


# The Passionists

*by*

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*Roger Mercurio, C.P.*

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The Passionists

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*Dedicated to the memory  
of our classmate  
Fr. Carl Schmitz, C.P.  
martyred*

*in the year of our Golden Jubilee as Passionists*

*The Class of 1938*

## Contents

<i>Foreword</i> .....	7
<i>Introduction</i> .....	9
1. St. Paul of the Cross .....	15
2. Mother Mary Crucified Costantini .....	27
3. St. Vincent Mary Strambi .....	35
4. The Bulgarian Missions .....	43
5. Fr. Anthony (of St. James) Testa .....	47
6. Blessed Dominic Barberi .....	51
7. The Australian Venture of 1842 .....	61
8. St. Gabriel Possenti .....	67
9. Passionists Come to the United States .....	75
10. The Mid-century Crisis .....	82
11. Blessed Bernard Mary Silvestrelli .....	86
12. Passionists in Spain and Fr. Amadeo Garibaldi .....	91
13. Blessed Charles Houban of Mount Argus .....	97
14. Fr. Fidelis Kent Stone (of the Cross) .....	103
15. St. Gemma Galgani .....	111

16. Communities of Passionist Sisters.....	117
17. Passionists in the New Century.....	121
18. Passionists in Northern Europe and Blessed Isidore De Loor.....	126
19. Passionists Between the World Wars.....	131
20. The American Experience.....	138
21. Passionists in the Postwar Era.....	145
22. Renewal and the Second Vatican Council.....	149
23. Experiencing the Renewal.....	159
24. Passionist Martyrs.....	171
<i>Epilogue: Into the Twenty-first Century.....</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>Index.....</i>	<i>188</i>

## Foreword

For almost two years I literally “lived” with Passionists whose stories are in this book. I have read the “life” of each one, the writings, the sermons, whatever information is available. I studied the historical background of these men and women, the social and religious conditions in which they lived.

Day and night, in many long solitary walks, in the quiet of my room or chapel, I have pondered over God’s call. At times I felt I was conversing with each one, about his or her joys and sorrows, fears and hopes.

They in turn have opened their hearts to me to share with me their experiences of being a Passionist. For from them I have come to know what it has meant to be a Passionist, whether at the very beginning, or during the Napoleonic suppression, in the ups and downs of the nineteenth century, whether in Italy, Australia, England or in the Americas.

I have lived again with Passionist men and women whom I knew from their contemporaries or even personally in these more recent years, in the tensions of war and prosperity, amid conformity or renewal these past thirty years, in the midst of prison chambers and death in China, Spain, Bulgaria, or even as I wrote in the Mindinao mountains of the Philippines.

It is now my privilege to share with you, dear reader, the stories of these great and little Passionists, the veterans and the youthful, the mystics and apostles and martyrs.

From the stories of these Passionists may we learn the meaning of religious life in years gone by. May we face the challenges of our

present time with their courage. Inspired by their experiences, we are readied to step forward into the future, into the new century beyond the year 2000.

Finally, a word of thanks to the many Passionists and other friends, and especially our provincial, Fr. Sebastian MacDonald, and Mr. Michael Glazier, all of whom have encouraged me in this project. As a Passionist for fifty years, I offer this book as a work of love to thank Paul Francis Daneo for all that he did and suffered to found the Passionist Congregation.

September 14, 1990

Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross

Roger Mercurio, C.P.

## Introduction

“It was the worst of times.” So writes Charles Dickens of the period at the end of the eighteenth century in his immortal *Tale of Two Cities*. Indeed, for the Church the eighteenth century was “the worst of times,” even though many call it the Age of Enlightenment.

Philosophers such as Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, and others were attacking and ridiculing Catholicism and Christianity. Scientific discoveries in such areas as astronomy, chemistry, physics, geology, were shaking the faith of many believers.

The eighteenth century has also been called the age of absolutism. Kings were ruling without their parliaments. Take the example of Frederick the Great in Prussia or Catherine the Great in Russia. Even George III in England had complete control over a subservient parliament.

The absolute monarchs of Europe more and more excluded the Holy See from any role in diplomatic decision making. By the end of the century, in 1773, Pope Clement XIV bowed to the pressure of the Catholic kings of Spain, France, and Portugal and suppressed the Society of Jesus. A few years later, French clerics would swear allegiance to the new structures of the Revolution’s “church.” The Papal States would be overrun by Napoleon’s armies.

Moreover, both in the Catholic Church and the Reform Churches, externalism, legalism, formalism, were stifling real religious experiences and loving piety in the hearts of believers. Jansenism and quietism continued strong and alive in many Catholic countries. Yes, it was in so many ways “the worst of times.”



Fortunately, like Dickens, we too must add that "it was the best of times." For the eighteenth century had another side that many Catholics tend to overlook. Because of the anti-Catholic and even anti-Christian excesses of the Enlightenment and the resultant violence of the Revolution with its terror, Church historians have neglected the deeper roots of the seemingly radical movements of the century.

Serious thinkers were clarifying the sources for the rights and duties of individuals. In Poland and in the English colonies on the east coast of North America principles of freedom, equality, and fraternity were being seriously discussed and proposed as the basis for democratic constitutions. These principles had their roots in the Christian concept of the individual worth of each human person.

The historian Hubert Jedin has reminded us that in the light of recent studies and especially of the Second Vatican Council, we must modify the opinions of nineteenth-century Catholic historians in regard to the Age of Enlightenment. He adds that "the rationalism of Enlightenment is historically inconceivable without the philosophy of Scholasticism . . . the religious inwardness of Pietism . . . the Christian concept of the uniqueness and freedom of the individual person."

The rigorism of Jansenism and the formalism in the many Churches (Catholic and Protestant) were already giving way to a revival of gospel Christianity. Witness the impact of John Wesley's preaching in England, the parish mission work of Segneri, Leonard of Port Maurice, Alphonsus Liguori in Italy, and others in France, Spain, Germany, and elsewhere. Recall also the impact of Pietism in Lutheran Germany, the devotion to the Sacred Heart in Catholic France.

Seeds were thus being planted for the postrevolution Church. The mystical teachings of St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross (canonized in 1726), St. Francis de Sales, would take the place of the sterile asceticism of Jansenism, and the quietistic aberrations of Molinos. Vernacular translations of the Bible were more and more available for ordinary Catholics. Muratori and Vico influenced the writing of history, while interest in renewing the liturgy was growing.

The eighteenth century, the time for the "householder" to draw from his storeroom things both old and new, should be viewed as a pivotal century, witnessing to the demise of many evils in society

and in the Church while also giving promise to new life and hopes for the future. It is indeed a "period of transition."

This is especially true of the Catholic religious communities in Europe. Both men and women founders were looking for new structures for their religious communities. Earlier, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John Eudes, and others founded new religious institutes with stronger apostolic ministries. Now in the eighteenth century, St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Paul of the Cross, as well as others, were setting up new models of religious life. In each case we find the blending of the old with the new. Each founder sensed that the age demanded something new, while retaining many of the riches of the past.

Actually, what was taking place was the development of religious life, which eventually would find acceptance in new canonical forms, namely that of exempt clerical institutes or congregations. These would enjoy the privileges of the "great Orders" of old but without such obligations as those of the choral Office and solemn vows.

But more than new canonical forms were being developed. The founders were breathing new life and purpose into the very soul of religious life. In the blending of prayer and ministry, of community and apostolate, a new apostolic spirituality was emerging. The eighteenth century would thus prepare the way for new forms of religious life in the nineteenth century, which would lead to the call for spiritual renewal from the Second Vatican Council.

Thus seeds were being planted by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the founders and their first followers. These were, to be sure, only seeds. It would take years, but there would be growth and plentiful harvesting.

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In the following pages we will focus upon one religious community known as the Passionists. We will witness the workings of the Holy Spirit upon the labors of Paul Francis Daneo and Mother Mary Crucified Costantini in founding the Congregation of the Passion and the Institute of the Passionist Nuns.

In the ensuing chapters we will see the seed growing and developing before and after the French Revolution, as the Congregation spreads from the Papal States to all of Italy, into western Europe, North and South America, and Australia. Eventually, in the twen-

tieth century it will be established also in Asia and Africa. The Passionists will become a truly international religious institute in the truly international Church of the post-Vatican II era.

At the same time, the spread of the Congregation engenders the flowering of the charism of Paul Francis Daneo in various ways. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon chosen men and women, the Passionist charism will respond to the varying needs of different ages and varying cultures.

Finally, in the Epilogue we will look into the twenty-first century to project the results of the Pentecostal fires of the Second Vatican Council upon the Passionist community. What the Congregation will be at that future date will depend on the continuing action of the Spirit and the dedicated commitment of present and future Passionists to the ideals of the founder, St. Paul of the Cross.

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