the homilies dealt with the "four last things", that is, death, judgment, hell, and heaven. These themes were the foundation stones of lay missions in the eighteenth century, the primary purpose being to effect a conversion, i.e., to motivate a person to receive the sacrament of penance. Therefore, sermons impressed upon listeners the seriousness of their situation in a most dramatic way. Viewed from today's theology, it is terrible and bewildering to see the degree to which fear dominated the content of these sermons.

There is no original composition by St. Paul of the Cross among his fourteen meditations on the passion. What attracts our attention, in these as well as in the sermons, however, are the numerous, mostly Latin, quotations. These include quotations from Scripture and from a wide variety of other works, such as those by Justin, Augustine, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, Anselm of Canterbury, and others. Aside from what might be considered the works of the Church Fathers, Vincent Ferreri is often cited, and many other citations are taken from the spiritually edifying literature of Paul's time. A considerable portion of the meditations are devoted to the revelations of St. Bridget, which, next to sacred Scripture, were quoted most frequently.

Organizationally, these meditations on the passion consisted of separate fragments of the evangelists' accounts of the passion. Each fragment is surrounded

by rich scenery and often a lot of fantasy. First and foremost, the purpose of the meditation was to arouse the listener's compassion and then – at the point where personal sin is seen as the cause of Jesus' suffering – to effect a strong loathing for the listener's own sins.

What we have already said about the function of the written sermons is also applicable to the written meditations: They were intended to stimulate ideas and to serve as points of reference. In favor of this opinion is the fact that all the preserved meditations are relatively short compositions and, if read in a preaching style, would scarcely last more than fifteen minutes. We know from the testimony of witnesses, however, that the saint's oral meditations on the passion lasted much longer. Furthermore, it is highly improbable that the founder, while speaking on Christ's passion, the main theme of his own life, did not use his own ideas too.

In summary, it can be concluded that the sermons and meditations, although written in the founder's own hand, differ in content from his letters. Only very limited and narrow conjectures, therefore, about the theological thought of the saint can be based on them.

5. DEPOSITIONS OF WITNESSES DURING THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONISATION OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

Having discussed what may be considered "direct sources" of information, that is, material written by the saint himself, we shall now deal with "indirect sources" of information, that is, with the testimony of people who knew St. Paul of the Cross personally and bore witness to their knowledge of him after his death. The process for the founder's beatification and canonization provided the opportunity for giving this testimony. With the encouragement of Pope Pius VI, these proceedings began in January 1777, just fifteen months after Paul's death.

Taken into consideration here are the Italian transcriptions of depositions given by 121 witnesses called in six informative processes and three apostolic ones. This testimony fills twenty-two volumes and over 11,600 pages written on both sides. All depositions are preserved in the archives of the Passionist Congregation.

Because Paul of the Cross engaged in apostolic activity in several locations in Italy, it was necessary to hold the processes in more than one diocese. As a result, between the years 1777 and 1780, informative processes were simultaneously held in six different sites: Rome, Corneto-Tarquinia, Gaeta, Alessandria, Vetralla, and Orbetello. Apostolic proceedings (following procedures outlined in canons 2087-97) took place in Rome, Viterbo, and Corneto-Tarquinia between the years 1792 and 1804.

Of all the testimony taken during these nine canonical processes, only a third has been published to date, but further publications are expected. Without a doubt, these documents represent an almost inexhaustible fount of detail and information on the life of the founder. At the same time, it is necessary to deal with this testimony in a very objective manner and with critical distance.

Such reservations regarding the claim of historical authenticity of the testimony of witnesses seem fully justified on the following grounds. Using the date of the testimony as the reference point, facts and related events in most cases occurred many years, sometimes many decades, earlier. We can conclude, therefore, that the

exactness and reliability of the depositions depended solely on the recall of the witnesses. Moreover, there was a proportionate number of witnesses whose ability to make distinctions and report events in an objectively factual manner was limited.

Also to be taken into account is the fact that the ground rules which governed the informative (as opposed to the apostolic) processes were not designed to maximize reliability in the reporting of historical events. For example, canon 2050 indicated it was not necessary to have detailed certainty about a person's virtues, miracles, or martyrdom. It sufficed that the person had an enduring reputation for such and that it came about spontaneously and in an upright manner. With the looseness inherent in this type of goal setting, it is understandable that witnesses, with the best intentions in the world and in good faith, could give less-than-accurate information about the occurrence of past events. Even though an oath was required of the, it was hardly an inherent obstacle to the way in which they, without burdening their consciences, bore testimony to the reputation of the saint as "a servant of God".

Depositions taken during apostolic processes, in contrast, were to include actual proof of virtues and miracles, even in an isolated case, and proof of martyrdom and its cause. In point of fact, however, the length of time between the fact attested to and its occurrence was so long (more often than not several decades) that it was almost impossible to achieve the immediacy needed to ensure historical reliability of oral testimony.

Despite the presence of variables which tended to reduce confidence in the reliability of some testimony, there were a great number of historically reliable depositions. This reliability was a function of the qualifications of the witness as a discernor of truth and error and of the closeness of his contact with the founder. For example, the depositions of Fr. John Mary are regarded as highly reliable. As Paul's confessor and spiritual director, he knew the saint very well. As author of several works describing the origin and growth of the Congregation, Fr. John Mary was also well acquainted with events and their dates and times.

It is apparent from the words and phrases used in many of the depositions that the events and facts were reported in an exaggerated manner. At least partially, this tendency may be attributed to the spirit of the age. It is well known that those of the baroque period employed, with great enjoyment, an emphatic and grandiloquent style. Also, some depositions unmistakably indicate witness' bias in relating only the marvelous and extraordinary.

6. THE ANNALS OF FR. JOHN MARY CIONI, C.P.

Among the many indirect sources of information on the life and activity of Paul of the Cross, the Annals of Fr. John Mary Cioni, C.P. are especially important because of their high degree of historical reliability. These Annals record the history of the establishment and growth of the Congregation between the years 1720 and 1795 and portray the personality of the founder in a special way. This all the more so because the author was less interested in detailing the contemporary setting and interrelationships which influenced the founding of the Congregation than in motivating readers, especially Passionists, to an imitation of their founder-saint.

Despite their purported purpose and the author's moralizing for the edification of his readers, the Annals, taken as a whole possess a high degree of historical

reliability in the recording the facts described therein. This is primarily due to the author's strong lifelong interest in history. Besides these Annals, Fr. John Mary composed other historically inspired works such as a history of the establishment of the monasteries, five voluminous biographies, twenty-nine shorter ones, and obituaries on more than seventy members of the Congregation who died during 1745-90. On the basis of the opinion of some specialists in history, it is reasonable to assume the author of the Annals was thoroughly familiar with historical method.

Two factors which greatly aided Fr. John Mary's work were his phenomenal memory and his familiarity with St. Paul of the Cross. For the composition of historical works, however, Fr. John Mary relied less on memory, although he possessed an excellent one, than on the prompt recording of events which he had either observed or in which he participated. He then cited these detailed notes to support his statements in the Annals. Because Fr. John Mary was Paul's intimate friend and for ten years his confessor and spiritual director, and because there were numerous opportunities for the type of discussions in which John Mary could obtain an in-depth view of Paul's personality, the statements John Mary makes regarding deeds or motives of the saint may be preceded by the word authoritative.

After having considered the person of the author, so important for a correct evaluation of the Annals, it is now time to consider more details about the source itself. Although the handwritten original is anonymous, the author is beyond all doubt Fr. John Mary. Furthermore, it appears that, in his reports on the years 1720-75, the author expresses himself quite laconically, while he treats the years 1775-95 in a less concise and more rambling style.

Taxonomically, the archival data are categorized chronologically. Small paragraphs are written under each year's heading. Each paragraph is numbered, bears a heading, and contains a few sentences. Facts are recorded, one after another—more or less independently – in the manner of a chronicle. Hardly any attempt is made to interpret individual events or to evaluate them.

The Annals' mark of distinction is that they provide a multiplicity of detail on the personality of the founder and the establishment of his Congregation. Furthermore, the details are firsthand reports of an author who – at least from time to time – lived in the same community with the saint and was himself a participant in the foundation of the Congregation.

In 1967, the Annals were published in their entirety by Fr. Gaetano, who, not content with merely editing the work, wrote several notes which clarified related facts and which, at times, sharpened the focus on the events and added a certain quality of completeness to them.

Father Martin Bialas, C.P., "The Mysticism of the Passion in St. Paul of the Cross" (Ignatius Press, San Francisco).