

# Being Discalced Carmelites Today

Charismatic Declaration of the Teresian Carmel

*Working draft*

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## **Introduction**

Who are we as Discalced Carmelites? How can we truthfully and comprehensibly describe our identity, our way of life, and our mission in the Church in today's world? "Who am I?" is the question that every man and woman has asked themselves and continues to ask in our time. In the context of today's globalized world in which everything appears fragile and ephemeral, in which securities and stable points of reference are lacking, and in which everything seems subject to constant change, we, too, want to take our reality into our own hands in order to better understand who we are and what we are called to be.

The Teresian Carmel begun by Saint Teresa of Jesus in the wake of the ancient religious family of Carmel now has a long and fruitful history. Over time it has spread throughout the world and has taken on different forms and styles, incarnating itself into a multiplicity of cultures. The diversity present in the today's reality of the Order in terms of origin, culture, formation, sensitivity and activities leads us to give thanks for the fruitfulness of our charism, but at the same time, it asks us to foster fidelity to the perennial elements of the charism and to the unity of our family, drawing on the common spirit that constitutes us in a single body.

Today, we feel the urgent and beautiful challenge of assuming the richness of the charism that has been given to us and of continuing to update it so that it receives new vitality and remains always current. The charism that Teresa of Jesus received, lived, and transmitted is a dynamic reality which develops and expresses itself in ever newer forms. We must always begin anew in order to be a foundation for those who will follow without remaining prisoners of a glorious past and without letting the grace of the present moment pass in which we are called to work concretely to build the Carmel that our time needs.

The Second Vatican Council explicitly called for an adequate renewal (*accommodata renovatio*) of religious life, and shortly afterwards, Paul VI made it clear that this process must remain constantly underway: "Nevertheless, suitable renewal cannot be made once and for all but should be encouraged in a continuing way, with the

help of the zeal of the members and the solicitude of the chapters and superiors.” (*Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, 19).

The post-conciliar drafting of the new Constitutions and Applicative Norms was a fundamental stage in the renewal requested by the Council. However, the rapid and profound evolution that is taking place in society and cultures, as well as within the Order, requires permanent discernment in order to respond in a charismatic and always up-to-date way to today’s reality.

Following the indications of the Church, we are urged to rekindle the desire and practice of constant renewal, an essential condition for an incarnate fidelity to our charism. The updating requested by the Council is not complete, because it can never be finished.

## **I. The Response to a Call**

### *1. The experience of vocation*

At the origin of our journey to religious and Carmelite life, we each recognize a personal call from God. Our own decision did not lead us to Carmel, but it was a free divine choice which each of us experienced in his own way. We are aware that the call and response were the work of the Spirit: the Spirit of the Risen One who calls, and the Spirit who we received in baptism responds.

### *2. On the way to identity*

The free personal response with which one receives and accepts the call begins a process of discernment, acceptance, and progressive identification with the charismatic identity. This identification will grow and mature in a process that lasts a lifetime.

### *3. The ever-present call*

Concern for the future must not make us lose sight of the experience of the call, which is the solid basis on which our existence rests. We do not know what the future of the Order will be, let alone that portion of it to which we belong. Nor do we know what form consecrated life will take, what changes the ecclesial institutions that we are accustomed to consider immutable will undergo. But we need not to worry about this, but rather to take concrete steps in the light of the experience that we keep in our hearts, from which our life and our spiritual identity have sprung and continue to flow. Everything can be taken away from us, but not this “hidden source” that nourishes our hope.

## II. Formation and charismatic identity

### 4. *An identity in formation*

The subject of formation and the subject of identity cannot be separated. Charismatic identity in fact exists only as identity-in-formation, that is, in a process of personal and community identification, and formation exists only in function of an identity to be achieved.

### 5. *Teresian reform as a path of formation*

Teresa's reform was, first of all, a journey of formation to re-learn how to live the Carmelite vocation on the basis of a new experience of God. Her writings, particularly the *Way of Perfection*, were born as instruments of formation for a specific way of living our relationship with God, with oneself, and with one's companions on the way. Similarly, the return to the sources of the charism desired by the Second Vatican Council should also be carried out with a view to re-form and to re-learn how to live religious life as Teresa taught us. In fact, we must recognize that despite the journey of the Order since the Council, especially with regard to theoretical reflection, we are still looking for a form of life that is faithful to Teresa's original insights and appropriate to the times in which we live.

### 6. *Integral Formation*

The response to our call introduces us to a life experience that has its own specific characteristics and has already been developed, lived, and transmitted by other people who make up the religious family of the Teresian Carmel. For those who are called, a path of human, evangelical, spiritual, and intellectual assimilation and maturation opens up. The future of one's vocation depends on this commitment and each person, in responding to the call, personally assumes the responsibility of working on his own formation.

### 7. *Community as a Place for Formation*

Good formation can never be the task of just one individual, but of a cohesive community committed to "freeing each other from illusion." (V 16:7) The concrete identity of a group is recognized in the quality of its collective work of formation towards itself, as well as towards its new members. Living in community day by day "shapes" us, that is, it accustoms us to think, judge, and to act in one way rather than another.

### 8. *Every Community is Formative*

Formation should not be confined only to the houses of initial formation. All our communities are called to be formation structures, capable of stimulating and accompanying the development of people and of giving them a new identity. Every

community must be a reality that makes people grow, makes them more mature, more prayerful, more fraternal, more loving of God, and more concerned for the good his people.

#### *9. Always in Formation*

It is therefore a matter of knowing that we are inhabited by a dynamic identity; that we are always on the way, growing and developing. Once embraced, it is kept and updated continuously as a response to the changes in the context in which we live and to the signs of the times. The whole life of the Carmelite becomes an unceasing journey, knowing that when we do not go forward, we stop, and that when we do not grow, we diminish. Above all, we are invited to live in an attitude of constant willingness to learn and grow, with a true *docibilitas*, which opens us up to ongoing renewal. This applies to individuals, to every community, and to the whole Order. In this formation process, the progressive integration of the vows into one's own Carmelite religious life becomes fundamental. Vows are not an acquired and static state of life, but values to be assimilated and lived out day by day. In this way they, too, contribute to the process of ongoing formation.

#### *10. Intellectual preparation*

A fundamental dimension of formation, both initial and ongoing, is the serious and in-depth study of theology and spirituality, as well as those human sciences that help us to better know ourselves and the world in which we live. In order to be able to offer a qualified service to the Church and to humanity, none of us can do so without an accurate and always up-to-date preparation. The Order as a whole needs to intensify its research and study, particularly of our Saints in dialogue with contemporary thinking. Only in this way can we continue to significantly present the richness of the spirituality of the Teresian Carmel. It will be useful in this sense to strengthen academic centers and publications, and to promote studies of specialization.

### **III. Teresian anthropology**

#### *11. The Carmelite Way of Being Human and Christian*

Being a Discalced Carmelite is a concrete way of living the human condition and Christian identity. The Teresian charism contains an anthropology, a particular vision of what it means to be human which, seen from a specific angle, is not different from that proposed by the Gospel. We are convinced that the Teresian vision of the human person shows its particular relevance in face of humanity's search for meaning and happiness.

#### *12. A Changing World*

Humanity is now witnessing a profound change, indeed, a continuous acceleration of change, which is, among other things, a consequence of the great

scientific and technological development (the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, information technology), and the domination of the economy with its logic on society. We find ourselves in a globalized world which has as its characteristic constant change, a world that has been defined as fluid, and even gaseous, where everything is volatile, temporary, and ephemeral.

### *13. Human Dignity Not Fully Recognized*

Great progress has been made in accepting the value and dignity of the human person. However, theoretical admission and juridical recognition of the equality of all men and women do not correspond in reality to a life worthy of all, and injustices, wars, poverty, and discrimination remain, or even increase. Although the awareness of belonging to a single human family has grown, social and economic differences, lack of solidarity, and exploitation persist.

### *14. Current Trends in Humanity*

Especially in economically more developed societies, there is strong individualism that makes the right progress of individual freedom coexist with the risk of closing in on oneself and reducing social relationships, solidarity, and fraternity with others. The leap in the quality of digital technology contributes significantly to this. From being a means of communication, it has become, especially for the young people, an environment of life and virtual relationships. The search for happiness, which is a desire inscribed in the heart of every human being, is often expressed in a consumerist and selfish way, and is often centered on material well-being, the cult of the body, and focus on one's image. A lot of resources are spent on physical health care with the will to defeat diseases and pain. Transhumanism, which is becoming more and more widespread, claims to transform the human condition by the development of technologies capable of improving human physical, psychological, and intellectual abilities, even with the hope of being able to extend life beyond its biological limits in the future.

### *15. True Human Dignity*

In this context, the anthropological proposal of Teresa of Jesus is enlightening, starting from her personal experience of the extraordinary dignity of the human person: "I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity" (1M 1:1). Human dignity depends neither on physical beauty, nor social prestige based on wealth, power, or aristocratic origin; all this forms part of the "*negra honra*", one of the idols of her time to whom Teresa refuses to pay homage. The incomparable magnificence of the human person derives from the fact that we were created by God and chosen by him as his dwelling place.

### *16. Inhabited Interiority*

Teresa of Jesus' intuition, which is the basis of the Teresian charism, is that the response to the deepest desires and needs of the human heart is found within us, in the "interior castle" of the soul, in our interiority wherein dwells our Trinitarian God. From this perspective, there is a great agreement with the Apostle Paul, who proclaims: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Cor 3:16).

### *17. Looking Outwards*

Unfortunately, it is possible, and even usual, to spend our life outside of ourselves in the exterior, in appearance and superficiality (terms that characterize well the culture of our time): "For there are many souls who are in the outer courtyard (...) and do not care at all about entering the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, or even how many rooms it has." (1M 1:5).

### *18. Entering into Yourself*

We must return to ourselves to discover the riches that dwell within us, first of all, the Guest who lives there, the otherness from which we come and to where we are going. To return to oneself means to learn to listen to the inner dialogue that takes place within us, the fundamental relationship on which our being is based. It is by looking at ourselves in him that it becomes possible to enter without fear into ourselves and face the darkness, the wounds, and conflicts that are part of our identity. "To think that we must enter into heaven and not into ourselves, knowing each other and considering our misery and what we owe to God, from whom we implore mercy, is madness" (2M 11).

### *19. Living and Witnessing to the New Man*

We Discalced Carmelites have the responsibility and the obligation to show humanity this treasure that we have been given and received. However, in order to be able to do so it is necessary for us to be the first to have a profound experience of our interiority and union with God, which transforms us into the image of Christ, the new man (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). An authentic experience of the God present in us impels us to recognize the presence of his Spirit in the situations of the world and calls us out of ourselves to recognize the signs of God in history.

## **IV. The charism**

### *20. Charism as a Gift of God to the Church*

By the charism of a religious family, we mean a gift that God gives to the Church through the personal experience of a founder, who, by accepting him, incarnates him and makes him alive. It is always a concrete way of putting the Gospel into

practice, according to a particular form of life. The Holy Spirit then, through the action and witness of the founder, attracts other people to share in the same charism and to adapt its fundamental elements to the different historical and cultural situations in which it spreads.

### *21. Friendship*

The Teresian charism consists essentially in an experience of friendship. If the Franciscan tradition speaks of “perfect joy”, Teresa speaks of “perfect friendship”: “It is a very important thing always to have a conscience so pure that nothing hinders you from asking our Lord for the perfect friendship the bride asks for.” (MSS 2:21). We are created out of love and destined to love. For St. Teresa, friendship is none other than the fullness of the relationship of love with God and with others: “We should grieve and be very sorry that through our own fault we do not reach this excellent friendship and that we are happy with little.” (MSS 2:16)

### *22. Living in Relationship*

What, then, should we learn from the school of Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, and the other teachers of Carmel? In a word, one could say: we must learn to “be in relationship”, relationship with God, with ourselves, with the other, with the Church, and with the world. In fact, relationship is the weakest link in our way of living today. The culture that surrounds us and the lifestyle produced by it tends to exclude relationship as a potentially destabilizing element, bearer of unforeseen changes, uncontrollable, and integrated into a system.

## **IV.A. Relationship with God**

### *23. The Divine Initiative*

The central element of the Teresian experience is the relationship with God. It is first and foremost a relationship that God desires to establish with us, making us participants in the life and relationship of the Trinity. For Teresa and John, the first and decisive step in developing a relationship with God is to “become aware” (Canticle B 1:1) of who the revealed God is, of His presence and His work in us. It is not a question of “knowledge” on an intellectual level, but of a cognitive experience that changes our way of being in the world.

### *24. The God Revealed in Jesus Christ*

This reality, so high and sublime, became close to us and made it possible to experience him in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. He, in his humanity, is the way that leads us to the knowledge of the Father (cf. Jn 14:6). The Teresian Carmel exists as a response to the discovery of Christ who is the way to truth, beauty, and goodness of the mystery of communion between God and human beings

(Teresa of Jesus: “Like a bond united together / very disparate things”), a reflection of the intratrinitarian communion (John of the Cross: “joined them / in an ineffable bond”). The heart of Carmelite life is the experience of a personal relationship with the living God, present and close, and who makes himself known as a friend.

#### 25. “In obsequio Iesu Christi”

The Carmelite Rule reminds us that the purpose of every form of religious life is “*in obsequio Iesu Christi vivere*”. The formula has its roots in a Pauline text in which the Apostle expresses his desire and his efforts to bring all people “to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5), that is, to a relationship of faithful obedience to Christ. The term used by Paul indicates an attitude of docile listening, which becomes total availability towards those who offer us God’s salvation and love. *Obsequium* is joyful submission to Christ through faith. Paul himself lived his relationship with Christ as full communion with him: “I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Ga 2:20). This is actually the invitation and call addressed to all Christians: “God is faithful, and it is by him that you have been called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord! (1 Cor 1:9).

#### 26. *A Relationship of Friendship*

Teresa of Jesus, starting from her story of Carmelite life and even more from her personal experience of encounter with Christ, translates *obsequium Iesu Christi* as friendship with the Beloved. Teresian spirituality is centered on friendship. God is the one who lives in the interior castle of the human person, and from there, from within, makes his voice heard, offers his love and awaits a response of love.

#### 27. *An Experience of Love*

Starting from this fundamental reality, many essential elements of Teresa’s experience and proposal take on meaning: attention to interiority, contemplation, and unceasing prayer. Prayer is a personal encounter with the living God. On the path of prayer everything depends on love: “The important thing is not to think much but to love much, and so do that which best stirs you to love.” (4M 1:7). It is a relationship of friendship, a reality of theological life (faith, hope, love), which we recognize as present in its fullness in the person of Mary.

#### 28. *Seeking God and Not Oneself*

The search for inner peace, meditation as a way to personal serenity, silence and interiority, often without any religious content or reference, abounds and spreads in modern society. However good and positive this search may be, it should be emphasized that Carmelite (and Christian) prayer has an interpersonal character and is always an experience (or at least a desire) for an encounter, dialogue, and relationship.

Prayer cannot be limited to a search for inner peace, serenity or well-being, nor can it be a simple obligation to be observed.

### *29. Friendship with God as a Permanent State*

The relationship with God is not an occasional experience, but must become a permanent state as any true relationship of friendship or love. We are called to loving union with God which marks the whole of life in all its dimensions and in all its moments. In our tradition, which is based on the prophecy of Elijah, we usually speak of “living in the presence of God”. This expression indicates the goal we are aiming for: that our whole life becomes prayer, constantly remaining before the face of God.

### *30. Listening to the Word*

The constant listening of the inner Guest translates, among other things, into attention to the Word of God. The Carmelite tradition emphasizes the importance of the Word of God listened to, meditated on, and lived out. It is sufficient to recall the invitation of the *Rule* to “meditate day and night on the law of the Lord” (*Rule* 10), and the witness of all the saints of Carmel who recognized the voice of the same Lord in Scripture and in personal prayer. In this way we can also identify one of the fundamental characteristics of the Marian inspiration of our charism.

### *31. The Community that Prays*

The relationship with the Lord is lived not only in community, but also as a community, particularly in the celebration of the liturgy. Each individual member needs the companionship of his brothers to present himself before the Lord as the Church that says to her spouse: “Come!” (Rev 22:17). A privileged expression of the community encounter with him is the concelebrated Eucharist. It is also to celebrate together the prayer of the Church in the Liturgy of the Hours and together practice mental prayer.

### *32. Mental prayer*

In order to maintain our personal relationship with God and to be faithful to the Teresian charism, we cannot do so without mental prayer. For each person and each community, it is essential to devote a specific time daily to it, free from other occupations, as well as to have a suitable place for this manner of prayer. This is a fundamental requirement of our vocation which in this way is constantly reaffirmed and renewed.

### *33. Solitude and Silence*

The need for solitude and silence; the need “to be alone frequently with the one whom we know loves us” (V 8:5), is irrevocable for the contemplative vocation. It is necessary to let a large space remain empty, to spend a long time in silence so that the presence of God can occupy it. In this digital age it is not so much physical solitude that

frightens us as being “disconnected”, not connected to that sort of *anima mundi* that has become the virtual world of the internet and social networks. The absence of connection (and not of relationship) causes anguish; it places us into an inescapable confrontation with ourselves. In the silence of information, images, and contacts, the emptiness of an unexplored interior region opens up, unknown, yet absolutely ours, and therefore disturbing.

#### *34. Detachment*

One of the most emphasized elements in our tradition, beginning with Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross, is detachment as absolutely necessary to become free and to be able to find our true wealth only in God and experience that “God alone is enough”. Above all, detachment must be interior, but also exterior. In a society oriented towards consumerism, we religious are also easily tempted to possess or use many things and to always have new experiences. Without detachment and a sober lifestyle it is not possible to live the contemplative-community life: “prayer and comfortable living are incompatible.” (CV 4:2).

#### *35. The Danger of Acedia*

The relationship with the Lord gives meaning and strength to our charismatic life. It is necessary to cultivate and nourish it every day so that the flame of love is not extinguished and life does not become grey and routine. Acedia is undoubtedly one of the dangers of our current situation, often hidden in the form of activism and multiple changing interests. Only a renewed passion for God can protect us from such risks.

### **IV.B. Fraternity**

#### *36. Solitude and Fraternity*

There is a specifically Teresian way of conceiving and living the contemplative life. Friendship with God is personal, but in no way individualistic. It cannot be lived alone. For this reason, the Teresian charism has a strong community dimension, which is also characterized by friendship.

#### *37. Hermits in Community*

On the one hand, Teresa remained faithful to the ancient tradition of Carmel, reaffirming the importance of certain dimensions of the hermit’s lifestyle (solitude, silence, and detachment), on the other hand, she considered the experience of living in community equally essential. The balance between these two elements of the contemplative life is fundamental to the Teresian Carmel, and it is the tension between them that enriches and purifies them reciprocally. Teresa wanted her daughters to be “not only nuns, but hermits” (CV 13:6), “who want to enjoy in solitude their Spouse, Jesus Christ” (V 36:29), and who looked to the first generation of hermits on Mount

Carmel as models (cf. F 29:33; CV 11:4; 5M 1:2). At the same time, she excluded for her nuns a purely hermit's life. She wants "all to be friends" (CV 4:7) and also for the brothers to learn the "style of fraternity" practiced in her communities, especially in moments of recreation (F 13:5).

### *38. Friends of the Friends of God*

For Teresa, friendship was a fundamental means for her to grow in her relationship with God, as she writes in a passage of the *Way* in the Escorial version: "They will tell you that it is not necessary, because it is enough to have God. But, to possess God, a good means is to speak with his friends; one always derives a great advantage from this. I know from experience" (EC 11:4). From this point of view, it is not possible to separate the relationship with God from the relationship with God's friends. A healthy relationship with the other, in fact, is an indispensable means of making a person grow in relationship with God, and vice versa. Weakening the practice of relationship with one's brother weakens the life of communion with God, just as the loss or mitigation of the eremitical dimension leads inevitably to a style of human relationship more worldly than evangelical, more proper to the flesh than to the Spirit.

### *39. A Family Around Jesus*

The mystical experience of the closeness of Jesus and his concrete humanity awakened in Teresa the need to build a new community capable of welcoming his presence on the model of the family of Nazareth (V 32:11), the house of Bethany (CV 17:5) and the apostolic college (CV 27:6). In reality, it is a matter of building a family whose way of being and living is transformed and transfigured by the presence of the Lord in their midst. The newness of this intuition has taken centuries to be truly understood and assimilated. The traditional paradigm of the monastic religious community was too strong for a different way of being religious to be easily admitted.

### *40. Brothers of Mary*

In Carmel we have yet another resource for living fraternity. The name that identifies us in the Church is "discalced brothers of Mary". We are "brothers," and therefore, fraternity is not an accessory element, but a substantial one. We are not "fathers", that is, priests who live in fraternity: we are brothers, and "discalced" brothers, that is, without other riches or resources to present to the world except that of a fraternity that unites us to Mary and ourselves. As fraternity, the relationship with Mary is not a particular aspect or devotion in Carmel, but expresses the essence of our vocation. There is a sort of mutual mirroring between Mary and the community: on the one hand Mary is the image and model of the community, on the other hand, the community is the image of Mary.

#### *41. The Temptation of Clericalism*

The majority of friars are also priests, and our service is largely ministerial in nature. This can lead unconsciously to leaving our identity as discalced friars and Carmelites in the background or even to considering it only as a prior condition for priestly ordination. We are “brothers”, characterized in the first place by a charism, not by the ordained ministry. Any ordination is added to our religious identity but does not replace it.

#### *42. Building Community*

For the religious life in the Teresian Carmel, community building is essential. If we want to be Carmelites, we must first of all be part of the same family. Community building is the condition for embarking on the contemplative journey of which Teresa speaks (CV 4:4). Religious vows themselves acquire in Carmel all their meaning inasmuch as they dispose us for fraternal life, based on the acceptance of others, the sharing of goods, and to commitment to a proposed common life. A Teresian community is not when we are together to do something else, but because being together is a value in itself. The community is not a means of achieving other ends: it is an end in itself. This should also be one of the criteria for discerning the vocation to the Teresian Carmel.

#### *43. Community and Individuality*

The community is a group of different people, each with their own way of being and their own individuality. Unity is not uniformity; it does not annul individualities. It is a “regular” community of people who always remain irreducibly “irregular”, and this is not to be considered a defect, but a fruitful and enriching tension. It would be very risky if the community asked each one to cancel or mask everything that makes him unique and different from others. It would be a community held together by the law, not by love.

#### *44. The Community that Helps Us Grow*

Community is the environment in which everyone encourages one another to respond to God’s love. Even before founding her communities, Teresa, with a small group of people with whom she shared her desires, wanted to “gather together sometimes to free each other from illusion and to speak about how they might mend their ways and please God more.” (V 16:7). This requires an exposure of the person to fraternal relationships in which the truth of his humanity, the level of maturity, and the need to grow are exposed. It is a matter of opening oneself up to the other with confidence, letting the other into one’s own life and thus becoming brothers and sisters. For the community to truly become a place of personal growth, it is necessary to live with humility, that is, to walk in truth: to be transparent in front of our brothers,

revealing ourselves as we are, with our own weaknesses and riches, and allowing others to help us rediscover the truth about ourselves.

#### *45. From the I to the We*

The relationship with one's self, made up of reflection, listening, and a progressive deepening of one's conscience, is the antithesis of the current "obsession with the self" (self-obsession), in which ignorance of the truth of the person corresponds to an obsessive concern for one's image, well-being, and presumed self-realization. The results of these two different ways of relating to oneself are opposite: on the one hand, opening oneself up to the community, on the other hand, closing oneself in individualism.

#### *46. The Teresian Community as a Response to Individualism*

The Teresian community is a serious response to the unbridled individualism of today's society which leads to living in isolation and causes growing dissatisfaction. We speak of the "monotheism of the self" as a characteristic trait of our time, in which everyone asks himself "Who am I?" In the face of this, the Christian proposal would be to ask himself rather "For whom am I?", to which from a Carmelite perspective one can add "With whom am I?"

#### *47. Ecclesiology of Communion*

The Teresian community is also a privileged manifestation of the ecclesiology of Vatican II based on synodality and the spirituality of communion. One of the tasks of the Carmelite charism today is to be a sign for the Church of the importance of communion, of living truly as the body of Christ, all united to him and to others.

#### *48. An Organized Community*

Listening to the Word, made in the Spirit, leads to obedience to God with full acceptance of his will, which is then translated into community obedience. The organized community, with its rules of life and the tasks assigned to each one, is the concrete way to escape from one's selfishness and to live in daily openness before God. In community, the common search for God's will is carried out by means such as obedience to superiors, community meetings, the revision of life, the running of a community, and the sharing of the work of God.

#### *49. The Role of the Superior*

The community is made up of brothers, that is, people who are on the same level. It is a community of equals, but not a headless community: it needs a superior, a leader whose office is to care for the unity of the body and the growth of each member. The superior's task is not simply to "coordinate" or "administer" the life and activities of the members of the community in such a way that they are carried out in an orderly

manner. His task is to be a builder of peace, weaver of relationships, animator of fraternal life. For this reason, it is fundamental that his relationship with all be one of love in the spirit of Teresa who said to her prioresses: “Try to be loved, in order to be obeyed” (Const. XI:1).

#### *50. Small But Not Too Small Communities*

Teresa founded small communities in contrast to her previous experience of a large number of nuns in the monastery of the Incarnation. The aim was to live a true fraternal life, a real friendship among the nuns: “In this house all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped” (CV 4:7). For this reason, she indicated a maximum number of members for her communities of nuns (which fluctuated between thirteen and twenty-one). In the present situation of the communities of friars, there is the opposite tendency: in the older provinces there is an ever smaller number of friars due to a decrease in vocations, and in the younger ones, because the prevailing criterion is the pastoral needs. Each community must have the necessary number of friars, not only to be able to call itself such from the juridical point of view (that is, never less than three), but to be able to live the fundamental elements of the charism which has a strong community imprint.

#### *51. One Order With Three Branches*

The Teresian Carmel expands throughout history in multiple and complementary forms of life. Its most natural and complete expression is found in the three branches of the Order: the nuns, the friars and the seculars. All three live the same charism in different ways.

#### *52. The Enriching Unity of the Three Groups*

The multiform reality of the Carmelite family requires a close relationship between nuns, friars and laity, which makes their complementarity fruitful. Sharing among the members of the three branches is a source of mutual stimulation and new vitality. On the other hand, the diversity of forms of life within the Teresian Carmel makes it possible to distinguish and highlight the specific ways in which each group expresses the charism of friendship with God: the nuns in unceasing prayer and evangelical self-denial in the service of Christ and the Church, the brothers in a mixed life of prayer and apostolate, and the laity in prophetic witness and in the commitment to family life and work.

#### *53. New Relationships*

A new way of relating to and helping one another is needed among the three groups of the Order. Without any feelings or attitudes of superiority on the part of anyone, each one must make available the riches of his or her own life and be ready to accept the witness and teaching that comes from others so as to help one another in

renewed fidelity to the vocation received. We know and want to be brothers and sisters to one another, equal in dignity and complementary in charism and mission.

#### **IV.C. The mission**

##### *54. Called for Mission*

A vocation always corresponds to a mission in the history of salvation. Mission is not an activity added to the identity of the person called, but is an integral part of it. It is, so to speak, its manifestation, its communicative dimension that contributes to the mission of the Church in the world. In this sense, the mission of the Order should be distinguished from the apostolate carried out in the Order.

##### *55. Rethinking the Mission of Carmel*

Before thinking about apostolic work or pastoral service, usually carried out as ordained ministers, we should reflect in depth on our mission in the Church as friars, bearers of a specific charism. The work or service will then depend on a series of factors that are difficult to determine in advance. Especially in today's society, in which the traditional structures of Christianity are in crisis, it is all the more urgent to rethink our mission with creativity, starting from a lived experience of Teresian community.

##### *56. Religious Life as a Sign*

In order to understand the mission intrinsically linked to the Carmelite-Teresian vocation, we must return to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on religious life. *Lumen Gentium* reminds religious “of their duty to work, according to the strength and form of their vocation, both through prayer and through effective activity, to root and strengthen in their souls the kingdom of Christ and to expand it throughout the world” (LG 44), and it assigns to religious life in the Church the fundamental function of being a “sign”, which expresses and manifests four principal dimensions of the Church: It is a sign of the Christian vocation as such; of the eschatological tension of the pilgrim Church which does not have a lasting city on this earth; of the form of life chosen by Jesus Christ; of the primacy of grace and the power of the Spirit over all earthly realities.

##### *57. The Mission of the Order*

The mission of the Teresian Carmel in the Church is to live and bear witness to friendship with God. We are called to proclaim what we have seen and heard (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3), accompanying people on the journey of the interior life so that all may have the experience of feeling loved by the God who dwells within us and calls us to respond to his love.

### *58. The Apostolic Dimension in the Teresian Experience*

The Carmelite charism has a strong apostolic, missionary and service impulse. Teresa was moved by the situation of Christians in Europe, as well as by the news about the indigenous population in America. She felt the relentless desire to respond to the great needs of the Church with all her strength. She even experienced a strong apostolic desire: “I invoked our Lord, begging him to give me the means to do something to gain souls in his service” (F 1:7).

### *59. Attention to Today's World*

If Teresa was particularly attentive to the reality of her time, we too, called to live her charism today, are bound to discern the needs of our contemporaries. We cannot be insensitive to the needs of every kind that humanity suffers today, and we feel called to collaborate in the evangelizing action of the Church, even in the simple and daily ways characteristic of our lives. Our presence as Carmelites can also be significant in areas that are relevant today, such as ecumenical dialogue, interreligious dialogue, the struggle for justice and peace, dialogue between faith and science, the means of social communication, and ecological commitment.

### *60. To Please the Lord*

Teresa's apostolic desire always has a Christocentric approach, the desire to “please the Lord in something” and to help “as best as I can this Lord of mine” (CV 1:2); “I aim for nothing else than to please him.” (V 25:19). A true friend always tries to do what the friend likes; he wants to make him happy. To enter into a relationship of friendship with God and to do so with others in order to help one another has the indispensable consequence of always being at his disposal: “Perhaps we don't know what love is. I wouldn't be very surprised, because it does not consist in great delight, but in desiring with great determination to try to please God in everything” (4M 1:7).

### *61. A Life Commitment*

Ecclesial service, apostolic work, is fundamental for the Carmelite and can be translated into very different ways. First of all, just as Teresa did in fidelity to her commitment to religious life in community: “I resolved to do the little that was in my power, to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could and strive that these few persons who live here do the same” (CV 1:2). Carmel, like any form of religious life, should not be measured on the basis of its usefulness or effectiveness. Rather, we are called to be a sign and to bear witness to Christ and the Gospel. It is not a question of doing much, but of giving oneself completely for the love of Christ. This requires that we move from activism to service, from what pleases me to what serves others. Therefore, it is not numbers that count, but the quality of charismatic life and the witness that follows.

### *62. The Apostolic Value of Prayer*

The witness of a contemplative life is our first and fundamental service to the Church and to humanity. Prayer itself has the power to transform the world and others. It does so in a hidden way without us realizing how this happens. Our daily prayer has an apostolic and ecclesial intention, and not only personal or private, as many examples of the biblical tradition and the history of Carmel remind us: Mary, Elijah, Therese of Jesus, Therese of the Child Jesus, etc.

### *63. The Multifform Ecclesial Work*

The mission is developed through the concrete work that Christ and the Church need in every time and place. In the tradition of our Order and its present reality, there is no exclusive apostolic task. We are open to all the commitments in which we can express, develop, and communicate our experience of God, especially those that are required of us by the local Church in which we are inserted. There are many and varied ecclesial activities compatible with our way of life, but not every way of doing them is an adequate expression of our charism. Every particular commitment must come from personal listening and community discernment of God's will.

### *64. Ministry of Spirituality*

In our pastoral service there is an eminent place in our desire to lead others to experience a deeper relationship with God. This can be achieved through specific activities of initiation into prayer and the ministry of spirituality, but also by giving a Carmelite imprint to any other ecclesial commitment we undertake. A concrete form in this sense can be the welcoming of people into our communities to share our life with them, to speak to them through our example and witness more than through words.

### *65. The Mission ad gentes*

Explicitly missionary activity has been strongly present in the life of the Order over the centuries. The missionary spirit remains fundamental for us and must not fade away. In the present context, it should be extended to the different realities of our world and should include the necessary re-evangelization of regions that until recently were predominantly Christian and are no longer so. On the other hand, we are well aware that the mission is realized not so much by virtue of what we do, but by who we are; it is essentially a question of being more than of doing. It flows from our personal encounter with Jesus Christ who calls us to be with him and to accompany him in his ongoing mission in the world.

### *66. Community Discernment on Mission*

In face of the diversity of possible commitments and the many needs of the Church and of humanity, and because of the limited forces at our disposal, there is a greater need than ever for good communal discernment regarding the commitments to

be made so that they may be in keeping with the charism which God has entrusted to us and with what the Church expects of us. John of the Cross asked himself: “What is the point of you giving the Lord one thing when he asks you for another? (*Maxims* 73)

#### *67. The Community Character of the Apostolate*

Each of us is called to participate in the mission of the Order with his own personal collaboration. The normal manifestation of our service to Christ and the Church are the commitments that the community assumes and carries out with the coordinated collaboration of its members. An individual friar can also carry out a personal task, adapted to his own qualities and abilities, always with the consent and discernment of the community and carrying it out as its member. In fact, the gifts of the Spirit that each one receives are always “for the common good” (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), knowing that we are “the body of Christ and, each according to his own part, its members” (1 Cor 12:27).

#### *68. The Apostolate Shared Among Brothers-Nuns-Laity*

The apostolic dimension of our life had its first recipients within the same family of the Teresian Carmel. The apostolic commitment in its many forms (prayer, witness, preaching, spiritual accompaniment, teaching, publications) is directed primarily to the brothers, nuns and laity of the Order. On the other hand, our family can more effectively express its witness and carry out its apostolate through the active collaboration of the members of the three branches, each according to his own form of life.

### **IV.D. Unity of Prayer-Fraternity-Mission**

#### *69. Three Aspects of an Indivisible Reality*

There are three fundamental elements of the Teresian charism: prayer, fraternity and mission. However, what really characterizes us is the fact that all three are intrinsically connected to each other and do not make sense independently, but are interrelated.

#### *70. Three Elements that Nourish Each Other*

In fact, we cannot live a relationship of friendship with the Lord without a true fraternal relationship in community and without an apostolic commitment as a response to God’s will. Community life has no meaning if Christ is not at the center and if it does not result in a witness and service to him and his Church. Apostolic activity becomes a worldly occupation if it does not arise from a loving relationship with God and is not lived as an expression of community commitment and discernment.

### *71. Fostering Harmony*

One of the great challenges for the present and future of the Order is not only to grow and deepen daily in our life of prayer, fraternity and service, but to establish in practice a deep and coherent relationship between them.

## **V. Unity and pluralism**

### *72. A Harmonious Pluralism*

In recent times, the Order has become truly universal and new, and different ways of living the charism have developed which is gradually being inculturated and adapted to a variety of places and peoples. Different choices are made with regard to community relationships, apostolic commitments, and the style of prayer. This reveals the multifaceted beauty of the charism and that it is not a static and uniform reality. However, not every diversity is positive and enriching, it is only so when it is harmonious and coherent, when it is well connected to the whole, because a tile detached from a mosaic makes no sense. One of the needs of the present moment is to ensure that pluralism within the Order is lived with “one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32).

### *73. Charism and Inculturation*

The Gospel can only be lived in an inculturated way, that is, by incarnating it in a given socio-cultural environment. The same can be said of the concrete form of Christian life which is the Teresian Carmel. In the different regions of the world, our charism comes into contact with the cultures of humanity. Charism and culture can enter into dialogue that is aimed at mutual enrichment and fruitfulness. A critical discernment will always be necessary to decide which elements of the traditions of different people are compatible with the life and identity of the Teresian Carmel.

### *74. The Expansion of the Order*

The first and fundamental condition for implanting the Carmelite life in a new region is to possess a true mastery of the charism, obtained not only by theoretical and conceptual means, but above all, by personal assimilation and lived experience. Only by starting from a deep knowledge of the Teresian-Carmelite ideal and from personal identification with it can it be transmitted effectively. For the expansion of the Order, therefore, it is necessary to focus more on the quality of the charismatic life of the missionaries and their attractive witness than on the realization of external works, however useful for social and human development they may be. Also with regard to the acceptance of possible vocations, it is necessary to abandon the concern for numerical growth and to ensure, first of all, that the candidates have an aptitude for our way of life

and that we have the capacity to offer them good discernment and accompaniment in the formation process.

#### *75. Discernment of Inculturation*

A fundamental criterion for adequate inculturation is communion with the Order. The adoption, in a particular region, of new lifestyles or communal, liturgical, and pastoral practices, etc. cannot be decided independently by a circumscription, a community, or much less by an individual, without the necessary dialogue and discernment shared with the other members of the Carmelite family, taking into account the values of the charism.

#### *76. An Order Comprised of Provinces*

The friars of our Order live in community. The communities are usually grouped into provinces. According to tradition, from the beginning, a province consists of a sufficient number of communities and friars to guarantee its autonomy in government, formation and economic administration. Each province has its own delimited territory with the aim of fostering a relationship of understanding, fraternity, and collaboration among the friars who are part of it, thus, a sense of family, and to facilitate its internal organization. Other types of minor circumscriptions are possible, but usually for exceptional or temporary situations.

#### *77. Provinces in Times of Change*

In periods of rapid change like ours, the Order also experiences new and changing situations. In some regions there is a great decrease in the number of friars, while in others the growth is very rapid. These and other phenomena require us to react with timely and appropriate decisions that are the result of careful discernment in the light of the charism. Provincial and other structures must be adapted to the conditions of the moment so that they can continue to promote the essential values of the Order. The fundamental criterion is not to maintain our presence, but to protect and revitalize the spiritual patrimony of the Teresian Carmel. In many cases, it will be necessary and positive to merge the circumscriptions, to modify their juridical status or territorial limits, and in any case, to increase interprovincial collaboration everywhere.

#### *78. Provinces and Territoriality*

Recently, the presence of communities and friars from one province in the territory of another has been growing. Some provinces have communities in different regions of the world, in places very far from each other. This is a new practice for us which has traditionally been characteristic of modern congregations of an apostolic type and with a centralized structure. The proper discernment of this reality must take into account, on the one hand, the necessary flexibility to foster missionary action and help among the provinces, and on the other hand, to safeguard of the essential aspects of the

life of a province, which must not lose cohesion, family spirit, possibility of relationships, and collaboration among its members.

*79. The Sense of Belonging to the Order*

Together we form the one family of the Teresian Carmel, divided into provinces and communities. We must foster a sense of belonging to the Order and a deep communion within it. Each person should feel as his own the experiences, needs, joys and sufferings of others, and seek to contribute through his commitment to prayer, fraternity, and service to the good of all. It is necessary to strengthen coordination and mutual aid at all levels, promoting initiatives of interprovincial collaboration, attention to the needs of the Order, mutual trust between the different instances of local, provincial, and general government, and especially with the availability of friars to services that are required for the good of the Order.

**Conclusion: From Text to Action**

The ultimate aim of this Declaration is not only to reformulate the essential elements of our identity in the light of the historical context in which we live, but also to initiate paths that allow us to move from theory to experience, from words to deeds. Each circumscription of the Order, as well as each community and each individual friar, will have to commit to pray and reflect, and then decide on concrete ways to put into practice the letter and spirit of this document in order to help each other live as Discalced Carmelites today. The provincial chapters will be the most appropriate place to evaluate and translate into decisions, suggestions, and proposals that emerge from the reading and meditation of the Declaration. In particular, the Father General and the Definitory should be vigilant for a fruitful practical application of this Charismatic Declaration.

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