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Prot. n. 302/2018 GM

MORE ON *COR ORANS*: DOUBTS, OBJECTIONS, FEARS

Rome, 1st October 2018
St Therese of the Child Jesus, Doctor of the Church

My dear Sisters,

Two months ago, on the occasion of the solemnity of Mary, Mother of Carmel, I sent you a letter, presenting the applicative Instruction *Cor Orans*, illustrating in the letter the underlying approach and insisting on some aspects that are particularly important for your assimilation and translation of it into practice. As usual, the letter was received by you with great interest and not a few communities expressed to me their gratitude for this small offering of help and for the encouragement to study this document more deeply. As a result, we have entered fully into a phase of reflection, marked also by numerous gatherings, meetings, assemblies, by which to continue on and to share the path of assimilation and adaptation of the prescriptions of *Cor Orans* to the Teresian Carmel.

During this time, I have been able to listen to and record not only legitimate doubts and questions about the significance and scope of the norms established by the Instruction, but also underlying oppositions, which, in my view, come from erroneous preconceptions. I am therefore obliged to return to the topic of *Cor Orans*, to speak not only of the objective questions dealt with in the text, but also of the subjective attitudes of those who read it, which hinder a serene and fruitful reception and, therefore, a correct application to the Teresian Carmel. As so many studies of hermeneutics have taught us, every reading is an interpretation and, therefore, the disposition of the reader is decisive for the comprehension of the text. Not all difficulties are to be found in the text, because not a few of them reside in the mind and outlook of the reader: Important new things are overlooked, dangers and threats are seen where there is an opening of paths and opportunities, indications that leave room for the freedom of the subjects are considered confusing or inadequate, while at the same time, complaints are made about the excessive minuteness of the rules.

To me, it seems useful to distinguish three different types of reaction to the Instruction, which require different modes of response and clarification: the *doubts* and questions raised by the text; the *objections*, which perceive in some new things introduced by *Cor Orans* risks of various kinds for the life of the Discalced Carmelite nuns; underlying *fears* and resistance.

1. Doubts

It is absolutely normal that a text of such importance and density, as is *Cor Orans*, would pose numerous questions to those reading it with the intention of putting it into practice. Despite all the effort made by those who drew up the text to express the subject matter in a clear and comprehensive manner, there is inevitably the possibility of misunderstanding and uncertainty about the exact intention of the text. In fact, a considerable number of questions have already been received in the

General House, which are generally legitimate, that is, justified by some objective difficulty. In the forest of so many questions, three types of doubts can be distinguished:

1. Doubts in understanding the text, that for some reason or other does not appear clear.
2. Doubts about the practical application of certain rules which change traditional practice.
3. Doubts about points not explicitly addressed by the Instruction.

To some of these doubts I will attempt to give as concise as possible replies, which have no other claim than to indicate criteria and methods to find plausible solutions.

Numbers 1 and 3. Here there is a question about the meaning of the distinction between simple and solemn vows, revived by *Cor Orans*. Certainly, it is not a question of particular importance in itself, and even less so for the Discalced Carmelite nuns, who have always maintained the practice of solemn profession of vows. On the other hand, the new code of Canon Law no longer distinguishes between institutes of solemn vows and institutes of simple vows, but in can. 607 § 2 speaks only of «public, perpetual or temporary vows». Only in can. 1192 § 2 is a distinction made between simple vows and solemn vows, without however specifying what exactly the difference consists of. Generally, there is agreement in holding that there is no difference between simple and solemn vows concerning the vows of obedience and chastity (cfr. can. 1008). Instead, for the solemn vow of poverty, what counts in set down in can. 668 §§ 4-5, namely that it entails the radical surrender of goods and the loss of the capacity to acquire and to possess[1].

Numbers 7-8 and 13. What arises here is: does there exist a difference between Federations and Associations and what makes up the difference. In fact, the definition of the term 'Federation' in no. 7 and of the term 'Association' in no. 8 does not seem to imply substantial differences. In the language of recent documents from the Holy See[2], both terms are used as synonyms and it is specified that what is said concerning Federations applies also to Associations. *Vultum Dei Querere* never uses the term Association, as also does not *Cor Orans*, except in numbers 8 and 13 and in the final dispositions. Number 13 reiterates that «The provisions of this Instruction for the Federation of monasteries are equally valid for the Association of Monasteries and for the Conference of monasteries, considering their unique nature and their own Statutes approved by the Holy See». Similarly, in the second final disposition, it is said: «The provisions of the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* for all the monasteries concerning the obligation to enter a Federation of monasteries also applies to other structures of communion such as the Association of monasteries or the Conference of monasteries».

In conclusion, for practical purposes, the Statutes will differentiate one Federation or Association from the other. I do not think, however, that we can consider the Association as a "lighter" structure than the Federation: such an interpretation does not find any foothold either in *Vultum Dei Querere* or in *Cor Orans*.

More complicated, however, is explaining in what sense or even why the *Conference of Monasteries*, which is «a structure of communion among autonomous monasteries, belonging to diverse Institutes and present in the same region» (*CO* 9), has been inserted alongside the Federation and Association. It is obvious, in fact, that a structure of communion between monasteries of different institutes in itself has, *per se*, remarkably different characteristics and aims. However, thinking of some particular situations, such as regions where the Catholic Church is completely a minority and

1. Cfr. V. DE PAOLIS, *La vita consacrata nella Chiesa*, Marcianum, Venice 2010, pp. 305-306, p. 507.
2. Cfr. VC 59; VS 27.

consequently the presence of the monasteries of female contemplative life is reduced to a few units, in my opinion, it could be reasonable to attribute to the Conference of Monasteries at least part of the functions of a Federation or an Association, rather than forming a Federation with geographically distant monasteries belonging to different traditions, languages and cultures.

Numbers 11 and 96. *VDQ* in Art. 9 § 4 says that the establishment of an international commission should be favoured in every Institute. *CO* incorporates this recommendation, stating that the Commission «aims to promote the study of topics relating to contemplative life in relation to its charism» (*CO* 96). It pertains to the Congregation to erect or recognize such a Commission and to approve its Statutes. One wonders, however, how in actual fact can we achieve the creation of such a Commission. Given its character as a «centralized organ of service and of study for the benefit of nuns of the same Institute» (*CO* 11), it seems to me not only appropriate, but necessary that there is assistance from the Centre of the Order, and more positively from the Superior General, who «has the obligation of being at the service of all the monasteries of the Order, either directly or through his collaborators» (*Const.* 242). This service provides that he promotes «in dialogue with them, [the Discalced Carmelite Nuns] projects and undertakings in the fields of spiritual development and formation. In conformity with the mind of the Apostolic See, he will favor the creation of Federations and Associations. He will keep himself informed about their life and the direction they take» (*Const* 242). Therefore, I believe that, in order to put this instruction of *VDQ* and *CO* into practice, it is necessary to start (or resume) a dialogue with the Federations and Associations concerning the establishment of an International Commission. Personally, I believe that, particularly in this historical moment of change, it would be a great help to be able to count on the collaboration of a group of nuns, representative of the different geographic areas and sensitivities of the Order. Think, for example, the work that awaits us to revise several numbers of the *Constitutions* and, probably, also the *Ratio Institutionis*, to quote only the two cases that most clearly require an intervention and, therefore, a careful prior study.

Numbers. 15, 39a, 70. Among the requirements for autonomy of a monastery, number 15 of *CO* indicates not only the number, but also the "quality" of the members. Evidently it is much easier to verify the number than the quality of the members of a community. In numbers 39a and 70, «advanced age» is one of the criteria. Certainly, a community composed for the greater part of old nuns is more fragile and exposed to risks for the future than a young community. However, age alone is not sufficient to evaluate the autonomy of a person and a community. Experience teaches us that there are persons of advanced age who are quite able-bodied, who contribute in a decisive manner to the life of the community and, *vice versa*, young or not so old people who, for various reasons, need to be supported and are not capable of taking on important responsibilities. For this reason, there is a need to use such criteria with prudence and flexibility. Perhaps it would be fairer to speak of nuns who demonstrate a sufficient physical, psychological and spiritual stability.

Number 31. It is established that the local superior of a new foundation is appointed by the Prioress of the founding monastery or by the President of the Federation (where the foundation has been undertaken by the Federation). For the method of making such an appointment we must go to the law pertaining to it. As we know, the Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in N. 207 provide that the Superior of the new foundation, called a Vicaress, is appointed by the Superior of the foundation (Bishop or religious Superior). Therefore, until this number of the Constitutions is

reformulated, there remains a doubt on the manner of making an appointment. However, if the so-called analogy of law applies, n. 59 of *CO* can help, where it establishes that the local superior of the affiliated monasteries is appointed *ad nutum* by the Prioress of the affiliating monastery or by the federal President (when the monastery is affiliated to the Federation) «with the consent of the respective Council, having heard the nuns of the community of the affiliated monastery».

Number 45 and numbers 54-64. They deal with the new regulations concerning a monastery *sui juris* «which has only an asserted autonomy, but in reality, very precarious or, in fact, non-existant» (*CO* 54). *VDQ* specifies as a first requisite for affirming the viable autonomy of a monastery «a certain, even minimal number of sisters, provided that the majority are not elderly» (*VDQ* art. 8 § 1). The implementing Instruction specified that this minimal number is five solemnly professed nuns (*CO* 45), regardless of their age. The first consequence is that the monastery «loses the right to the election of its Superior» (*ibid*). The Superior of the monastery, having obtained the authorization of the Congregation, will appoint an administrative Superior, after having consulted the members of the community individually. Clearly this is a temporary measure, while awaiting that the Congregation takes a decision on the future of the monastery. It must evaluate what, realistically, are the possibilities of growth or revitalization of the community and which methodology of accompaniment would be more effective and timelier. According to *VDQ* art. 8 § 2, the process of discernment will ordinarily be undertaken by a commission established *ad hoc*, formed of the Ordinary, the President of the Federation, the Federal Assistant and the Major Superior of the monastery (cfr. also, *CO* 43, 45, 56, 69). In actual fact, *CO* proposes two possible solutions: 1) Affiliation, in view of overcoming the critical situation or accompanying the monastery towards closing; 2) direct suppression, when it is evident that the conditions for proceding to it already exist.

It is important to clarify some principle of the new procedure:

1. A monastery that does not enjoy vital autonomy cannot be left alone, but must be accompanied in evaluating its present situation and in taking decisions for the future. It is a fundamental principle, for in the past we have assisted many times where there had been clumsy attempts to "manage", without any other criterion than that of survival of the monastery at all costs.
2. The community is an integral part of the process of discernment. It is consulted at the time when the administrative Superior is appointed, it is represented in the commission in the person of the Superior, by means of whom they will express their opinion.
3. Affiliation is a «support of juridical nature» which normally helps the community in its journey towards closing (rarer is the case of affiliation to help a monastery to overcome a temporary crisis due to internal dysfunctions, in view of its revitalization). Thanks to affiliation it should be possible to avoid the process of administration by the appointment of an external commissioner, which is a procedure imposed on the community to resolve situations of crisis.
4. The way of accompanying the affiliated community will vary from case to case, depending not only on the situation of the affiliated monastery and its needs, but also on the relationship that is established with the affiliating monastery.
5. The Instruction does not speak of the possibility of strengthening the community by means of sending sisters belonging to other communities. This, obviously, does not signify that such a possibility does not exist. The important thing is that these decisions are taken in dialogue and in agreement with the ecclesial bodies called to supervise and accompany the monastery, so that they respond with a clear and shared logic.

Numbers: 51, 53, 106. For expenses and acts of extraordinary administration of a *sui juris* monastery, it is necessary to have the authorization of the Council and of the Chapter, according to the sum «to be determined in their local statutes». Basically, according to the law proper to the Discalced Carmelite nuns (*Cost.* n. 252), for extraordinary administration, the consent of the Chapter of the monastery is required. When «dealing with business or sale, whose value exceeds the sum fixed by the Holy See for individual regions [....] the permission of the Holy See is required as well». The question is where do you find the details for the various authority for expenditure. The Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite nuns provide in n. 254 that «in order to help the communities in the right application of the norms on the administration of goods, and without detriment to other legitimate provisions of local statutes, the General Definitory of the Order may prepare for use in the various regions a listing of amounts allowed for the expenditures of the monasteries. This listing will be updated as local economic conditions change and in the light of the decisions of the Apostolic See». In fact, throughout the years, the Definitory has published lists for the various regions based on the maximum sum fixed by the various Episcopal conferences and accepted by CICLSAL[3].

Numbers 52 and 81 d. *Cor Orans* makes an exception from can. 638 § 4, where it states that for the validity of alienation or of whatever business that could result in damage to the patrimonial situation of the monastery, it requires the written consent of the Bishop for the monasteries under his supervision. Therefore, from now on, this approval will no longer be necessary for these monasteries, but the consent of the chapter «and the opinion of the Federal President» (n. 52)[4].

However, no change has been made to § 3 of can. 638 which provides for the written permission of the regular Superior from which follows that n. 253 of the Constitutions remains valid for monasteries placed under the supervision of the Provincial (or of the General) who then must request the written consent of the Superior for acts of extraordinary administration mentioned above.

Number 72. The question arises what is the "Fund for Nuns", to which the Congregation may destine a part of the goods from a suppressed monastery. I suppose that it is the fund run by the Nuns' Assistance Secretariat, a body instituted in 1954 by Pius XII, of which the Secretary of CICLSAL is President. Its specific aim is to help monasteries in financial difficulties and nuns needing medical assistance (in Rome they are treated in "Villa Nostra Signora della meditazione").

Number 79. Mentioned again is art. 9 § 4 of the Conclusions and Regulations of *VDQ*: «The association, even juridical, of monasteries to the corresponding Order of men is to be encouraged». We wonder what is the meaning of this statement and its eventual practical consequences. To attempt a reply, first of all it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the expression «association to the corresponding Order of men», of which speaks can. 614. In fact, «the association can oscillate between a simple spiritual affinity-closeness, translating into an obligation of pastoral assistance on the part of the male institute, and a true juridical dependence on the Regular Superior»[5]. According to the typology elaborated by Fr Torres, we can distinguish three forms of association: spiritual

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3. Cfr. CICLSAL, *Economia a servizio del carisma e della missione*, LEV, Vatican City 2018, n. 57. In the appendix attached to the table of the limited sums for the alienation of immobile goods of the religious, approved by CICLSAL.
4. Number 81 of *CO* also provides, moreover, for the possibility that personal law restores the obligation of such a consent, that however no longer exists in common law.
5. J. TORRES, *Le case religiose: commentario ai canoni 608-616*, CICLSAL: Practical school of theology and law of consecrated life, *pro manuscripto*, Rome, 1994-1995, p. 45

association, spiritual-juridical association, juridical association[6]. As regards the monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns, all (even the monasteries following the 1990 Constitutions) share a spiritual form of association with the male branch. The also juridical association is given by two elements: the spiritual-juridical relationship with the Superior General and the juridical relationship of supervision with the regular Superior (normally the Provincial, but in some cases with the General himself). *VDQ* and *CO* encourage strengthening association, even juridical, with the male branch of the Order, by passing, when it seems possible and opportune, from under the supervision of the bishop to that of the Order. However, the fact that a monastery is entrusted to the supervision of the diocesan bishop does not take away the more radical spiritual-juridical association with the Order by means of the bond with the Superior General (particularly underlined in numbers 242-243 of the 1991 Constitutions), which is a guarantee of unity and identity with our charism, for the whole Order.

Number 81 e. In our Order, by virtue of a privilege from the Holy See, the General can grant an indult of leaving the monastery for a professed nun in temporary vows. However, as also noted in number 194 of the ocd nuns, for monasteries under the supervision of the bishop, such an indult can also be granted by the Prioress, with the consent of her Council, but must also be confirmed by the bishop (cfr. can. 688 § 2).

Number 81 f. The decree to dismiss a nun, whether issued by the General or by the bishop, must be confirmed by the Congregation so that it comes into effect (cfr. can. 700).

Number 92. Among the functions of the Federation is noted «the exchange of nuns and material goods». This aroused some concern as to whether the Federal President could impose, under obedience, that a nun move from one monastery to another (like a Major Superior of an Institute of active life). It is clear that this is not the case: the Federation remains a structure of communion and not of government, and therefore the federal President is not a Major Superior (cfr. *CO* 110).

Numbers 94 and 145. The legal seat of the Federation is established in a particular monastery at the time when legal recognition is sought in civil matters. For this reason, it has a permanent character (it is not tied to change of federal offices), which naturally does not imply that it cannot be changed when necessity requires it. Number 145 recommends that the Federal Secretary, whenever possible, be a nun who resides in the monastery chosen to be the legal seat, which will also contain the archives of the Federation.

Numbers 111-114. What is new that *CO* has introduced, concerning the function of the Federal President in canonical visits to the monastery, has caused many questions about the practical way of carrying it out. I limit myself to recalling the points that are clearly present in the Instruction, upon which the way of carrying out the visits ought to be modeled, commencing from the date on which *CO* was published:

1. The canonical or pastoral visit, which in our monasteries takes place «at least once in the triennium» (*Cost.* 244-245), will be conducted together by the Superior of the monastery and the Federal President. The concrete ways of conducting and collaborating will have to be agreed upon between the two visitators. With regard to the possible presence of the federal

6. Cfr. also C. DURIGHETTO, *I monasteri di monache associati agli ordini mendicanti (can. 614)*, LEV, Vatican City 2010, pp. 141-151.

treasurer, it is not foreseen, even if number 143 speaks of her cooperation with the President «in the context of the regular visit».

2. The President of the Federation can also carry out other pastoral visits in the federated monasteries, «whenever the need requires it» (*CO* 113). This means that she can do so on her own initiative, she does not need the invitation or agreement of the Community visited. In such cases, she will be accompanied by a councilor, who shall act as co-visitator, and, if appropriate, by the Treasurer of the Federation.
3. All other visits –maternal or sisterly– are, however, decided by mutual agreement with the Superior of the monastery (*CO* 114).

Number. 125. The President of the Federation is bound to consult the federal Council at the finish of every canonical visit, before sending to the Prioress of the monastery «the most suitable solutions for the cases and situations that emerged during the visit» (*CO* 115). One wonders what the meaning of this norm is, since only the President has carried out the visit. Moreover, it is to be feared that this could violate the right to confidentiality of the community visited. In this regard, I believe that two aspects must be distinguished:

1. The consultation of the Council has as its object not the report of the visit as such, but some decisions which it is deemed necessary to take in order to address particular problems that arose during the visit. It is a means that favours the objectivity of the decisions taken. It is good that the President listens to other opinions and different viewpoints in the spirit of collegiality which must characterize the service of authority in religious life and in the Church.
2. This does not mean that there may be issues which, by their nature, should not be communicated, in order to protect the reputation of the monastery and the people and the confidentiality of the information received. The visitator, therefore, must distinguish with care what must be shared and what should remain confidential.

Number 141 e. The Federal Assembly «makes decisions and issues norms that all nuns are required to observe, after the definitive approval of the Holy See». Some communities wonder what would these norms be. It seems to me that the meaning of the regulation is to give the Federal Assembly the power to issue rules which, once approved by the Congregation, become binding on the federated monasteries. In addition to the purposes and competence that the Instruction attaches to the Federation, these norms could refer also to matters relating to the life of individual monasteries (e.g. initial formation, or forms of separation from the world, or the use of means of Communication). In this case, however, in order to enter into force, they must be approved by the Congregation.

Number 141 h. The Federal Assembly «identifies a monastery as the place of initial common formation for the monasteries of the Federation». First of all, it should be remembered that *CO* in n. 258 reiterates that «every monastery *sui juris*, from the moment of its erection is the place of the novitiate and of initial, permanent or ongoing formation», and the Constitution *VDQ* in n. 14 states: «Formation, especially continuing formation, [...] is *grounded* in the daily life of the community. Consequently, sisters should keep in mind that the ordinary place where the process of formation takes place is the monastery itself, and that fraternal life in community, in all its expressions, should contribute to this process». For this reason, I would not say that either *VDQ*, or *CO* encourage initial formation in common as the ordinary method of the formative process. It could happen, however, what is foreseen in n. 259, that a *sui juris* monastery «cannot guarantee a quality formation». In this

case, it is necessary to move the formation either to another monastery of the Federation or to the initial formation place common to various monasteries. In addition to this case, I suppose that the Federal Assembly can decide on a venue in which to carry out formative periods in common for the temporary professed, which can be an enrichment of the formation received in community, both in content as in fraternal relationships.

Number 153. Some communities ask what would be the duration of the mandate of the religious Assistant. In n. 153, it is said that «the appointment of the Assistant is *ad nutum Sancta Sedis*», which means that it is for an indefinite time, until the Holy See disposes otherwise. The preceding decree from CICLSAL on the 8th September 2012, in n. 10 provided that «every four years, the federal President with her Council, having consulted the individual communities of the monasteries belonging to the Federation or Association, will communicate to this dicastery the opinion of the federated or associated monasteries concerning the continuing in office or the possible substitution of the Religious Assistant (Decree CICLSAL 24823/2012). This provision, which does not however refer to the expiry of the mandate but to a periodical evaluation of the office carried out by the Assistant, has not been adopted by *CO*.

Numbers 166 and 188 c. It is stated that the separation from the outside of the space exclusively reserved for the nuns must be «material and effective, not just symbolic or spiritual» (in n. 188 c is added: «in a radical, concrete, and effective way and not simply symbolic.) In other words, it must in actual fact make possible what was said in the previous numbers, namely to guard «a space of domestic and family life, within which the community lives a fraternal life in its most intimate dimension» (n. 164) and «to prevent access by strangers» (n. 165). However, the Instruction leaves to the Chapter of the community the possibility of determining the form of separation it determines more opportune. The sobriety of the text takes on all its meaning, if it is compared with the two documents on cloister, which precede the publication of the Discalced Carmelite nuns' Constitutions[7]. With regard to *Verbi Sponsa*, n. 14 § 1, it is no longer necessary to have approval from the Holy See for the particular method of separation from the exterior.

Number 184. It reaffirms what is provided in can. 667 § 3 of Canon Law, namely the legal link between papal cloister and recognition as an Institute of entirely contemplative Life. In this sense, there is no change for the Discalced Carmelite nuns, insofar as they are completely devoted to a life of prayer (cfr. *Cost.* n. 109). Some monasteries posed the question if it is still valid, given what is stated in *VDQ* art. 10 concerning the possibility that an individual monastery could ask the Holy See to follow a form of cloister different to that in force. Since we are dealing with an Apostolic Constitution, it is clear that this article remains valid. However, it should not be forgotten that the request for a different form of cloister must nevertheless respect «its own tradition and what the Constitutions demand». In other words, the mode of cloister must still preserve the identity of the charism of the monastery. Personally, I believe that this possibility is opportune, especially for certain monasteries that for particular situations cannot follow the ordinary form of papal cloister.

Numbers 232 and 247. The Instruction strongly underlines the importance of permanent formation for contemplatives, which «must be considered as a priority both in the plan of community life and in the plan of life of each nun». In number 247, the difficulty is addressed which is more

7. *Inter cetera* of 1956 (nn. 13-17; EVC 2939-2943), *Venite seorsum* of 1969 (nn. 3-4; EVC 4497-4498).

often opposed to carrying out a continuous course of formation, namely an overload of work. Without undervaluing the financial, spiritual and human importance of work, we must resolutely avoid that it «becomes dangerous when it is absolutized and captures attention to the detriment of the spirit». Such recommendations must be taken into serious consideration by the community in their revision of life and working out their community project.

Number 251. According to this number, initial formation is structured in three consecutive stages: postulancy, novitiate, and the time of temporary or junior profession. However, it is added that these stages are preceded by aspirancy. It is asked if this last mentioned should also be considered part of the formation process. In my opinion, the reply is affirmative (included from the point of view of calculating the time of formation), but it is logical that it not be put at the same level as the other three stages, because the aspirant does not reside permanently in the monastery.

Numbers 262-268. The relative novelty of aspirancy, not foreseen as such in the Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, has been the source of many questions. In reality, however, it does not consist of a lengthening of the time of discernment and of mutual acquaintance permitted in n. 134 of the Constitutions. From now on, a minimum of one year is required, with the liberty of managing this time more suitably for the situation of the person and of the community. For a certain time the aspirant can be followed from outside, in a steady manner. It is important that one nun in particular (who can also be the mistress of novices) be entrusted with the responsibility of accompanying the aspirant (n. 267). Advantage should be taken of this time to invite the aspirant «to fill any gaps on the path of human and religious formation» (n. 262). It is therefore up to the discretion of the Prioress and her Council «to establish the times and ways that the aspirant will spend in the community and outside the monastery» (N. 263).

Number 287. In applying the provisions of *VDQ* 15, this norm prescribes that solemn profession may not be made before completing five years of temporary vows. It is also stated that first profession is made for three years and then renewed annually for another two years. While the norm is clear, there are not just a few doubts and questions from the communities:

1. It is asked if the norm ought to be applied also to the sisters who had already made temporary vows before the Instruction was approved. The new norms are applied to those who are commencing one of the stages of formation after the promulgation of *CO*. But those who had made first profession before the publication of *CO*, can follow the stage of temporary vows according to the old regulations, since every act is subject to the discipline in force at the time it was carried out.
2. It was also asked if it is necessary to follow the way of professing vows set down by *CO*, or if we could continue with the annual renewal. This is a secondary aspect. However, according to the logic of Canon Law, you must eventually ask the Congregation for permission to continue in a manner that is different from the norm in effect.
3. Also asked was, should the *Ratio institutionis* of the nuns be modified as a result of the lengthening of the time of temporary vows. An eventual updating of the *Ratio institutionis* may be taken into consideration after the publication of the *Guidelines* for formation announced in n. 289 of *CO*.

2. Objections

In the observations sent in by communities at various meetings, there are not lacking objections to the provisions of the Instruction. For objections, I refer to some critical surveys of *CO* norms, the implementation of which would create difficulties for the Discalced Carmelite nuns. They are, therefore, objections that come from your experience and your lifestyle. Normally the objection is accompanied by a proposal for an amendment or more flexibility of the norm for our Order. I have identified the following main objections and relative proposals.

Numbers 110 and 135. The duration of six year laid down by *CO* for the President and for the other federal offices seems too long to many. It was proposed to maintain the former duration of three years with the possibility of re-election. In this case the Intermediate Federal Assembly (n. 136) would also have the task of renewing the offices of the Federation.

With regard to this point, I observe that neither *Sponsa Christi* (nor *Inter Praeclara* the applicative Instruction) nor *VDQ* have determined the duration of the mandate of Federal offices. Only in the model or scheme of statutes for a federation of nuns' monasteries, published by the Congregation for Religious in 1974, is it said that «the Federal Assembly will meet in ordinary session every six years» and that «the President is elected for six years and can be re-elected for another six years in succession»[8]. Nevertheless, in our Order all the Federations provide for a duration of three years with the possibility of re-election, which corresponds to the duration of the appointment of a female Major Superior in our Order. In my humble opinion, since it is a particular determination, that detracts nothing from the substance of the Federation, we can ask the CICLSAL to allow the Federations that so desire to maintain the three-year term. The normally adduced reasons are based on the difficulty for a contemplative nun to live her vocation, having for such a long time to deal with the life of other communities, implying frequent exits and a considerable burden of responsibility.

Numbers 149-151. Although *Cor Orans* does not explicitly say that it is obligatory for every Federation to have a Religious Assistant, neither does it state, however, that his presence is optional, unlike *Sponsa Christi* (art VII § 7; *Inter praeclara* 25). There are not a few Federations of Discalced Carmelite nuns who do not envisage having an Assistant and who would prefer that this point be left to their free choice. I hold that, also in this case, it would not be impossible to seek from the Congregation a more flexible interpretation of the Instruction. However, the Religious Assistant should be replaced by an alternative figure in the *ad hoc* Committee, where his presence is envisaged (it could be, for example, the superior General or his delegate).

Number 287. What has aroused much perplexity is the prolonging of the time in temporary vows to five years, contrary to the practice in use in our Order, which normally was kept at the minimum of three years (*Cost.* 162). It was brought to notice that the communities of Discalced Carmelite nuns are, by the wish of their foundress, and even more so in many cases for the scarcity of vocations, numerically small and, moreover, that today's candidates are no longer very young. A formative course of at least nine years is likely to exacerbate the precarious situation of our monasteries, where the number of chapter nuns is often rather small, as well as making the generational replacement more complicated.

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8. Norms *The Federation* of the Congregation for Religious for the preparation of statutes of a federation of monasteries of nuns, published in «Commentarium pro religiosis et missionariis» 55 (1974), pp. 365-377 (=EVC 4936-4953).

The merits of these observations cannot be denied. Moreover, it surprises a little that the Instruction has tightened the formulation of *VDQ*, which was more flexible. In the conclusion and regulations section, *VDQ* spoke only of «ample time» to be set apart for initial formation (art. 3 § 5) and in the exposition it is recommended that this time be «to the extent possible, [....] no less than nine years and not more than twelve» (VDQ 15). Because canon 655 states: «temporary profession is to be made for a period defined in proper law; it is not to be less than three years nor longer than six», and it does not appear that an exception has been made to this canon for the contemplative nuns, it is my personal opinion that the Discalced Carmelite nuns could ask the Congregation to leave the possibility, albeit in a non-ordinary form, of a period of time of three (or four) years for the temporary vows.

I ask myself what would possibly be the best and most effective form to present these requests to the Holy See. One way would be in getting approval of the Federation statutes. They could be incorporated into their own norms which deviate from common law. According to *CO* 141 e, these rules may concern not only the life of the Federation, but also aspects of the autonomous life of the federated monasteries, such as the duration of the years of temporary profession. Once the statutes have been approved by the Holy See, then the law proper to the Order prevails over common law.

3. Fears and resistance

As I said at the beginning, radical criticism of *CO* was not lacking. Some held that it was an oppressive series of norms, taking freedom away for the nuns; while others said it was an attack on the identity of the charism of Discalced Carmelite nuns and also on integrally contemplative life. *Nothing new under the sun!* When *Sponsa Christi* was published, there were similar reactions. In a little-known document from the Congregation for Religious in 1953, a series of directives to the «delegates for the preparation of the Federation of monasteries of nuns» (that evidently existed at the time), you can read:

> Moreover, Most Reverend delegates, work at persuading the individual monasteries, highlighting what is contained in the documents of the Holy See and presenting Federations as a means to ensure the true good of the same monasteries, without concentrating on why would they change the kind of life and the organization now in force. You can remind them that the law of the Church does not permit isolated monasteries of monks or religious. Then make every effort to dispel, diligently, not a few false ideas, unfounded fears, vain concerns that circulate concerning the application and implementation of *Sponsa Christi.*
>
> Some of these ideas come from the lack of knowledge of what they say, in the most solemn and explicit way, about the pontifical documents. Thus, it has come to be said, for example, that papal enclosure will disappear, that solemn vows are abolished, that Federations will affect autonomy, that they will limit the rights of the local and regular ordinaries on the monasteries. All this is in open contradiction with the documents of the Holy Father and the Holy Congregation.
>
> Not a few fears of the nuns will disappear if you tell them that Federations do not impose the common novitiate, the loss of stability in their own monastery; but on the contrary, each monastery retains the right to its own novitiate and the transfer of religious from one monastery to another is something exceptional, due to reasons why, even now without

> Federations, we resort many times to the Holy See, in order to come to the aid of monasteries in need of the fraternal help of others[9].

Although 65 years have passed since the drafting of this text, it could have been written today in response to the fears of many sisters. It is interesting to note that fears are always the same: we are becoming like Sisters of active life, the autonomy of the monastery is being affected, the Ordinary will have no more authority, we will be forced to have houses of formation in common, and so on. I would like to see these fears dissipating and the way the Church asks us to travel be looked at more calmly and objectively, so that we can devote our energies to the issues that actually require our commitment to study, adapt and put into practice.

What causes the most worry and preoccupation is the widening of the authority of the Federal President:

1. It is feared that the role and duties of the President will overlap and replace those of the monastery's Ordinary.
2. There is fear of excessive control (someone called it a "siege") by the President.
3. It is feared that the spirit of communion, which ought to characterize the federative structure be replaced by a legalistic spirit.
4. It is feared that the cumulation of responsibility entrusted to the President is contrary to the vocation of contemplation, silence and withdrawal proper to the Discalced Carmelite nun.
5. It is argued that these innovations are contrary to the spirit of our Holy Mother Teresa, whose remarks are cited about visitators who multiply orders and norms without necessity.

What I would reply to these fears is: what, rather, a contemplative community should effectively fear is the absence of people who take care of and watch over them. «Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up (Qo 4, 9-10). Nobody more than our Holy Mother Teresa was convinced of this truth, whether it was from her personal experience, or concerning the life of the communities founded by her. We all remember what Teresa wrote in the book of her Life: «I should like [... that] we might seek to gather together some time to free each other from illusion and to speak about how we might mend our ways and please God more since we do not know ourselves as well as others who observe us, if they do so with love and concern for our progress»[10].

As for communities, Teresa, being a realistic person and an excellent judge of the virtues and vices of human nature, repeatedly expressed her preoccupation concerning the way some Prioresses governed (and the present prioresses reading this are not to take it badly: it is our Holy Mother speaking with her customary frankness). She knew that there were some who, even though they had been elected, did not have the capacity to guide a community and she adverted the visitator to this so that he could take steps without hesitation[11]. She knew the risks of an excess of zeal and fervour, that

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9. Directive *Consapevole* of the Sacred Congregation for Religious to the delegates for preparing Federations of nuns' monasteries (15th December 1953), in EVC 2737-2739.
10. «Procurásemos juntarnos alguna vez para desengañar unos a otros, y decir en lo que podríamos enmendarnos y contentar más a Dios; que no hay quien tan bien se conozca a sí como conocen los que nos miran, si es con amor y cuidado de aprovecharnos» (L 16: 7).
11. *On making the Visitation*: 9: «It's impossible that all those elected prioresses will have the talent for the office,. When it is realized that they do not, the first year should by no means without their being removed from office».

imposes on others its own style of piety and asceticism[12], or, the opposite, the danger of superficiality and being lax[13]. She feared that the Prioresses might think they knew everything and start acting according to their own thoughts, without sticking to what is prescribed by the Constitutions[14], or they might form bonds in an excessive way with some people and treat others in a different way to them[15], or receive novices without discernment[16]. She was also aware of non-transparent practices and imprudent management of money[17]. For all these reasons Teresa considered it necessary that there be a higher level of control to keep watch and evaluate with objectivity their conduct and way of living as a community: «Let her understand [the Prioress] that there will be someone who will watch this and inform the visitator. I hold that it is impossible for any prioress to fulfill her office well if she becomes upset that the visitator learned of something she does. A sign that something is not done fully for the service of God is that I do not want it known by the one who stands in His place»[18]. Even Teresa considered it appropriate that the visitator would assign a nun to report to him if his prescriptions were not being observed: «The visitator thereby would in a way be present, for the nuns will proceed more carefully and be on their guard not to go against any of his orders»[19].

Quotations could be multiplied, but what interests me is to show how Teresa's humanism is neither naive nor conciliatory. It is important to grasp the preoccupation Teresa had that there would not be repeated in the communities founded by her what she had seen happen elsewhere. Truth and humility should be the foundations on which to build community. If you are too self-confident and do not accept correction from another or try to conceal or disguise the truth, you are deprived of the aid that the Lord offers us through the mediation of the Church and of the brethren. Certainly, the

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12. *Ibid*, 29: «It's necessary for the visitator to inquire about whether the prioresses have added more vocal prayers and penances than is obligatory. It could happen that each one, according to her own taste, might add particular things and so burden the nuns that they will lose their health and not be able to do what they are obliged to do» (cfr. also F 18:7-8).
13. *Ibid*, 21: «A prioress who takes great liberty in breaking the laws of the constitutions and does so for little reason or habitually, thinking that this or that matters little, will do great harm to the house, Let this be understood, and if it doesn't appear at once, time will prove it».
14. Letter to Maria de S. José, 11th November 1576 [ed. ICS Publications 148:11]: «I tell you, my daughter, that it's necessary that you be very careful about what these little prioresses dream up»; letter to J. Gracián, 21st February 1581 [ed. ICS Publications 376, 8]: «There are prioresses who when copying them [the Constitutions] –and without thinking they are doing anything wrong– add or delete whatever they like. A strict, unmistakable precept should be set down against deleting or adding to the Constitutions».
15. *On making the Visitation,* 19: «He should inquire whether the prioress has some particular friendship with a nun doing more for this one than for the others».
16. *Ibid*, 25: «In regard to the permission to accept nuns, a very important matter, the visitator should not give it without receiving a full account. And he should inquire himself, if he is in a place where it is possible to do so, for there can be prioresses so fond of taking in nuns as to be satisfied with little. And if the prioress wants to admit someone and says that she is well informed, her subjects almost always agree with what she wants. But it could happen that the prioress might be inclined to admit an aspirant because she is a friend or relative or out of some other personal considerations. And she will think she is right and yet be wrong».
17. *Ibid*, 35: «It is very important that he [the Visitator] inquire whether any money goes into the hands of the prioresses without the knowledge of the key-bearers, for this could happen without her adverting to it, or even whether she possesses anything except in conformity with the constitutions»; *Ibid*, 40: «It is also necessary to counsel the prioresses not to be too generous and liberal but to keep in mind that they are obliged to reflect on how they spend money. They are no more than stewards and must not spend as if the money were their own but according to reason and with great care so that their expenditures are not excessive».
18. *Ibid* 22: «Let her understand [...] that there will be someone who will watch this and report it to the visitator. I hold that it is impossible for any prioress to fulfil her office well if she becomes upset that the visitator learned of something she does. A sign that something is not done fully for the service of God is that I do not want it known by the one who stands in His place».
19. *Ibid*, 31: «In regard to important commands, it would be very good for the visitator to order one of the nuns, under obedience, in the presence of the prioress, to write to him if any of the commands is not observed so that the prioress understands that the nun cannot do otherwise The visitator thereby would in a way be present, for the nuns will proceed more carefully and be on their guard not to go against any of his orders.

recommendations of the Holy Mother echo the culture and the mentality of her time, as well as a different canonical system. But it cannot be said that the dangers, temptations and faults you have found are things of the past and that, therefore, there is no need to supervise them: «However holy the nuns may be, it is necessary....to attend to these matters»[20].

As for the fact that Teresa speaks of a male visitator and ordained minister and not of a nun visitator, unthinkable at her time, it must be said that Teresa sees the advantages of a visit made by a nun who can live inside the enclosure and be a direct witness of just how the life is lived, without trusting only the word of the sisters, and in particular of the Prioress:

> He [the Visitator] is not himself a witness, but things are told to him in such a way that he cannot help believing them. For these reasons, after the visitation, everything stays as it was. If he could be a witness within the community for many days, he would know the truth. The prioresses do not think they are untruthful, but this self love of ours is such that it's a wonder if we ever blame ourselves, nor do we know ourselves [52]. I myself have experienced this many times, and with prioresses who were very, very great servants of God whom I trusted so much that it seemed to me impossible for the facts to be otherwise. Yet once, after spending some days in a house, I was amazed to see something so contrary to what I had been told, in an important matter, that I came to recognize along with almost half the community the partiality involved, and it was the prioress herself who did not realize this as afterward she came to understand[21].

In conclusion, I believe that Teresa would not only have nothing to say about the new norms of *CO*, but indeed she would greet them joyfully. Indeed, even she had had the unfortunate experience of us all, namely that «If these monasteries are visited in the way that is now customary in the Order, there will be little fruit; and there could come more harm than good»[22].

Another concern expressed by various communities concerns the weakening of relations between nuns and friars, as a result of the increase of the authority of the Federation and in particular of the President. In fact, however, it cannot be said that *VDQ* and *CO* remove something from the relationship that the male branch of the Order has with the female branch. The powers of the Superior General remain as described in the Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite nuns. The fact that *CO* does not mention it means that it does not question them. With regard to the supervision of the Provincial, some of his responsibilities – as the responsibility to carry out the pastoral visit – are shared with the President of the Federation, but they are not cancelled at all. Others, such as the faculty of granting dispensations from cloister or permission to be absent from the monastery, are attributed to the Prioress, which is more in keeping with her legal status as a Major Superior.

Personally, I believe that the relationship between nuns and friars is an essential dimension of our vocation and our way of life. That is why it cannot be reduced to a matter of legal procedures.

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20. *Ibid*, 36: «as I have said, however holy the nuns may be, it is necessary».
21. *Ibid*, 51-52: «[As the Visitator] is not himself a witness, but things are told him in such a way that he cannot help believing them. For these reasons, after the visitation, everything stays as it was. If he could be a witness within the community for many days, he would know the truth. The prioresses do not think they are untruthful, but this self-love of ours is such that it's a wonder if we ever blame ourselves, nor do we know ourselves. [52] I myself have experienced this, many times, and with prioresses who were very, very great servants of God whom I trusted so much that it seemed to me imposible for the facts to be otherwise. Yet once, after spending some days in a house, I was amazed to see something so contrary to what I had been told, in an important matter that I came to recognize along with almost half the community the partiality involved, and it was the prioress herself who did not realize this as afterward she came to understand».
22. *Ibid*, 54: «If these monasteries are visited in the way that is now customary in the order, there will be little fruit and there could come more harm than good».

Above all, as I have been accustomed to say on several occasions, the ancient model of one-way dependence addiction should have long been overcome. We must tend rather to a model of reciprocity and alliance in the care of our common vocation and Teresian Carmelite mission. If the new things introduced by the recent legislation help us to walk in this direction, we can only rejoice. The real problem, however, is not in the norms, but in a mentality that needs to be renewed by returning to the roots of the common charism that unites us. The more we are faithful to these roots, the more our relationships will be strengthened and become generative of new life.

I conclude this already too long epistle. I have sought to reply to your questions, but no theoretical explanation can take the place of experience. It doesn't matter how many lessons on the technique of swimming you can listen to, there is nothing that can replace the experience of diving into the water and the discovery that, if we do not panic, the water itself supports us and gives us a new freedom of movement.

With these greetings and an invitation to walk «by the way of love and confidence [23], I salute you fraternally in the Lord.

p. Saverio Cannistrà

P. Saverio Cannistrà OCD

General Superior

23. THERESE IF THE CHILD JESUS, *Yellow notebook*, August 12th, 2.

Appendice
Congregazione per gli Istituti di vita consacrata e Società di vita apostolica

Somma limite per le alienazioni di beni immobili dei Religiosi

Nazione	Somma max	Data definizione	Somma preced. 2004
1. AFRICA SETT.CENA	400.000 $ USA	1987	400.000 $ USA
2. ALGERIA			400.000 $ USA
3. ANGOLA			4.000.000 escudos
4. ARGENTINA		30.06.1995	300.000 $ USA
5. AUSTRALIA	4.443.114 $ austral		2.000.000 $ austral
6. AUSTRIA	1.500.000 €	02.02.2000	1.500.000 €
7. BANGLADESH			50.000 $ USA
8. BARBADOS			300.000 $ USA
9. BELGIO	2.000.000 €	10.11.2005	2.000.000 €
10. BELIZE			300.000 $ USA
11. BOLIVIA	300.000 $ USA	24.05.1984	300.000 $ USA
12. BOSNIA -HERZEG.			300.000 $ USA
13. BRASILE		3000 x sal min.	600.000 Rs
14. CANADA	4.480.970 $ canad.	15.02.2006	3.500.000 $ canadesi
15. CILE	500.000 $ USA	3.03.2004	120.000 $ USA
16. COLOMBIA			300.000 $ USA
17. COSTA RICA			55.000 $ USA
18. CROAZIA		*1.000.000 €*	300.000 $ USA
19. CUBA			55.000 $ USA
20. ECUADOR		1.000 x sal min.	37.000 $ USA
21. EL SALVADOR		*100.000 $ USA*	1.500.000 Col. Salv.
22. FILIPPINE			100.000 $ USA
23. FRANCIA	2.500.000 €	4.03.2008	1.400.000 €
24. GAMBIA			250.000 $ USA
25. GERMANIA			5.000.000 €
26. GIAMAICA			300.000 $ USA
27. GIAPPONE			4.000.000 $ USA
28. GUATEMALA			100.000 $ USA
29. GUYANA			300.000 $ USA
30. HAITI			300.000 $ USA
31. HONDURAS			100.000 $ USA
32. INDIA	10.000.000 rupie	18.06.2007	1.000.000 Rs (1/55 €)
33. INGHILTERRA	6.500.000 £ sterl	*2006-2007 1.650.000 €*	1.000.000 £ sterl
34. IRLANDA	3.001.643 €	30.09.2006	1.500.000 €
35. ITALIA	1.000.000 €		1.000.000 €
36. JUGOSLAVIA			300.000 $ USA
37. LIBERIA			250.000 $ USA
38. LITUANIA	2.000.000 litas	22.01.2003	(= circa 580.000 €)
39. LUXEMBOURG			620.000 €
40. MALTA			Deve chiedere sempre
41. MAROCCO	400.000 $ USA	1987	400.000 $ USA
42. MESSICO			500.000 $ USA
43. MOZAMBICO			700.000 $ USA
44. NIGERIA			1.750.000 N 50.000$
45. NICARAGUA			50.000 $ USA
46. NUOVA ZELANDA			30.200 $ USA
47. PAESI BASSI OLANDA		*500.000 F*	2.500.000 €
48. PANAMA			250.000 $ USA
49. PAPUA-NEW GUINEA			55.000 $ USA
50. PARAGUAY		*150.000 $ USA*	55.000 $ USA
51. PERU'			300.000 $ USA
52. POLONIA	1.000.000 €	19.10.2006	500.000 $ USA
53. PORTOGALLO	1.500.000 €	07.05.2002	500.000 $ USA
54. PORTO RICO			250.000 $ USA
55. REP. CECA		*40.000.000 CZK*	50.000 K ceche
56. REP.DOMINICANA			250.000 $ USA
57. SCANDINAVIA			1.000.000 $ USA
58. SCOZIA		*2.500.000 £ (GBP)*	
59. SIERRA LEONE			250.000 $ USA
60. SLOVACCHIA	50.000.000 corone sl.	23.11.2001	100.000.000 corone sl.
61. SLOVENIA			5.000.000 $ USA
62. SPAGNA	1.500.000 €	28.02.2007	600.000 €
63. STATI UNITI d'America	10.000.000 (+ di 500.000 catt) $ USA	31.03 2008	5.000.000 (meno di 500.000 catt.) $ USA
64. SVIZZERA	5.000.000 franchi sv.	03.07.1985	5.000.000 franchi sv.
65. TAIWAN			1.000.000 $ USA
66. UNGHERIA			1.000.000 $ USA
67. URUGUAY			200.000 $ USA
68. VENEZUELA		*1.290.000.000 BS*	3.000.000 Boliv.
69. ZIMBABWE			250.000 $ USA