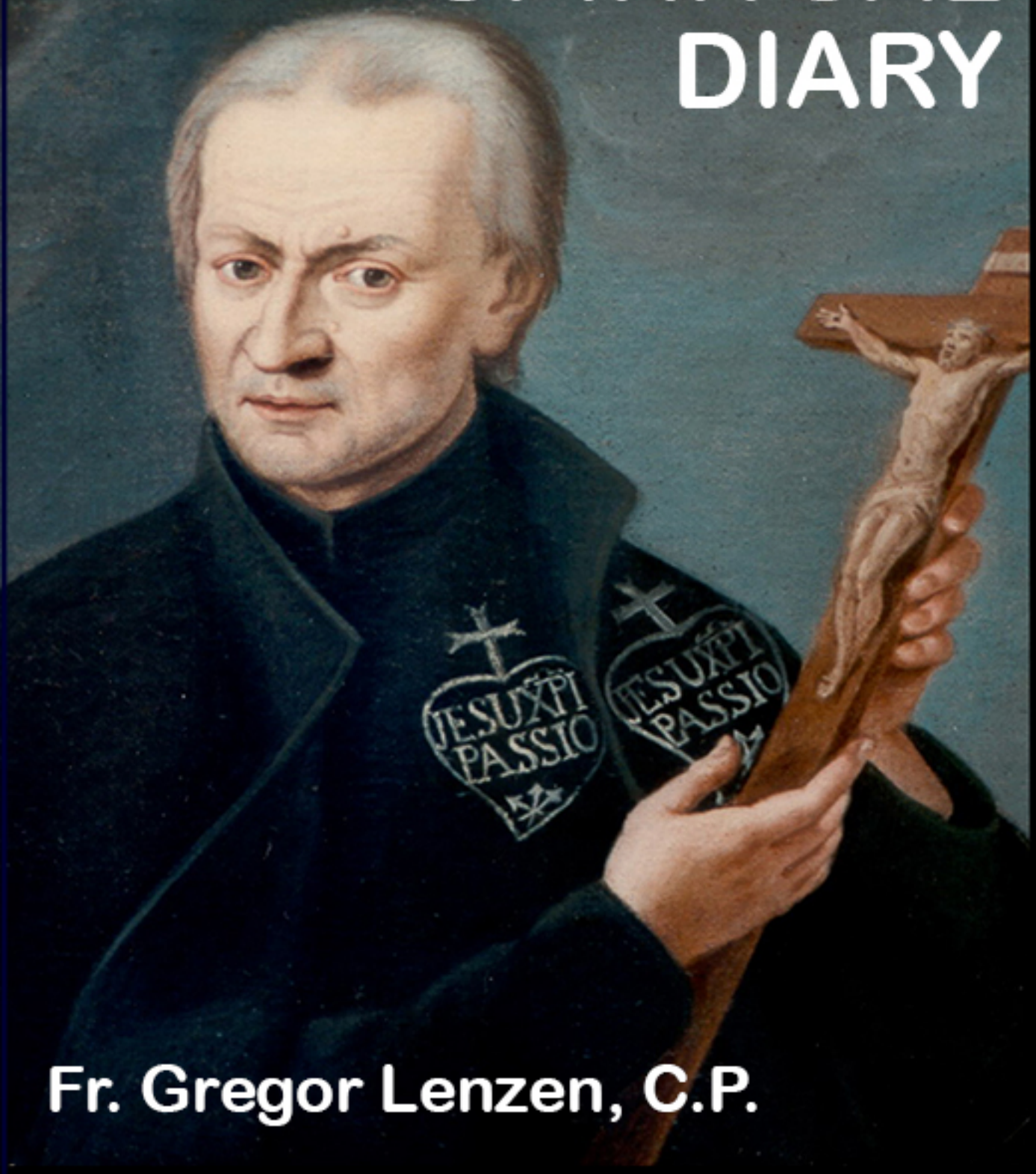


SPIRITUAL DIARY



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SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT
IN THE DIARY OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS (1694-1775)

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A. Castellazzo - The Saint's "Novitiate"

I. Preliminary History

The Spiritual Diary of Paul Francis Danei, considered by Joseph De Guibert "to be one of the classic texts of Catholic mysticism"¹, was the result of an inner spiritual process of which we shall now offer a brief outline.

The young man whose document provides us with an insight into his interior life was born on 3 January 1694 in the Northern Italian town of Ovada near Alessandria. In order to support his large family, his father, Luca Danei, ran a small shop selling textiles and tobacco. After hearing a sermon in 1713 when he was 19 years old, Paul underwent his 'conversion'. From then on his only interest was in living for God. A plan to participate in a crusade against the Turks in 1716 fell through. Over the following years God increasingly revealed his true vocation to him through various inner inspirations. Paul was filled with a great desire "to withdraw into solitude, to wear a simple habit, to go barefoot, to live in extreme poverty - in short, by the grace of God, to lead a life of penance".² The inspiration also drew him "to gather companions who would live together and devote themselves to increasing the fear of God in souls".³ The religious habit of the future community was also revealed to him in a sort of spiritual vision. He wanted to found a congregation "with the approval of Holy Mother Church" and to name it "The Poor of Jesus".⁴

The 26-year-old was embarking upon a journey but exactly where this would lead was still unclear. He left home on 22 November 1720 and on that same day, in the Bishop's private chapel, he was clothed in a black penitential garment by Monsignor Gattinara of Alessandria, Paul's confessor and spiritual adviser. The bishop ordered him to withdraw into solitude and to note down the inner movements of his soul. He was also to write the Rule of the proposed congregation.

The diary entries recording his 40-day retreat at the church of St. Charles in Castellazzo begin on 23 November 1720. This valuable document - written as a basis for Monsignor Gattinara's own discernment process regarding Paul's vocation - is also a compelling witness to the spiritual discernment and decisions of a human being in existential dialogue with God.

¹*Le Journal de Retraite de Saint Paul de la Croix*, ed. by J. de Guibert, in: RAM IV (1925), p.27.

²St. Paul of the Cross, *Words from the Heart*, p.11, A Selection from the Personal Letters of St. Paul of the Cross, trans. and ed. By Edmund Burke C.P., Roger Mercurio C.P., Silvan Rouse C.P. (Dublin 1976). (hereafter = *WH*).

³*WH*, p.12.

⁴*WH*, p.13.

II. The Place of the Diary in Paul's Spiritual Development Process

Looking at these forty days in their entirety they represent the classic framework of a preparatory period before a special mission. The small uninviting storeroom off the sacristy of St. Charles symbolises the archetype of the "desert" which is to be found in various forms in the life of every prophet and founder figure. For Paul Francis Danei the "desert" of Castellazzo provided the necessary conditions for finally working out his vocation. His model for this was to be found in his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who had spent forty days and forty nights in the desert (cf. Matthew 4, 1-11) before appearing in public for the first time. Like Jesus, Paul Francis had also been led into the desert by the Holy Spirit to find his way in the "discernment of spirits". Constantly faithful to the model of his Lord, the young hermit tried to keep his soul vigilant and alert by fasting. The Tempter troubled him greatly during those days and nights and plunged him into a state of desolation and fear. It was then a question of "coping with himself as he endured the nights of the conscious and unconscious so as to truly conquer his human condition"⁵, as Josef Ratzinger writes in the preface to the German edition of the Diary. The reader witnesses a dialogue between God and Paul. The Saint gives us a continuous and very precise description of his various thoughts and feelings, in other words of the "conditions of his soul" that affected him during those 40 days. From this point of view the Diary is the most important written source coming from the pen of the great mystic. It deals with probably the most decisive phase of his journey. In the constant fluctuation between consolation and desolation Paul completed the inner process which had already begun in his early childhood. The solitary struggle with God formed his spiritual identity which was to be so characteristic of his later thinking and work.⁶

III. A second "Manresa"

A short comparison with the figure of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) may perhaps be permitted here. Castellazzo closely resembled the Manresa experience which the founder of the Jesuits later called his "primitive church" or "novitiate".⁷ On 25 March 1522 Ignatius had come to the small Catalan town to "make a few notes in the book which he kept with him".⁸ He stayed there for eleven months. His inner life at that time ranged from 'the depths of dreadful desolation to the heights of mystical experience'.⁹ These ambivalent experiences provided the basis for the now classic 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits'. The spiritual enlightenment granted to him on the River Cardoner enabled him to see everything with new insight. That 'grace of all graces' showed him the new direction of his life's path. Fr. Stanislaus says about Paul of the Cross,

⁵*Das geistliche Tagebuch des heiligen Paul vom Kreuz*, (mit einem Geleitwort von Prof. J. Ratzinger), ed. by M. Bialas, (Aschaffenburg 1976), p.5.

⁶S. Paolo della Croce, *Diario spirituale*, Testo critico, Introduzione e Note, ed. by E. Zoffoli, (Rome 1964), pp.34-35.

⁷Cf. Dalmeses, C. de, *Ignatius von Loyola*, (Munich 1989) p.39.

⁸Op.cit., p.38.

⁹Rahner, H., Imhof, P. (eds.), *Ignatius von Loyola - Trost und Weisung*, Geistliche Briefe, (Zurich 1989) p.15.

"St. Ignatius could say that even if the whole Bible did not exist, he wouldn't have lost anything after the heavenly visions he saw at Manresa and can we not believe the same of Paul of the Cross who was given a similar mission?"¹⁰

The experiences of the hermit of Castellazzo show similar characteristics to those of the pilgrim of Manresa. "Castellazzo" and "Manresa" both symbolize a fundamental experience. They describe the place of an intense encounter with God that led to the recognition of a personal mission in the Church.

¹⁰*Diario di S. Paolo della Croce*, con Introduzione e Commenti, ed. by P. Stanislao dell'Addolorata, (Turin-Rome 1926), p.14.

B. The Spiritual Dynamic of the 40 days at Castellazzo

I. Searching for the Will of God

In the opening entry St. Paul of the Cross sounds the characteristic tone of the whole Diary when he writes, "that the most holy will of our dear God is being fulfilled."¹¹

The Saint here is laying the foundations for an authentic process of spiritual discernment, the aim of which finally was always to do the will of God. Marcel Viller SJ, in his study "La volonté de Dieu dans les lettres de S. Paul de la Croix"¹², showed us how firmly the great mystic's search for the will of God was rooted in his spiritual teaching. In this study Viller describes Paul as a man of his time who "inherited a very strong spiritual tradition still not sufficiently studied, the tradition of abandonment".¹³ The kindly Bishop of Geneva, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), "who marks the starting point of the spirituality of abandonment"¹⁴ stands out amongst the followers of this tradition. Fr. Francis Anthony Capriata OFM Cap, one of Paul's companions as a young man, witnesses to Francis de Sales' influence on Paul.

"...I received instruction from Paul in the ways of mental prayer, purgative, illuminative and unitive; I remember that, in almost every detail, he followed the teaching of St. Francis de Sales which he knew very well."¹⁵

The central position of the will of God in the spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross must therefore be considered in relation to the influence of St. Francis de Sales "to whom is owed the first and therefore the most decisive and important phase of his formation."¹⁶ Thus the Passionist founder stands alongside Ignatius of Loyola who was described as "a man of the will of God"¹⁷, although each had his own way of fulfilling that will, as Viller's article clearly shows. While Ignatius sought how to put God's will into effect through action, Paul adheres rather to an attitude of passive compliance. If we go back to Peter Lombard (1095-1160) and direct our attention to his distinction between the *voluntas beneplaciti* and *voluntas signi*,¹⁸ then Paul of the Cross is certainly oriented more strongly towards the first of the two concepts. In this he proved himself to be a disciple of that great doctor of the church from Savoy, Francis de Sales, who in the 9th

¹¹WH, p.18.

¹²Cf. Viller, M., *La volonté de Dieu dans les lettres de S. Paul de la Croix*, in: RAM XXVII (1951) pp. 132-174.

¹³Idem., *La volontà di Dio nella dottrina spirituale di S. Paolo della Croce*, (Italian translation), Ricerche di storia e spiritualità passionista – 29, (Rome 1983), p.8.

¹⁴Op. cit., p.39.

¹⁵*Processo ordinario de Alessandria*, f. 202v-3, testimony of F. A. Capriata.

¹⁶Zoffoli, E., *S. Paolo della Croce, Storia Critica*, Vol. II, (Rome 1965), p.122.

¹⁷Cf. Viller, M., *La volontà di Dio*, p.9.

¹⁸Cf. Guibert, J. de, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica*, (Rome 1937) p. 105.

book of his "Theotimus" speaks of the union of the human will with the divine will, "which is called the will of good pleasure"¹⁹ (Book IX, 1). Nevertheless there is a connecting thread running from Ignatius via Francis de Sales to the inner experiences of the young hermit in Castellazzo since "the relationship between Ignatian and Salesian spirituality is most clearly visible in the attitude towards the will of God."²⁰

If we read the entries in the Diary then all the essential basics of Paul's later teaching on surrender to the will of God are revealed to the reader. This surrender is linked in a characteristic way to a Passion mysticism aimed at sharing in the Passion of Christ and becoming one with the Crucified. The cell at St. Charles marks both the place of an intense struggle during which Paul Danei becomes Paul of the Cross and the place in which he clearly acknowledges and accepts God's plan for his life. The divine will is always the guiding principle for him. Thus in his Diary the concluding sentence on 30 December can be taken as programmatic: "In all things may the will of our God be done. Amen."²¹

¹⁹Franz von Sales, *Abhandlung über die Gottesliebe*, Part II, ed. by F. Reisinger, (Eichstätt-Vienna 1960), p.120.

²⁰Liuima, A., *Aux sources du traité de l'amour de Dieu de Saint Francois de Sales*, (I) (Rome 1959) , p.136.

²¹WH, p.32 (30 Dec.).

II. The Development of a New Mentality and Sensitivity

1. The Importance of the Affective Level

It was Ignatius of Loyola in his "Spiritual Exercises" who first noted the importance of the affections for the process of spiritual discernment.²² The emotions often have a greater influence on human decision than does rational thought. Therefore in searching for the will of God it is crucial to look into the root cause of such inner movements which may be motivated by God, the Evil One or human nature.²³

Anyone immersing himself in the Spiritual Diary of Paul of the Cross finds a man possessed of a great variety of emotions. Not without reason does his first biographer describe his temperament as "sanguine and very sensitive".²⁴ But this sensitive nature was the source of much spiritual suffering for Paul. He went into "a kind of interior depression at times"²⁵, suffering severely from his own nature. But he made a great effort to fight against it so as "to deal with others serenely".²⁶

In the Exercises Ignatius stresses that every disordered inclination must be removed from the soul so that in reaching a state of indifference one is able to recognise the will of God. In the midst of changing moods and feelings, Paul strove for an inner balance which he achieved "chiefly by abandoning himself to the provident love of God revealed in the Passion of Jesus."²⁷ His Diary is an eloquent witness to this.

2. The Means of Discernment

If one examines the text of the Diary for the means used in discernment, then prayer emerges as the outstanding factor. Paul lived his 40-day "desert" in an intense awareness of God's presence. Day and night he was united to God in prayer. This dialogue was enlightened by God through special graces²⁸ and illuminations of the Holy Spirit²⁹ which enabled him to recognise more clearly his vocation and mission. For him the encounter with the Lord in the Eucharist and the time spent in contemplation became the touchstones for the rest of the day. With the eyes of

²²Cf. Bernard, Ch. A., *Teologia spirituale*, (Rome 1983), p.352.

²³cf. *WH*, p.9 (10-13 Dec.).

²⁴Strambi, V. M., *Vita del Ven. Servo. di Dio P. Paolo della Croce*, (Rome 1786), p.196.

²⁵Giorgini, F., *Storia della Congregazione della Passione di Gesù Cristo*, Vol. I, L'epoca del Fondatore (1720-1775), (Pescara 1981), p.54.

²⁶Ibid. p. 54.

²⁷Op. cit. p.53.

²⁸Cf. *WH*, pp.19-20 (28 Nov.).

²⁹Cf. *WH*, p.31 (27 Dec.).

faith the saint could carry out analyses of situations that had arisen during the day.³⁰ He also once mentions a conversation with his brother about spiritual matters.³¹

Through all his emotions, his psychological and ascetic reflections, his prayers, hopes and desires during his retreat at Castellazzo, Paul received divine light so as to break through the darkness of doubt and to comprehend the will of God.

3. Description and Judgement of Spiritual Movements

a. Desolation

Introduction

On examining the interior movements of the spirit which Paul of the Cross perceived in himself and described in his Diary, the predominance of his feelings of desolation is particularly striking. The reader is confronted by and will perhaps be disturbed by "the melancholy, anxiety and temptations of a person abandoned before God"³². Because of his long "night" lasting for 45 years³³ which broke the patterns of the spiritual life up until that time, the founder of the Passionists was also described as "the prince of the desolate".³⁴ In order to understand the significance of these difficult trials for Paul's spiritual development we shall follow the discernments he himself makes in his Diary. In so doing we shall witness a surprising overlap of positive and negative aspects.

Negative Function

The entries for 10-13 December draw to our attention a typical moment of desolation when Paul describes his condition as follows:

"I was dry, distracted, tempted; I had to force myself to stay at prayer. I was tempted to gluttony and hunger came over me. I felt the cold more than usual and the flesh wished for some comfort, and on that account I wanted to run away from prayer."³⁵

³⁰cf. *WH*, pp.26-27, (21 Dec.).

³¹Cf. *WH*, p.28 (21 Dec.).

³²*Das geistliche Tagebuch des heiligen Paul vom Kreuz*, (mit einem Geleitwort von Prof. J. Ratzinger), ed. by M. Bialas, p.5.

³³Cf. Gaetan du S. Nom de Marie, *Oraison et Ascension Mystique de Saint Paul de la Croix*, (Louvain 1930), pp.3 and 85 ff.

³⁴Martin, H., "*Desolation*", D.Sp. t.III, (Paris 1957), col. 635.

³⁵*WH*, p.24 (10-13 Dec.).

This is a clear temptation to abandon prayer and is accompanied by both physical and spiritual symptoms. Paul can now clearly discern their origin as he continues:

"but the violence and the assaults kept coming, from both the flesh and the devil. For my part, I believe that the devil entered into it because I know he has a special grudge against anyone who prays."³⁶

The distinction between devil and flesh is important since "it is dangerous to consider every natural emotion intrinsically negative (...) not denying that nature in the concrete situation is very easily inclined to selfishness and consequently to resist the attraction of the supernatural world".³⁷ Up to this point the young hermit clearly assigns a negative meaning to his desolation since - as St. Ignatius says in the Exercises - it draws one down "to things low and earthly".³⁸ Paul's reaction in the following quotation also accords with the classic rules of discernment.³⁹

"But by God's mercy, I kept on saying that I wanted to hold out even if I were to be carried away in little bits."⁴⁰

Paul resists his temptations with determination and does not change his plan but places even greater emphasis on prayer. His perseverance bears fruit.

"When the prescribed time came for me to leave, I remained on in peace and tranquillity..."⁴¹

He is even able to look back on his personal experience in a detached manner and manages to draw up an objective rule for such situations:

"Care must be taken not to withdraw from prayer at such a trying time because suffering would not be thereby diminished; on the contrary without gain to itself, the soul would be the more afflicted because it would see itself slipping into tepidity."⁴²

³⁶Ibid. p.24.

³⁷Bernard, Ch. A., *Teologia spirituale*, p.351.

³⁸Fleming, David L. S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, A literal translation and a contemporary reading. The Institute of Jesuit Sources, (St. Louis 1978) p.206, Nr. 317.

³⁹Cf. op.cit., p.208, Nos. 318-319.

⁴⁰WH, p.24 (10-13 Dec.).

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Op.cit., p.25.

Positive Function

But there is another aspect to the mood of desolation in Paul's spiritual development. This can be discerned on the first day of his stay at Castellazzo which was marked by melancholy and great temptation.

"For the rest of the day I was interiorly afflicted with a peculiar kind of depression, but not like that which comes from worldly troubles. It is a certain interior suffering in mind and heart, mingled with hidden temptations which are recognised with difficulty and which therefore greatly trouble the soul. One does not know where one is, so to speak, whether here or there, the more so because at such a time there is no sensible sign of prayer."⁴³

Paul is not content with a mere description of this desolation but closes on a positive note:

"I know that, by the mercy of our dear God, I desire to know nothing else nor to taste any consolation; my sole desire is to be crucified with Jesus."⁴⁴

One can almost hear the echo of the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal. 6, 14), whom Paul of the Cross loved to call "my dear St. Paul" and whom he revered with "a particular devotion".⁴⁵

The relationship between his interior suffering and the Passion of Christ finally led Paul Danei to regard desolation in a positive light because it made him more like the Crucified Christ. Every page of his Diary witnesses to the forcefulness of this transformation process aimed at developing a closer union with the Crucified God through sharing in stages in His suffering.⁴⁶

This unusual experience shows once again "that human life is not simple: natural life is not always in accord with the supernatural".⁴⁷ Spiritual and physical suffering achieve great good in the supernatural order contrary to the intention of the Evil One who tempts those "who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord".⁴⁸

In the following pages we shall now gradually demonstrate the significance that Paul of the Cross ascribed to the spiritual suffering he experienced at Castellazzo.

⁴³WH, p.17 (23 Nov.).

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵*Processo ordinario di Roma*, 1034, statement by Fr. Francesco.

⁴⁶Cf. Zoffoli, E., *Storia critica II*, pp.1032-1033.

⁴⁷Bernard, Ch. A., *Teologia spirituale*, p.358.

⁴⁸Fleming, David L. S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* A literal translation and a contemporary reading. The Institute of Jesuit Sources, (St Louis 1978) p.204, Nr.315.

Purification

In the above mentioned quotation from 23 November Paul writes in connection with temptations:

"God makes me understand that these temptations purify the soul."⁴⁹

Paul became even more aware of the purifying purpose of spiritual suffering such as dryness, distraction or weariness in prayer and in the entry for 10-13 December we can read:

"I know I understand that this kind of prayer of suffering is a great gift which God grants to the soul to make it a spotless robe of purity."⁵⁰

In his work on the mystical life of Paul of the Cross, Father Gaétan, commenting on this passage, writes, "he is perfectly aware that God allows these trials to purify him and he teaches that every soul called to a high degree of prayer must of necessity undergo these sufferings."⁵¹ Paul is coming closer to the point where he comprehends the aim of such suffering, namely the transformation in Christ for which the soul must be purified.

"I would like to make everyone understand the great grace that God in his mercy bestows when he sends suffering, especially suffering devoid of consolation. Then indeed the soul is purified like gold in a furnace; without knowing it, it becomes radiant and is set free to take flight to its Good, that is to the blessed transformation."⁵²

On 23 December Paul makes a striking comparison to a rock in the sea, which is meant to portray the soul being buffeted by waves of demonic thoughts and images. As long as the soul remains united to God the enemy is powerless. Rather it will experience the cleansing power of the storm.

"But God makes me understand that the soul is with him and that he is pleased to see it thus engaged in battle. This is more profitable for the soul for, as a result of what it suffers and endures in the struggle, it is purified like the rock which before the storm may have been covered with debris but after the storm is cleansed because the waves have washed it clean."⁵³

Zoffoli sums up the nature of these spiritual trials: "the purification process, sadness, dryness,

⁴⁹WH, p.17 (23 Nov.).

⁵⁰Op.cit., p.24 (10-13 Dec.).

⁵¹Gaetan du S. Nom de Marie, *Oraison et Ascension Mystique de Saint Paul de la Croix*, p.51.

⁵²WH, p.28 (21 Dec.).

⁵³Op.cit., p.29 (23 Dec.).

desolation, fear, diabolical suggestion ..., was for Paul the mystical death which allowed him to conform with Christ".⁵⁴

Transformation

The purifying effect of desolation therefore is merely a preparatory stage for the deeper meaning which the saint ascribes to it. For Paul the important thing ultimately is the imitation of Christ Crucified in which he participates in the Passion of Jesus.

"I had a keen infused knowledge of the sufferings of my Jesus and I felt so ardent a desire to be perfectly united with him that I wished really to feel his own sufferings and to be on the Cross with him."⁵⁵

We are now at the heart of Paul's mysticism. Temptations, for example, in prayer become a welcome opportunity for him to be united with the Crucified One.

"I know that God makes me understand that the soul which God wishes to draw to a high degree of union with himself by means of prayer must travel along this road of suffering in prayer, of suffering I repeat, without any sensible consolation so that the soul no longer knows where it is, so to speak."⁵⁶

Paul models himself completely on the example of Jesus who had prayed in total desolation both in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross. The less consolation one experiences in suffering the more like the suffering Lord one becomes. This is his fundamental idea.⁵⁷ Sharing in the Passion of Christ finally leads to an even closer identification with his beloved model and increases the desire for suffering.

"For the greater glory of God I must add one point - namely, that when I am in this state in which I have already been on some occasions and that for a considerable time but not with such violence I beseech Jesus Crucified not to deliver me from it. On the contrary I desire it in order to suffer and I have a certain fear that it will depart. ... The fear I mention comes from the soul's longing to follow Jesus in suffering."⁵⁸

Breton comments in this connection that "what strikes one in the Diary is in fact an increasing thirst for suffering".⁵⁹ The emphasis, however, is not on the fact of suffering itself. The Saint

⁵⁴Zoffoli, E., *Storia critica II*, p.1033.

⁵⁵WH, p.22 (6 Dec.).

⁵⁶Op.cit., p.25 (10-13 Dec.).

⁵⁷Cf. Viller, M., *La volontà di Dio*, p.37..

⁵⁸WH, p.27 (21 Dec.).

⁵⁹Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, Studio sulla dottrina spirituale di S. Paolo della Croce, (Pescara 1986) p.60.

writes:

"I understand this is a great and fruitful way of suffering most pleasing to God, because the soul thereby becomes indifferent to such an extent that it no longer thinks in sorrow or joy but solely of remaining conformed to the holy Will of its beloved Spouse, Jesus. It desires above all to be crucified with him because in this it is more conformable to its beloved God, who during His whole life did nothing but suffer."⁶⁰

Therefore suffering is not the central issue. On the contrary: "The 'ego' must be absent from its suffering".⁶¹ It is not a question of suffering or of joy, but of that indifference which raises the soul "above its 'passions' in a kind of kenosis".⁶² Without a doubt Paul of the Cross owes his vision of indifference to the thinking of Francis de Sales who deals with this subject in some chapters of his *Abhandlung über die Gottesliebe (Treatise on the Love of God)*. According to de Sales an indifferent heart transfers "its love not to things which God wills but to the will of God which desires it".⁶³ (Book IX, 4). The crucial element therefore is union with the Divine Will which Paul also clearly emphasizes. For him, however, the will of God consists primarily in bringing one's own life into line with the life of Jesus Christ which was marked in great measure by suffering.⁶⁴ Paul longs to be a living model of Jesus in His Passion. Therefore he desires no consolation in order to share in Christ's surrender to the will of the Father, 'because in enjoyment one's own will is involved'.⁶⁵ In the very experience of suffering Paul sees the need to be united with the will of God. In this way a path of suffering becomes a path of surrender.⁶⁶

The true reason for his discipleship of the Cross and his surrender to the will of God, however, is to be found in the Saint's great love for the Lord. Anyone who truly loves identifies with his beloved and seeks to appropriate the beloved's feelings and attitudes as his own. Thus the Passion of Christ becomes the strongest motif in the young hermit's love. On 27 December he writes of a quiet in prayer "mingled with the sufferings of the Redeemer in which my soul takes delight. There was a mingling of love and sorrow."⁶⁷ On contemplating the Flight into Egypt the following day he experiences the same inner stirrings: "Within my poor soul there was a mingling of sorrow and love, with many tears and much sweetness".⁶⁸ Love and pain come

⁶⁰WH, p.28 (21 Dec.).

⁶¹Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.61.

⁶²Op.cit., p.62.

⁶³Franz von Sales, *Abhandlung über die Gottesliebe*, Teil II, p.130.

⁶⁴Cf. Viller, M., *La volontà di Dio*, p. 36.

⁶⁵*Lettere di S. Paolo della Croce*, ed. by P. Amedeo della Madre del Buon Pastore, Vol. I, Rome 1924, p.617.

⁶⁶Cf. Viller, M., *La volontà di Dio*, p.35.

⁶⁷WH, p.31 (27 Dec.).

⁶⁸WH, p.31 (28 Dec.).

close together here. A few lines later we read "In the very same moment as the soul understands this in the most elevated fashion it either rejoices or is sorrowful according to the mystery. Mostly there is always a blessed contentment".⁶⁹ Again we can perceive the influence of Francis de Sales who wrote: "The sufferings of the One whom I love come from love so I suffer them with compassion. But they bring me contentment through the pleasure I find in this love."⁷⁰ (*Abhandlung über die Gottesliebe*, Book V, 5). Paul's loving identification with the Crucified One "has nothing in common with a morbid cult of suffering or its unconscious exaltation."⁷¹ 'Suffering as the door of Love' is how Josef Sudbrack summed up the mysticism of Paul of the Cross.⁷²

This love even goes so far as to want to imitate the Lord by sacrificing his own life:

"Ah, my only Love, why do I not die for you?"⁷³ - "The desire to die as a martyr, especially for the Blessed Sacrament in some place where people do not believe, does not leave me."⁷⁴

The aim of this process is that "blessed transformation"⁷⁵ into the Crucified God that takes place painfully "due to the love that tends to perfect likeness".⁷⁶

Contemplation

This transformation process led Paul to a great familiarity with the mystery of the humanity of Christ in his Passion. No matter how deeply he is drawn into the vision of God he never moves away from his loving, sorrowful union with Jesus in his Passion "because he contemplated the Absolute particularly in that suffering Humanity, knowing that there above all the Infinite revealed itself as Love."⁷⁷ We have a wonderful witness to this in the final entry for 1 January 1721, "the high point and climax of the document which will illuminate a life."⁷⁸

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Franz von Sales, *Abhandlung über die Gottesliebe*, Part I, ed. by F. Reisinger, (Eichstätt-Vienna 1957), p.248.

⁷¹Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.60.

⁷²Sudbrack, J., Review in "Geist und Leben", 50 (1977), p.476.

⁷³WH, p.18 (26 Nov.).

⁷⁴WH, p.32 (29 Dec.).

⁷⁵WH, p.28 (21 Dec.).

⁷⁶S. Paolo della Croce, *Diario spirituale*, Testo critico, Introduzione e Note, ed. by E. Zoffoli, p.39.

⁷⁷Op.cit., p.40.

⁷⁸Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.64.

"I also had knowledge of the soul united in a bond of love to the Sacred Humanity and at the same time dissolved and raised to a deep and conscious, felt knowledge of the Divinity. For since Jesus is both God and Man the soul cannot be united in love to the Sacred Humanity without being at the same time dissolved and brought to a deep and conscious, felt knowledge of the Divinity."⁷⁹

In his search for the knowledge of God, the Saint points here with amazing clarity to the mediating role of the humanity of Jesus. For Paul the suffering humanity of Christ is inseparably linked to an "intense and experienceable knowledge of the Godhead".⁸⁰ This quotation underpins the remarks by Josef Sudbrack in his review of the German edition of the diary. "It (the Diary) concerns the significance of the human Jesus and his Passion for all Christian meditation and contemplation. It concerns the mistrust of every experience that claims to be able to put behind it the concrete human Jesus and the hardship of pain."⁸¹ So for Paul the remembrance of the Passion becomes the door to contemplation. The mystical experience mentioned above is at the very heart of Paul's teaching on prayer.⁸²

Reparation

One final positive aspect of Paul's experience of suffering is the participation in "the love of Christ, victim of the sins of the world, in the anguish he endured because of the offences against God."⁸³ On 29 December 1720 he writes in his diary:

"... in the evening I was recollected and felt moved to make reparation for irreverences, especially in the church (...). I asked him to give me the grace to shed tears of blood as I so wish to do."⁸⁴

Deeply impressed by the "infinite justice"⁸⁵ of God, Paul wants to make amends through his participation in the redemptive and expiating agony.⁸⁶ Two noteworthy studies have been made⁸⁷ of this characteristic trait of Paul's interior life which, however, are not

⁷⁹WH, p.33 (1 Jan.).

⁸⁰Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.63.

⁸¹Sudbrack, J., Review in "Geist und Leben", 50 (1977), p.476.

⁸²Cf. S. Paolo della Croce, *Diario spirituale*, Testo critico, Introduzione e Note, ed. by E. Zoffoli, 86, Note 2.

⁸³Zoffoli, E., *Storia critica II*, p.1038.

⁸⁴WH, p.32 (29 Dec.).

⁸⁵WH, p.30 (26 Dec.).

⁸⁶S. Paolo della Croce, *Diario spirituale*, Testo critico, Introduzione e Note, ed. by E. Zoffoli, p.44.

⁸⁷Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, R., *Nuit de l'esprit réparatrice en S. Paul de la Croix*, in: *Etudes Carmélitaines* (Bruges) XXIII (1938), t. II, pp. 287-293. - Lebreton, J., *Saint Paul de la Croix – L'union au Christ souffrant*, in: *Tu solus sanctus. Jésus Christ vivant dans les Saints. Etudes de théologie*

uncontroversial.⁸⁸

b. Consolation

The Eucharist as a Source of Consolation

In examining the positive function of suffering in the spiritual experience of Paul we could recognise the centrality of Jesus Christ as God and Man. In the mystery of the Eucharist that same Christ whose Passion changes desolation into an opportunity for discipleship also becomes a source of consolation for the hermit of Castellazzo. Each of the 40 days of Paul's retreat was marked by an inner encounter with his "Sacramental Spouse, Jesus".⁸⁹ The reception of the Eucharist "gave him light, strength, peace and sweetness in the absolute quiet of the faculties".⁹⁰ The Diary offers many examples of this. We should single out the entry of 7 December since it demonstrates the connection with the physical level:

"...At holy Communion I was particularly recollected and uplifted with tears to such an extent that the bones of my stomach ached for I was shivering a little from the cold - but then it all disappeared. This often happens to me. I know I have felt bodily weakness before - oh, infinite mercy of our Sovereign Good!. - After holy Communion I felt better and strong. According to the understanding that God gives me, this comes from the great strength which the soul receives from that angelic Food which has likewise the effect of strengthening the body."⁹¹

The main effects which the reception of the Eucharist had on Paul's soul were recollection, peace, quiet, joy and love. Recollection was particularly important since it brought about a deep relationship with God in prayer.

"the longed-for moment of Holy Communion had come, after which I was moved by the infinite goodness to deepest recollection and to intense loving aspirations and colloquies with our beloved Spouse."⁹²

The Gift of Tears

Alongside other deep emotional responses evoked by Holy Communion Paul receives the gift of

mystique, Paris 1948, pp. 215-236.

⁸⁸Cf. Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.60, Note 12.

⁸⁹WH, p.33 (1 Jan.).

⁹⁰Zoffoli, E., *Storia critica II*, p.1029.

⁹¹WH, pp.23, (7 Dec.).

⁹²WH., p.31 (28 Dec.).

tears. But his tears are not confined to the moments of Sacramental Union with the Eucharistic Lord. They often occur quite suddenly⁹³ or express themselves in the form of tears of repentance.⁹⁴ Even the needs of the Church and the world do not leave Paul unmoved.

"I felt most fervent during the night and even shed some tears when praying to the Lord for holy Church and for sinners."⁹⁵

Generally, though, they are tears of emotion and joyous gratitude which indicate a certain insight and self-transcendence.

"All this I understand in a second with many tears mingled with the greatest degree of sweetness."⁹⁶

Mystical Phenomena

Extraordinary mystical phenomena also play a role in the spiritual discernment process of Paul in Castellazzo. The Diary entry of 28 November, for example, enlighten us about an intellectual vision:

"... especially in praying to the Sovereign Good for the happy issue, the holy inspiration which, by his infinite goodness, he has given me and continues to give me. I remember that I kept praying to the Blessed Virgin and to all the angels and saints, especially the holy founders. Suddenly I seemed in spirit to see them prostrate before the most holy Majesty of God, praying for this, too. That happened to me in a second, like a flash of lightning, in sweetness mingled with tears. The way in which I saw them was not in bodily form; it was therefore in the mind, with understanding in the soul which I do not know how to explain, and almost at once it vanished."⁹⁷

This vision comes as a "clear and consolatory answer"⁹⁸ from God to his prayer for a happy outcome of the "holy Inspiration" which for Paul probably meant the founding of the Congregation. In connection with these divine revelations Paul's later teaching on their immediate effect on the soul is interesting. It closely resembles that of St. John of the Cross. De Guibert summarises it as follows: "when any revelation truly comes from God, the whole effect that God intended by immediate communication is now produced in the soul at the moment this

⁹³Cf. *WH*, pp. 25-26, (15-18 Dec): "Ho avuto in questi giorni subitanea mozione di cuore a lagrime".

⁹⁴Cf. *WH*, pp.25-26 (19 Dec.).

⁹⁵*WH*, p.18 (25 Nov.).

⁹⁶*WH*, p.30 (26 Dec.).

⁹⁷*WH*, pp. 19-20 (28 Nov.).

⁹⁸Zoffoli, E., *Storia critica II*, p.1041.

revelation is given."⁹⁹

The entry of 30 November on the other hand describes a locution:

"... I remember that I asked my Jesus to teach me what degree of humility is most pleasing to him, and I heard this answer in my heart: 'When you cast yourself in spirit under the feet of all creatures, even beneath the feet of devils, that is what pleases me most.'¹⁰⁰

This is one of those "substantial" communications about which St. John of the Cross writes in "The Ascent of Mount Carmel".

"I have said that the third kind of interior words are the substantial ones. Although they are formal since they impress themselves on the soul very formally, they are quite different since their effect is vital and substantial which is not the case with purely formal words. Thus it is true to say that all substantial words are formal but the contrary is not true. Only those words which impress their significance upon the soul can be called substantial."¹⁰¹

The "essential" effect of this interior communication in Paul of the Cross can be seen in the deep humility which gives rise to the following lines:

"I had already understood that when one goes lower than hell, beneath the feet of devils, then God raises one to paradise."¹⁰²

Charles A. Bernard compares these "substantial words" with the "consolation without preceding cause" mentioned in Nr. 330 of the Spiritual Exercises, but it does not seem right to him "to admit the possibility of God acting without the mediation of consciousness."¹⁰³ In his opinion both forms are similarly effective.¹⁰⁴

In these extraordinary phenomena witnessed in the Diary we are given direct signs of divine activity which encourage Paul to continue his journey.

⁹⁹Guibert, J. de, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica*, p. 155. - Cf. also Brovotto, C., *Le visioni "intellettuali" di S. Paolo della Croce*, in: *Mistica e Misticismo oggi*, (Rome 1979), pp.440-455.

¹⁰⁰WH, p.21 (30 Nov).

¹⁰¹S. Giovanni della Croce, *Opere*, translation by P. Ferdinando di S. Maria OCD, Rome 1967, p. 218.

¹⁰²WH, p.21 (30 Nov.).

¹⁰³Bernard, Ch. A., *Teologia spirituale*, p.363.

¹⁰⁴Cf. op.cit., pp.363-364.

The Effects of the Good Spirit

The 40 days in Castellazzo are full of the workings of the good Spirit which show us some empirical criteria for spiritual discernment.¹⁰⁵

With reference to the intellect

God illuminates Paul's mind with special understanding and insights and thus allows him to penetrate the mysteries of faith:

"My dear God gave me infused knowledge of the joy the soul will have when we see him face to face, when it will be united with him in holy love."¹⁰⁶

"I also had a particular understanding of infinite mercy".¹⁰⁷

This process of spiritual renewal permitting a recognition of the things of God even more clearly reaches its high point in the already quoted "deep and conscious, felt knowledge of the Divinity"¹⁰⁸ of 1 January 1721. The young hermit shows himself to be docile to and receptive of the divine revelations throughout his retreat ("I have already understood..."¹⁰⁹). He also possesses the gift of discernment to a high degree, as we have already established.

With reference to the will

On the level of the will the Diary shows true humility as an unerring sign of the good Spirit.

"...I kept praying to my Jesus to grant me the greatest degree of humility: I wanted to be the least of mankind, the very scum of the earth."¹¹⁰

God fulfils this desire in a certain respect. According to the locution of 30 November, God allows Paul's soul to be thrown "beneath the feet of devils"¹¹¹ through "temptations to the most frightful blasphemies against God".¹¹² His soul is then cast "into an abyss of miseries"¹¹³. But Paul humbles himself and writes:

¹⁰⁵Cf. Guibert, J. de, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica*, Nr. 160 - Bernard, Ch. A., *Teologia spirituale*, p.366.

¹⁰⁶WH, p.22(4 Dec.).

¹⁰⁷WH, p.30(26 Dec.).

¹⁰⁸WH, p.33 (1 Jan.).

¹⁰⁹WH, p.21 (30 Nov.).

¹¹⁰WH, p.21, (30 Nov.).

¹¹¹WH, p.21 (30 Nov.).

¹¹²WH, pp.26-27 (21 Dec.).

¹¹³WH, p.27 (21 Dec.).

"...I have a certain fear that it will depart, excepting, of course, those temptations against God which I cannot desire unless God permits them for my greater mortification."¹¹⁴

The unshakeable trust in God with which Paul overcomes the attacks of the Devil offers another sign of the working of the good spirit. Two pictorial comparisons play an important part in this. First, even if not often felt, the awareness of God's protective presence is expressed by the image of an embrace:

"I know too that God holds the soul in his embrace although the soul, not realising this, seems to be utterly abandoned to its overwhelming misery."¹¹⁵

Secondly the soul is compared to a rock in the sea, which the raging waters of temptation cannot dislodge because it is firmly attached to God.

"...Similarly the soul at prayer is a rock because God holds it fast in his infinite love. It may even be called a rock of strength because the Sovereign Good imparts this strength to it."¹¹⁶

These lines reflect the "certainty that the nothingness of the creature is rooted in the Absolute".¹¹⁷ His trust in the mercy of God protects the Saint from despair and discouragement as he acknowledges his own sinfulness.

"...I had much tenderness and also much self-knowledge. I asked the angels who assist at the adorable mystery to drive me from the church as worse than a devil; but at the same time special confidence in my Sacramental Spouse did not desert me. I asked him to keep in mind the saying he has left me in the holy Gospel, that he is come to call not the just but sinners."¹¹⁸

Alongside the fundamental attitudes of humility and trust in God, as further classic characteristics one should also mention his inner peace, patience during physical and spiritual suffering as well as the mortifications and his deep love.

¹¹⁴Ibid. p.27.

¹¹⁵WH, p.27 (21 Dec.) - cf. also op.cit. p.29, (23 Dec.).

¹¹⁶WH, p.29 (23 Dec.).

¹¹⁷Breton, S., *La Mistica della Passione*, p.65.

¹¹⁸WH, p.22 (5 Dec.).

C. "Memoria Passionis" - Contemplation and Mission

I. The "new sensitivity" of the Cross

The final result of this study about the workings of the Spirit in the cell at Castellazzo and its interpretation by St. Paul of the Cross is rather the portrayal of a beginning. The basic idea that matures during those 40 days continues to unfold throughout his lifetime.

Particularly significant is the emergence of a "new" sensitivity. We have seen how important the affective level was in assessing Paul's character. Through his solitary struggles with the good and evil spirits, in the fluctuation between consolation and desolation he exercises his senses like an athlete and accustoms them to distinguish good from evil. When Paul Danei entered his first "ritiro" on 23 November 1720 he was no inexperienced beginner where spiritual matters were concerned.¹¹⁹ This becomes clear from the following extract from a letter by Fr. Columban of Genoa to Bishop Gattinara (25 Nov. 1720):

"Paul Francis is adorned with this precious jewel and the spirit of one symbolises the other; Michelangelo passed through all the degrees of prayer that Paul Francis and Anthony reached."¹²⁰

This indirect reference to the high degree of spiritual life of our saint shows to what extent his affinity with the world of divine matters had already developed. He leaves his "desert" as an adult, ready for the solid food of the will of God (cf. Hebr. 5, 14) for which he hungered. His 'sense' experiences are now focused on a different set of values which even affect his mode of speech. Concepts such as pain and joy, love and suffering intermingle and become interchangeable. Feelings that on a human level are seen as purely negative, suddenly acquire a positive meaning. The reason for this lies in the new perspective of participating in the suffering of Jesus. Castellazzo sets the stage for a breathtaking drama: the birth of the new man in Christ who meets Paul particularly in the form of the Crucified One. Paul wants to become like him, suffer with him, be crucified with him as a living image of his Passion (Gal. 2, 19.20a). That is Paul's acknowledged vocation and mission towards which his sense world was directed and renewed. The sequence of this inner suffering described by him in the Diary is a process of liberation in which obstacles are removed which might interfere with his response to such a mission. We are experiencing here the breakthrough to a new aesthetic, to a "new sensitivity" of the Cross.

II. Apostle of the Crucified One

The deeply contemplative experience of Castellazzo has an explosive apostolic content which shatters the walls of the small store room in the church of St. Charles and opens up the way to a world-wide mission.

¹¹⁹Cf. *Diario di S. Paolo della Croce*, con Introduzione e Commenti, ed. by P. Stanislao dell'Addolorata, pp.47-48.

¹²⁰Op.cit., p.33.

"I told him that I would willingly be torn to pieces for a single soul. Indeed, I felt that I would die when I saw the loss of so many souls who do not experience the fruit of the Passion of my Jesus".¹²¹

His mystical participation in the Redeemer's Passion provides the impetus for Paul's later zeal for the conversion of sinners.

"I had likewise great fervour mingled with tears in praying for the conversion of poor sinners; I kept telling God that I could no longer bear to see him offended".¹²²

Paul was seized by the desire to share in the redemptive work of God and to found a community for this purpose.

"I had also special tenderness in imploring God in his mercy to found the holy Congregation quickly, and to send forth some people for his greater glory and for the good of their neighbours."¹²³

And so Paul knew he was totally committed to the service of the Church ("this Congregation in holy Church"¹²⁴) whose highest authority he unreservedly acknowledged.

"I know I had a particular urge to go to Rome for this great and wonderful work of God."¹²⁵

From the very start the founding of the Order was the object of his spiritual discernment.

"...I also asked my Sovereign Good if it were his Will that I should write the Rule for the Poor of Jesus, and I felt a strong urge to do so, with great sweetness".¹²⁶

Paul's obedience to the Church and the love of his neighbour which guide him in his plan are clear external signs of the action of God in this matter. The spiritual face of the Saint whose most striking features were formed during those 40 days in Castellazzo is marked by the Rule of a Congregation that will make it shine forth in the Church.

¹²¹ *WH*, p.22 (4 Dec.).

¹²² *WH*, p.23 (7 Dec.).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Op.cit.*, p.22 (6 Dec.).

¹²⁵ *Op.cit.*, p.19 (27 Nov.).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*