

P. Saverio Cannistrà, *Superior General*

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE ORDER

Dear Brothers,

It is now two years since the General Chapter and we return to reflect on the Order or, as our Rule puts it “the spiritual welfare of the Order”. As we know, the Rule expected that the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel would meet once week to discuss “matters of discipline and your spiritual welfare”. Such frequency might appear somewhat exaggerated to us nowadays but it does go to show us something of the spirit of that first community. In fact, we cannot guard and maintain the spirit of our Order individually, because the experience of being community, of being brothers, is an essential element of that very spirit. I am convinced that a priority of our gathering here now is to reinforce our bonds of fraternity, to let us sense that we form part of a much greater family wherein we share the same spirit and travel the same journey. I hope that thanks to the experiences of these days, each one of us may return to our own community or circumscription and be able to say: I am not on my own, we are not alone, we can depend on our community, on the support and help provided by the discernment of a much more extensive family.

As is customary, the Extraordinary Definitory commences with the General's Report on the State of the Order. I have divided today's report into three sections:

1. I will give you a run-down of the activities of the Definitory and of those Centres that are directly dependent on the General Curia;
2. I offer a synthetic over-view of the general situation of the Order and
3. I present the programme for this particular Extraordinary Definitory.

1. *Activities of the General Definitory and of Centres dependent on General Curia*

1.1. Activity of Definitory

Between June 2015 and now, the Definitory has met on nine occasions for ordinary sessions. As is customary now, at the conclusion of each meeting a letter was addressed to the whole Order outlining the themes that had been discussed on each occasion. Our own Definitory has met twice a year with the O. Carmelite Definitory. In November 2016 we spent a week together with our O.Carm. Brothers in Stella Maris. With the assistance of Fr. Agostino Montano, a Josephite religious from Murialdo, we reflected on the relationship between religious and the local Church. The two Generals also addressed a joint letter to the whole Carmelite family for the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy (11 June 2016) [1].

Fraternal visits have been conducted by Fr. General and various Definitors from the summer of 2015. The full Definitory paid a fraternal visit to the General Delegation of Israel from 30 November to 6 December 2015. Pastoral Visitations commenced from the beginning of 2016. To date these have

been completed in 7 Provinces (Croatia, Philippines-Vietnam, Oklahoma, Paris, Tamilnadu, Warsaw, Venice), in the Commisariate of Sicily and in 4 General Delegations (Egypt, Israel, Venezuela, Argentina). According to the procedures approved for this sexennium, the decisions taken at these visitations are discussed and approved by the Definitory at its first meeting afterwards.

1.2 *The General Curia*

There has been a simplification and reduction of officials in the service of the Curia. At the moment there are 9, whereas there were 14 in the preceding sexennium. The Secretary General is also now responsible for the archives and statistics. The purpose of the Secretariate for the Missions has been redefined and is now called the Secretariate for Missionary co-operation. Special efforts have been made to improve our sector for communications. The new website for the General House was launched on 16 July 2016 with the addition of Facebook and Twitter. These are brought up to date on a daily basis. The archives are also being upgraded. It was necessary to make more space for them to ensure that our documented patrimony is well preserved. The General archive has its own website explaining its arrangement and characteristics and providing a whole series of publications for the use of anyone that might be interested (including the complete collection of *Acta Ordinis*). A website for the Postulation General is also near completion. One of the on-going needs of the Curia is that of translators, especially for English, notwithstanding the last General Chapter's approval of a request that the Provinces would "offer set translators to the General Curia". I have to say that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to find collaborators for our various centres at the service of the entire Order.

Among the initiatives desired by the General Chapter was the establishment of a fund for missionary assistance with contributions from all our circumscriptions. As a consequence of that decision, the Definitory addressed a letter to all Superiors on 19 December 2015, proposing three possible quotes for donations. In 2016, from a total of 51 circumscriptions, 37 sent contributions for a total of 83.610 euro. (80.000 of these were spent in response to various requests). To date this year, only 22 circumscriptions have sent their contribution. Apart from an extraordinarily generous contribution from one Province, we only collected 53.881 euro.

[1] "Sia benedetto per sempre, perché mi ha tanto atteso", <Acta OCD> 61(2016), 123-129.

Another important initiative, launched thanks to the contributions sent from the monasteries of Holland, was the establishment of a fund for needy monasteries. This is run by the Secretariate for Nuns, in agreement with Fr. General. During the past three years it has been possible to comply favourably with the requests of many monasteries, especially for construction work or for the extraordinary maintenance of buildings.

1.3 *Teresianum*

With regard to our Theological Faculty, I am pleased to be in a position to refer to notable progress in many areas. First of all, three permanent members have been added to the community: Fr. Emilio Martínez plus two others who have obtained their doctorates this year: Fr. Ignatius

Kunnumpurath from the Malabar Province (Doctor in Biblical Theology from the Urbanium) and Fr. Lukasz Strzyz from the Cracov Province ((Doctor in Fundamental Theology from the Lateran University).

Thanks to the implementation of a new programme, the running of the Faculty's library with online consultation has improved remarkably. All issues of the publication “Teresianum” (and “Ephemerides Carmeliticae”) may now be consulted online. Major efforts are underway to recommence publication of BIS which was suspended in 2006. In collaboration with the Belgian editorial Brepols it is now hoped to have it published online. It will limit its scope to areas of specific interest to our Faculty (Carmelite studies, Spiritual Theology and Theological Anthropology). An online course in Spirituality has also been introduced this year.

Collaboration between the Teresianum and Cites of Avila is progressing well. In order to be able to offer a complete cycle of studies for a Licence in Mystical Theology, Cites has requested incorporation with the Teresianum.

As regards inscriptions, the number of students for the academic year just concluded was 144: 31 in the 1st cycle, 67 in the 2nd and 46 in the Doctorate cycle. A further 78 students attended non-academic courses. In total, then, the Faculty had 222 students. A slow but constant diminution of students has been taking place over the past few years (there were 272 inscribed in 2010).

1.4 International College

During the past two years the Formation Community has been partly renewed with the arrival of Fr. Sunil Rodrigues (Karnataka-Goa Province) as Bursar, and Fr. Suresh Babu (Tamilnadu Province) who takes on the role of formator next month.

A regards students in formation, the following are the statistics for the last three years:

- 2015-2016: 24 students (Asia 13, Africa 10, Latin America 3)
- 2016-2017: 26 students (Asia 14, Africa 12, Latin America 2)
- 2017-2018: 25 students (Asia 14, Africa 9, Latin America 2)

There have been no European students since 2015. The last two were Polish students who completed their studies in June 2015. It is obvious that there has been a sharp decline in European vocations. However, according to the latest statistics in Europe, there were 61 temporary professed clerics (plus 5 non-clerics) in 2015 and 74 clerics (plus 7 non clerics) in 2016. The fact that not a single one of these was sent to the International College raises questions that I, for one, would not know how to answer. This Extraordianry Definitory is an ideal opportunity to freely raise any eventual difficulties or problems you may have concerning the College, or indeed any other areas directly under the General Curia. Our aim is to improve all of them.

1.5 Cites

As you know, the Teresian-San Juanistic Centre in Avila also depends on the General Definitory. The community remains the same with six religious from five different countries (Spain, Colombia, Poland, the Lebanon and Peru). There were 35 ordinary students in the last academic year. However, more than 400 took part as guest students at one or other of the numerous courses that are

on offer at the Centre. Among the various activities, I make special mention of the congress on St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, held in November 2016. The next congress, programmed for September '17, is *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* which will be the first in a series of congresses on the works of St. John of the Cross. The Centre also hosts inter-religious meetings, one on Buddhism last July and another on Islam to be held this coming November.

1.6 Delegation of Israel

There have been some changes in the General Delegation of Israel. For reasons of age and health, three religious have returned to their respective Provinces (Frs. Jan Kanty, John Landy and Bro. Morgan Ataide). Accordingly the number of religious in the Delegation has decreased even though two others have returned there: Fr. Robert Strojny (Cracov Province) and Bro. Gabriel Park (Korean Province). At the moment there are 13 members altogether (9 Fathers and 4 Brothers). This means that it is impossible to have an autonomous community at Muhraqa. The situation of our house in Haifa with its Latin parish and school has also become critical. For these reasons the Definitory has requested assistance from the Semi-Province of Lebanon.

2. The Situation of the Order

2.1 Statistical Data

In the table below I compare the data presented to the last General Chapter which referred to 2014, with the latest available data brought up to date in December 2016:

CONTINENT	2016	2014
Europe	1484	1484
Asia	1310	1316
Lat. America	544	516
Africa	473	484
North America	176	172
Middle East	57	49
TOTAL	4044	4021

As you can see, there are not huge variations between them. Of somewhat more interest, however, is the table referring to the religious in formation, from noviciate to Solemn Profession (in preparation for Ordination):

CONTINENT	2016	2014
Asia	417	432
Africa	203	209
Europe	137	112
Lat. America	109	110
North America	15	13
Middle East	6	7
TOTAL	887	883

Probably the most unexpected statistic is the increase of those in formation in Europe, equal to 23%. Other variations are not significant. You might say there is a basic stability.

As regards the geographic spread of the Order, friars are present in 87 countries at the moment. In the last two years East Timor has been added with a foundation in Dili, as well as Lithuania with the presence of two Fathers in Kaunas. The missionary experience in Bangladesh which was begun in 2015 had to be discontinued in 2016, due to a variety of difficulties.

2.2 *Spiritual Reality*

On quite a few occasions previously I have referred to this theme of the spiritual situation in our Order – our way of living and of witnessing to the Teresian charism. As I have not changed my ideas on the subject, I am obliged to repeat here more or less what I have already said on other occasions.

Our Order shares in the general situation of religious life today. We might define it as a path of renewal stuck halfway, a path slowed up or even blocked due to the uncertainty about the direction it is headed in or to the complexity of the journey and the fatigue of its travellers. As the recent document of CIVCSVA states, *New skins for new wine*:

“Especially in the first three decades after the Council there was a generous and creative effort at renewal. This has continued in the succeeding decades, even though at a slower rhythm and with a somewhat wearied dynamism” [2]. Among aspects of renewal referred to in the document we find changes in legislative texts, research and interpretation of the original inspiration of Institutes, a search for new structures of formation, a renewal and rearranging of structures and of economic management. We thank God for all of this but we also have to make the effort for an in-depth ownership of it so that what has been established at a theoretical level and from documentation can be translated into lived experiences. We must see our programme for the revision of our Constitutions in this light. (We return to this point tomorrow with the assistance of Frs. Agustí and Emilio).

Rapid and complex historical changes constantly question our adjustments, our habits, our way of thinking and of acting. Unfortunately, our reactions are usually rather slow and superficial. To cite the Congregation's document again, we are experiencing “a crisis of historical projection and charismatic profile [...]. We must recognize that in many cases we are dealing with the inability to move from ordinary administration (*management*) to guidelines that are adequate for the new reality to which we must wisely adapt. It is by no means an easy task to jump from the simple management of familiar situations to other goals and ideals with a conviction that inspires genuine trust” [3].

In actual fact this is precisely the situation in which anyone who is called to the service of authority in a religious family today finds himself: the sense of fatigue, not to say powerlessness, to move from ordinary administration (which very often has become “ordinary emergency”) to the prospect of new pathways, more in keeping with our charismatic identity and with the times in which we live. We are so “absorbed with solving problems” that we cannot even “imagine other itineraries”. We have to stop and reflect seriously on what the real problems are, those that touch on our deepest identity, and what are the ways for development and transformation that

[2] CIVCSVA, *Per vino nuovo otri nuovi. Dal Concilio Vaticano II la vita consecrata e le sfide ancora aperte. Orientamenti*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 2017, n.5

[3] Ivi, n. 8.

we might suggest for dealing with them. I will limit myself to referring to some aspects of the impoverishment of our religious life that we must act upon urgently, if we wish to have a present, and particularly a future, continuation of the high levels possible in the vocation that has been gifted to us.

A) THE CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION

The first area where we see the weakening of our religious life is in the contemplative dimension. At the core of a contemplative life is the desire to know God, to recognize the features of His face right through the signs of His presence in history. We are talking about a vocation and a fundamental orientation of a person. I take it for granted that all those who form part of the religious family begun by St. Teresa have this desire of the Spirit in their hearts, even though it may be latent and buried beneath many layers of other desires, other objectives and other gratifications. But, unless there have been errors in vocational discernment, this desire for knowledge of and union with God must be there, as a seed sown in the soil of our life story. The Gospel warns us that obstacles of all kinds may hinder the growth of the seed in the soil: there are birds that carry off the seed, rocks that prevent it from rooting deeply or briars that suffocate its growth. But each time the seed falls and is rooted in good earth it produces fruit (Mt 13, 1-23).

Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross and Thérèse of the Child Jesus, to mention only our three Doctors of the Church, have opened up a path of formation that is unparalleled in the spiritual tradition of spirituality. This is especially true because their teaching evolves from lived experience and not from theoretical speculation. As a result, we can never say that we have not been well equipped for our journey. And yet I see that we don't undertake the journey at all, or we stall at the first stage, without continuing our task of exploring and discovering. Why does this happen to us? There can be so many reasons. For example, a kind of vicious circle in which we are imprisoned. We distance ourselves further and further from our contemplative vocation until it becomes extraneous to us, unintelligible, and this in turn convinces us that we must seek fulfilment elsewhere.

We must recognize that it is by no means easy to live a contemplative life, all the more so at the present time. We cannot take it for granted that we are capable of it. I would even say that the contrary is true: the starting point is, in fact, that we are not capable of doing it. If we can only recognize this, we are already at a good point on our journey. Why is it difficult to be contemplatives? Because it does not simply mean observing a timetable of prayer. It means facing up to the transformation of a person, a process that is prolonged, slow and, very often, crucifying. It is not worth our while even attempting to begin if we lack the patience to wait, the freedom to change or the courage to renounce a way of life that is only interested in seeking our personal comfort zones. Teresa and John have told us in a thousand ways and perhaps we ourselves have repeated it in preaching retreats or directing penitents.

But when it comes down to ourselves personally, are we willing to undertake it, to attempt living this way, to embark on this adventure? Perhaps they seem uncertain and distant goals. We prefer to content ourselves with attaining objectives nearer at hand or easier to understand.

B) KNOWLEDGE OF AND CARE FOR OURSELVES

Teresa has taught us the importance, indeed the necessity of passing through knowledge of ourselves to reach knowledge of God who dwells in us: <It is absurd to think that we can enter heaven without first entering our own souls – without getting to know ourselves and reflecting upon the wretchedness of our nature.....> (2M, 11). But precisely such knowledge of ourselves and care for ourselves have become particularly difficult undertakings. We are constantly projected to things outside ourselves, our gaze and our hearing are continually focused on electronic devices that have become appendages of our own bodies. In such an ambient, listening to ourselves, to the messages arising from within and not from externals, requires courageous determination and motivation. To return to the words of Teresa, we live more and more outside the castle, we wander around its environs, take snaps of its walls and if, now and then, we take a look inside, we run away terrified. Who would dare venture into such an obscure and threatening territory that seems more a labyrinth than an interior castle? At most, we might agree to take a guided tour, in the company of a psychotherapist, in the hope that he knows us better than we know ourselves.

C) FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY

Another aspect of fundamental importance for a contemplative life is our relationships with others, with a brother, with the community that we are part of. Quite often, we do not feel “at home” in our own communities. I do not wish to blame anybody in saying this, but just to make us aware of one of the problems or of the challenges that we must confront. Again in this case, we must recognize that it is more difficult nowadays than it may have been in the past “to feel at home” in a religious community. The first difficulty derives from the fact that the role of the religious has lost much of its sense and traditional evidence. The uncertainty of the role, the splintering of the social bonds connected with it, the vagueness of the rules of conduct, all combine to make it so much more difficult to set up a religious community nowadays. As a result, we cannot depend any longer on the sharing of a similar ideal of life, on the same style of behaviour or on similar means of communication. Therefore the only possible basis has to be a “shared believing humanity”, becoming together more humane, more believing, and as such, more brotherly in our witness to the gospel. Naturally it is a lot more difficult to share our humanness and life of faith than stereotyped and codified roles. But it is precisely this difficulty that can reveal to us a much richer vision for community and one that is more faithful to the teresian concept of community, where all its members have to know each other and be friends. What may seem a crisis can effectively become an opportunity for growth and change, but to achieve this we must invest both strenuous effort and necessary resources in community life. With communities reduced to two or three and with a significant number of religious living on their own, dispersed around the world, the objective conditions for living fraternal life in community are sadly missing. We cannot

say that we appreciate the community dimension of our vocation if we then take options that lead in another direction and actually encourage individualism.

D) CHARISM AND ORDAINED MINISTRY

Our religious way of life is becoming increasingly more and more clericalized [4]. Limiting the theme to our own Order, the collapse of vocations in non-cleric brothers is a worrying statistical reality. But it is not this fact alone. Nowadays we identify ourselves much more in the role of an ordained minister and his work than in the role of a religious. The formation given to our young aspirants, apart from the noviciate year, is practically exclusively intellectual with a view to priestly ordination [5]. In this sense religious life is inclining more and more to the side of hierarchy and institution rather than to the gratuitousness of charismatic gifts. While priestly ministry can depend on a sure institutional foundation and on evidenced functioning, the same cannot be said for the charismatic dimension of the religious vocation. Charism is something that is absolutely gratuitous and, in a sense, perfectly useless, like the perfume of Bethania.

This is not solely a practical problem, due to an excess of activity and duties. It is a problem of mentality, that is much deeper and has more serious consequences than the simple prevalence of pastoral activity in our daily lives. The problem is that 'doing' has been superimposed on 'being', our way of thinking and of judging things. We see ourselves much more as priests and professionals of Sacred Orders than as Discalced Brothers of the Virgin Mary, the official title of our Order, which seems to me a wonderful programme of life: being brothers, being discalced (I like to interpret

[4] Cfr.ivi, n. 23: “Another point that we cannot overlook is that the clericalization of consecrated life has intensified in these decades..... religious priests are nearly exclusively dedicated to diocesan life rather than to their community with an obvious impoverishment of the latter”.

[5] Cfr. Ivi, n.15: “We must not only have young consecrated persons with academic titles, but they must also be formed in an identification with the values of *sequela Christi*”.

this as “disarmed”), being “Mary”, in her relationship with Christ and with the Church. We have submersed all this charismatic richness in general clerical activity. We are obviously not doing anything bad. On the contrary, we often operate well as pastors, parish priests or simple priests. What is worrying about it is that we neglect or sideline the core of our vocation. I sometimes think that we operate as certain married laity who are fine professionals, but neglect their own family or their own children. As professionals, they do great things and help many others but they do not give their own family what they should as parents and spouses.

Clericalism goes hand in hand with individualism. One of the risks for a religious who works in a parish or is involved in other activities is that he carries out his ministry independently of the community and of his Superiors. The parish or pastoral group or teaching or any other activity become his whole world. Nobody else may enter it to collaborate, to add some novelty or simply to share the experience fraternally. It is an obvious sign that the work is not being done by a religious with vows of obedience and poverty and as someone trying to live as a member of a community. The service has

been transformed into private and exclusive property. In such a situation the changes that would be normal in a religious life, transfers to another community, switches in office etc., become almost impossible. The individual is wedded to his activity which has become his very reason for living.

E) CULTURAL POVERTY

Should a religious be unable to relinquish certain activities that have become habitual for him, this is because of a kind of cultural poverty. Sometimes it seems that religious do not know how to do anything other than what they have always done. The impoverishment of religious identity also weakens an element that we traditionally find in the life and mission of religious – their dedication to study and their theological-spiritual formation. Our friars read little and write less. Our nuns and even the laity who frequent our houses have difficulty in finding a friar who is capable and willing to preach a retreat or give a course on Carmelite spirituality or fundamental or moral theology. It is true that the social-cultural context in which we live, where communication is reduced to imagery and brief messages, is not helpful. But precisely because of this, religious life should go against the current and give witness to a different way of living. When we speak of Teresian humanities, we should not forget that an essential aspect of this is learning to think, to listen, to express oneself. None of this comes automatically but needs time and effort in producing something that will not have immediate or automatic results. How can we respond to other people's questions if we ourselves are not already informed, if we know nothing more than ourselves (and sometimes even less), if, like them we are immersed in a world full of superficial and non-verifiable information, without a critical understanding of the past or a valid projection towards the future? This poverty is also reflected in our community dialogue where topics of conversation are normally about football or other trivialities reported in the daily papers.

F) OUR RAPPORT WITH OUR NUNS AND THE LAITY

In this situation of poverty at all levels the worst scenario would be that we retreat into ourselves and not allow ourselves to avail of the riches which our Carmelite family offers. I want to underline especially the importance of our relationship with our Discalced Carmelite Sisters and with those lay persons who are particularly close to Teresian Carmel. We can and should be giving them much more than we are giving, but we can actually receive much more from them. There is the condition, however, that we approach them not as priests, invested with sacred powers and knowing everything already but rather as brothers engaged on the same journey and subject to the same weaknesses as them, but in need of the help and companionship of others. It is easy to say it, but not at all as easy to live it. There is need of a deep conversion, of a real and genuine reform that will make us more simple, more humble, better disciples of Jesus and the gospel.

2.3 Reform of Religious Life?

<*Come dovremo essere?*>, the Document of the Extraordinary Definitory in 2011 concluded by indicating that a fundamental task of the Order was “to establish Teresian communities, that would

be places of authentic spiritual and human development, irradiating the truth and beauty that were being experienced in them". Six years later we can repeat the very same message. We have re-read St. Teresa, we are re-reading our Constitutions at the moment. We are doing all this with the intent of a serious revision of life. And so far it seems that we are really struggling to achieve this objective.

This is not altogether surprising. What we really need is a serious renewal of our life. The pontificate of Pope Francis has relaunched the conciliar theme of *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. As has been correctly written: <quite a few times, in these last three (four) years, the Pope has expressed, in different circumstances and to different audiences, the necessity of re-opening the chapter on reform, showing that this is co-natural to the very nature of the Church: the Church is brought back by the Pope to its identity and vocation of being a "restless body": the Church body has always been identified with continual change, sometimes rapid and accelerated, more often slow> (6).

(6) S, NOCETI, *Riforma della Chiesa. Indispensabile e, ora, possibile*, <Il Regno-attualità> 22/2016. p. 683.

Through the centuries, one reality in the Church that has experienced constant movement of reform is religious life. Enzo Bianchi observes: "It is not by chance that the apophthegm 'Today I begin anew' has been attributed to Anthony, the father of monachism. It has been a characteristic of monastic life, both in the East and West, to keep reforming, as though its very identity depended on a succession of reforms. Conversion and reform are part and parcel of the personal and community journey of religious life, so it must be constantly renewed (7).

For our part, we all certainly recall the text of St. Teresa in her *Foundations* and repeated at the beginning of our Constitutions: "It is we who are beginners now, but let them continually strive to be beginners too, in the sense of growing better and better all the time" (8).

However, it is not possible to programme reforms sitting at a table, or to impose them by decrees. Reforms are born from the grass roots, wherever the Spirit blows, as and when He wishes, as happened with Teresa de Ahumada and the community of St. Joseph's. The General, Fr. Rossi, was able to see that the Spirit was effectively at work in that new foundation, even though he would certainly never have foreseen all the consequences that would derive from it.

If we reflect for a moment, in actual fact what means can a General, or even a General Chapter and a Definitory employ to renew or reform an Institute? Anything that can be done in the practices of government, formation or pastoral animation, is inevitably institutional rather than being directed towards renewal or reform. It effects the good running of the Institute rather than the life of the charism. Naturally the good running of an Institute is praiseworthy. I feel there is a lot to be done in this regard as well. As we observed at the last General Chapter, there is an hiatus between our actual life and the legislative texts that govern it. This cannot be interpreted solely as the normal strain between reality and the ideal. We are dealing with a genuine and yawning separation. For this reason the motive for deciding on a systematic re-reading of our Constitutions was to encourage a deeper understanding of the differences and a subsequent dialogue between the two, as it were.

At the level of governance of the Order, I understand that our way of conducting affairs might often seem over-prudent, not to say timid or hesitant. I feel that the principle attributed to St. Bernard and very dear to Pope St. John XXIII: *Omnia videre, multa dissimulare, pauca corrigere* (to notice everything, disregard many and correct few things) is a very wise one and I deliberately try to abide

by it. Despite this, on the few occasions that it is necessary to intervene in serious situations, the reaction is generally one of surprise and exasperation, as though we were actually abusing our powers.

(7) E. BIANCHI, *Ecumenismo: profezia della vita religiosa*. A 1998 Conference.

(8) F 29, 32: “*Ahora comenzamos y procuren ir comenzando siempre de bien en mejor*”.

In these days, with such an attitude towards authority at all levels, efforts to correct obvious faults or to redirect mistakes are difficult tasks, or better, they are full-scale battles.

Proposals for new experiences are not encouraged either. In November 2016 I asked the European Provincials to consider the idea of a special year of formation for young solemnly professed or priests. It would be an opportunity for them to repeat, at a more mature stage in their lives, the fundamental themes of Teresian-Carmelite formation. Reactions were partly lukewarm, partly cold, partly decidedly opposed. From my experience, resistance, doubts and fears prevail with regard to anything novel, anything that we cannot fully grasp or that is going to call for determined efforts. As I mentioned at the outset, quoting the document from the Congregation, anyone involved in government has the unpleasant experience of being so caught up in day-to-day problems that he is unable to propose suggestions for renewal. Of course we must not just give up but both energy and time are limited. Without help and concrete collaboration, hopes of achieving anything different and meaningful begin to diminish and eventually to vanish altogether.

Personally, I have no doubt that the Spirit is also breathing among ourselves, in our own Carmelite family. There are desires, unrests, dreams that want to become an experienced reality. I believe that we should favour such experiences, even at the risk of making mistakes. By far the worst mistake would be to remain static and closed to the future. Discernment is also impossible if there is not a concrete experienced foundation in which to use it. I have been very struck by the words of Cardinal Martini, an expert on the *Acts of the Apostles*, with regard to the first “council” of the Church, the so-called Council of Jerusalem (*Acts ch.15*). Martini writes:

“If we read attentively the account of that council, we remain amazed to note that when a very practical and difficult problem had to be resolved – the mutual acceptance of Christians from Judaism and converts from paganism – they did not turn to Scripture or to any canonical tradition but rather, before all else, to reflection on how they had experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit...This is the attitude that is proposed for us now – to listen to the voice of the Spirit and draw inspiration from it for today, in humble obedience to that Word that he had spoken in the Church and that still speaks in the Magisterium, in the strength of preaching, in daily reading of Scripture, in the daily lives of the faithful, in the experience of sanctity” (9).

And this is precisely what we too must do: listen to the voice of the Spirit and draw very concrete consequences for today, in obedience to the Word of God which, for us, is the word of our vocation.

(9) C. MARTINI, *Cristiani coraggiosi. Laici testimoni nel mondo di oggi*, In dialogo, Milano 2017, pp. 123-124.

2.4 Two possible objections

I imagine that what I have just said could give rise to at least two observations or objections. Hence I will try and anticipate them.

The first and most obvious is: you have presented the situation of the Order in too negative and pessimistic a light. To that observation I respond that what I have said does not intend in any way to deny the many good and beautiful things that exist in our Order, as in all religious life, in the Church and in the world. But the objective of the report was something else: to point out some urgencies that pose questions for us and that require deeper consideration on our part. It would be pessimistic to deny that the Order holds a future, that it has a path to travel with a view to renewal and reinforcement of its charismatic identity and of its mission. On the contrary, the optimist is one who sets about searching for these ways towards the future.

The second objection might be the following: what do you propose in concrete? What have you in mind regarding the renewal of the Order and the way to tackle its challenges? It is true that I have been somewhat reticent on this point, but I did so purposely, for two reasons fundamentally. The first is, as I have said, that I believe that true reforms originate at grass roots level and not from the top down, or better, following the inspirations of the Spirit and not the decisions of authority. As such, I can invite vigilance and a word of caution: not to quench too quickly desires that may proceed from the Spirit. If we have a healthy unrest and true humility within us, I believe that we are capable of receiving anything new the Spirit has to suggest to the Teresian Carmel.

My second reason is that I should not wish to propose to the whole Order a vision for renewal or reform that is based on my own personal vision and sensitivity. Reform might originate from one or other of the fundamental dimensions of our vocation: from putting emphasis on the interior and contemplative life; from a deepening appreciation of fraternal life; from a renewed missionary thrust. It is the spirit that animates reform that is important, not the particular point of departure or method employed. If we concentrate effort on an authentic teresian contemplative life, this cannot but have positive repercussions on fraternal life and on our missions as well. And the same can be said of fraternal life or missions, should they be our initial focus. In the report that I presented to the General Chapter I spoke of four functional imperatives (using language borrowed from sociology). It can commence from any one of these: from the internalization of identity or the integration of the community or by adapting to circumstances. What matters is that it really be done. co-involving our life with it. It is not enough just to talk about it.

3. Programme for the Extraordinary Definitory

I conclude my already over-lengthy report with a look at the programme for these days. I ask for the kind of assistance from yourselves to which I referred earlier.

Fr. Economo General will give his report on the Central economic situation of the Order at the conclusion of my own report. Then Fr. Raphael, General Secretary for the Nuns, will present important new elements regarding the life of our Nuns from the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*. This will conclude the informative section of this Definitory.

The second part will deal with the programme for re-reading our Constitutions. Fr. Agusti and Fr. Emilio, President and Secretary respectively of the Commission for this programme, will provide

an estimate of the work done to date, presenting an outline of the responses received from the Provinces so far. Although we hope to have an Extraordinary Definitory in February 2019 dealing especially with this matter of the Constitutions, I think it is worthwhile to begin reflecting already on the direction we might consider taking.

The third part of this Definitory is a mini-course for Provincials which will treat of the more pressing themes for leadership of the Provinces. The Definitory General thought such a course would be useful, both to clarify some juridical and procedural points that have not always been observed in practice and also to assimilate useful material for the preparation of a new hand-book for Provincial government. As many of you are aware, the General Definitory approved a similar hand-book in December 2006 after the Extraordinary Definitory in Chile. Although it was useful, it does not appear to have been a great success. This Definitory wishes to re-propose it with some helpful amendments.

This part of our proceedings will conclude with a rather complex but particularly urgent juridical-pastoral question. It regards the presence of some of our religious in circumscriptions to which they do not appertain. The increase of this phenomenon demands special attention from all of us.

We confide our work to the intercession of Mary, our Mother and Sister. May She accompany us with her love and her protection!