

**REPORT OF THE GENERAL SUPERIOR
ON THE STATE OF THE ORDER**
92nd OCD General Chapter
Rome, September 2, 2021

Dear Brothers,

As is our tradition, we begin the work of this 92nd General Chapter with the report of the General Superior on the state of the Order. To tell the truth, as far as I am concerned, after twelve years of service as General Superior, I feel that I have already expressed all that I have to say about the situation of our Order. I do not think I have much new to add to what can be read especially in the presentations to the Extraordinary Definitors of 2011, 2014 and 2017 and to the General Chapter of Avila of 2015. In order not to repeat myself and to avoid unnecessarily lengthening my presentation, allow me to briefly recall the essential points of those presentations and to try to highlight the common thread that connects them in a unified development.¹

A retrospective glance

In the Extraordinary Definitory of 2011, I insisted above all on the need to start from real experience, from what our friars and our communities concretely live in their daily lives because only through this "hermeneutics from below" is it possible to see the truth about our Order and the path we are following. Quoting a famous expression of E. Husserl, I invited us to "go to the things themselves," to read the states of mind of the confreres and the human and spiritual atmosphere that is lived in the communities and to compare them with the spirit, motivations, and sentiments of Teresa as they are particularly described in the Way of

¹ As for the activities carried out by the General Definitory during this six-year period, which are usually included in the report on the state of the Order, I will not list them here. You will find them described in the summary published together with the text of this report.

Perfection. From the comparison which we attempted to make in that forum, several commitments emerged for the six-year period. First among them was that of "establishing Teresian communities that are places of authentic human and spiritual growth and of radiating the truth and beauty experienced in them." If communities become only "places of transit in the personal journey of each one, whose center of gravity is elsewhere" - the final document said - this is not a simple deficiency that can be compensated for by the richness of other dimensions, such as pastoral work, but it is the failure of the Teresian charismatic project. With community, we concluded, everything else will be given to us, but without community even what we have will be taken away.

The report to the Definitory in Korea in 2014 sought to deepen the analysis of why the Order's vitality appears weakened or stalled. It seems to me that the process of transformation triggered since the 1970s has led to a liberation not only from oppressive forms of legalism and authoritarianism, but also from that objective bond that connects us to the meaning of our lives, namely the end, the *telos* to which our Carmelite vocation tends. This tension towards the goal is indeed a bond, but an attractive and dynamic bond. To lose it in the name of the freedom of individual self-realization actually means to lose the direction and energy of the movement. A freedom deprived of its goal loses its propulsive dynamism and begins to rotate on itself. In this self-referential static nature, life is emptied of meaning and is easily filled with the small distractions and gratifications offered by the techno-consumerist society. To counter this tendency that leads to demotivation and inner paralysis, we must seriously ask ourselves the question: what kind of person do I want to become? The answer is not so much what we say in words, but what is written in the "practices" of life that we follow and by which we let ourselves be shaped. We have an idea, at least a vague one, that the identity of the Discalced Carmelite depends on the exercise of certain practices, such as contemplative prayer and fraternal relationships, and these are amply described in our Constitutions. But is our way of being shaped by them or by other practices that are consistent with other identities and make us different persons from what we have declared we want to

become? From these questions arose the need for a broad and sincere comparison with the texts of our Constitutions and Norms to verify towards which goal the path we are following as individuals and as a community is directed.

As is well known, the General Chapter of 2015 made the decision "that the Order undertake a rereading of its Constitutions, with a view to their possible modification in order to renew our life" (*It is Time to Walk!* Concluding Document of the 91st OCD General Chapter, n. 28). The primary purpose of this re-reading was the renewal of life through comparison with our legislative texts, in continuity with the previous sexennium dedicated to the re-reading of the works of Saint Mother Teresa. The intention of the General Chapter was to reduce the distance that had been created between the formulation of our ideal of life in the Constitutions and our lived experience: "It is a matter of re-creating - where there is something weakened or lost - the tension between the path and the goal" (*It is Time to Walk*, n. 27). However, the possibility of a revision of the Constitutions was not ruled out if, more than thirty years after their approval, this proved to be effectively necessary. In this regard, the Chapter considered three possible options: "reworking the Constitutions, revising them specifically and/or drafting a Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian life" (*It is Time to Walk*, n. 32).

The program of rereading the Constitutions was carried out from October 2015 to June 2018 with the help of twelve study guides, prepared by a special commission, which guided and facilitated personal study and discussion in community. At the Extraordinary Definitory of 2017, a first evaluation was made of the work accomplished up to that point, an evaluation that was certainly positive, but in which limitations and insufficiencies were also highlighted. The report I presented on the state of the Order on that occasion began with the following observation: "Our Order shares the general situation of religious life today, which we could define as a path of renewal that has remained halfway, a slow or even blocked path because of its uncertain direction, the complexity of the path and the weariness of the wayfarers." I then presented analytically the aspects of the Order's life in which this situation of unfinished renewal appears

most evident: the contemplative dimension, self-care, fraternal life in community, the relationship between charism and ordained ministry, intellectual formation, and the relationship with our nuns and the laity.

I conclude this retrospective look with the decisions taken by the 2019 Extraordinary Definitory of Goa which, for the moment, chose not to proceed with a rewriting of the Constitutions, nor to their revision, while it approved the drafting of a Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism and a revision of the Applicative Norms. Since March of this year, the second draft of the Declaration on the Charism has been available to you and corrected based on the suggestions we received from the circumscriptions and from individual friars. In June, we sent you the proposed revision of some of the Applicative Norms. We will be working on this material together over the course of these two weeks.

Where are we going?

At the end of my second term, I feel that I would not be doing the Order and this General Chapter a good service if I did not dare to draw conclusions from what I have observed and experienced during this period. It is my duty to say frankly what seems to me to be the truth of the transformation taking place in our Order, without attenuating or concealing it. What I am saying has been presented and approved by the General Definitory, so it is in the name of the general government of the Order that I am speaking to you.

In order to describe the evolution we are witnessing I will use some data that we observed during the pastoral visitations and that were confirmed by the responses that the circumscriptions sent us during the re-reading of the Constitutions. I will take them up by grouping them into four points:

- We are moving toward a Carmel that is more apostolic and less contemplative, engaged more in external works than in prayer.
- The care of community life is losing its centrality and importance in favor of the prevailing demands of pastoral ministry.

- The formation of our young men, if we exclude the novitiate year, is oriented more toward priestly ordination and the exercise of ministry than toward the maturation and consolidation of our friars and charismatic identity.
- The differences that exist between regions and circumscriptions are putting the Order's unity under great tension. The traditional autonomy granted to the provinces by our law risks becoming independent to the point that some provinces have written to us hoping that the Order in the future will take the form of a sort of federation of circumscriptions.

I have deliberately set out these data in the form of apodictic theses, without nuance, to allow you to grasp the reality in all its provocative concreteness. It is no longer time to remain in ambiguity and immobility. Is this a loss of specificity of the Carmelite-Teresian identity and of the unity of the Order? Or is it a question of a legitimate evolution of the Carmelite-Teresian charism, which - in substantial fidelity to its fundamental elements - enhances aspects of particular relevance for today's world? If we agree on the goodness and validity of this evolution, we must say so openly. We are the supreme authority of the Order: our confreres, especially the younger ones, expect from us clear answers at the theoretical and practical levels to the many questions they have about our way of living and working. If a General Chapter believes that this is the right direction for the Order to follow and decides so, we will all accept it and draw the necessary consequences. What we cannot do is affirm one thing on the theoretical level and do another in practice. Inconsistency is in any case an evil, confusing minds and making them incapable of lucid and courageous choices. Moreover, how can we form our young people if we are unable to communicate to them clearly what our vocation and mission in the Church consists of?

For my part, I believe that to continue along the line described would mean reaching a point of rupture with our tradition and altering the balance that links the various elements of our charismatic identity. For this reason, I reaffirm here the need for a serious reform of the Order, as I had already expressed in the 2017 Definitory, in consonance with the

appeals that Pope Francis is making to the whole Church, and in particular to consecrated life, which with its propheticism has in the past anticipated and inspired the reform movements of the ecclesial body. In my speech to the 2017 Definitory, however, I refrained from making concrete proposals because - I said - it did not seem right to me "to propose to the whole Order a vision of renewal or reform based on my own personal vision or sensibility." Although I am still convinced of this, I believe that this rightful prudence does not prevent me from presenting to your free discussion some paths that, in my opinion, the Order could or should take to get out of the crisis in which it is struggling and to undertake a renewal that is not imposed by circumstances, but is consciously chosen and coherently pursued on the basis of the gift of grace received and the needs of today's world. As you can see, I am not thinking of exhortations that remind our confreres of the duties of Carmelite life, such as: pray more and be more faithful to community life! We know very well that such recommendations, however just and necessary, are interpreted as an exercise of an exhortatory literary genre from which no practical effect is expected. In fact, it would be naïve and simplistic to think of solving our profound identity crisis with voluntary calls for greater observance.

What I am thinking about and what I want to propose to you is to reconsider more carefully some of the resources that we have in our Order and that we probably have not yet adequately utilized. I appeal, therefore, not to an effort of will, but to an effort of intelligence and to a change of mentality which will allow us to reset our life and to prepare a future free from the conditioning of a history gone by, but at the same time, faithful to the charismatic inheritance that has been delivered to us and for which we are responsible before the Church and the world. This, in my opinion, is the only way to put into practice what we have written in the Declaration on Charism. From many parts we have been asked to make the Declaration more effective and operational in order to avoid the risk that it too remains a document that is discussed, approved, and quickly forgotten. I wonder, however, what we are thinking about when we ask for practical decisions. If one is thinking of norms that impose

the observance of certain practices that are essential for living our vocation, one has only to refer to the already existing Constitutions. But it is not a question of simple observance. It is a question of clarity and courage: clarity in order to become aware of the epochal change underway in the history of our Order as well as of the entire Church, courage to make decisions corresponding to a profoundly changed history. We cannot repeat what we have always done if we really want to be faithful to our identity and prepare a future for it.

Interculturality

It is extremely difficult to make predictions about the future of our Order for several reasons. The first and most obvious is that the demographic picture of the Catholic Church and of Christianity in general is changing rapidly. I will mention just a couple of statistics. According to a survey a few years ago, 61% of Christians live in the Global South and only 39% in Europe and North America.² It is predicted that "by 2050 there will probably be more Christians in Africa (1.25 billion) than in Latin America (705 million) and Europe (490 million) combined."³

If we look at the Order's current statistics, we find that Europe still has the largest number of members, 1401 (35.2%), followed immediately by Asia with 1313 members (33%). If we add the number of members from Europe, North America, and the Middle East, we arrive at a total of 1626, or 40.8% of the total. The African Carmel, for the moment, has 552 friars, equivalent to 13.9%, while Latin America, with 487 friars, makes up 12.2% of the total.

Obviously, these numbers do not consider the age of the friars. If we were able to make a statistic that also takes age into consideration, we could easily predict the imminent overtaking of Europe by Asia and the rapid rise of Africa and Madagascar. We can, however, get an idea

² Cfr. T. P. RAUSCH, "Sfide contemporanee del cattolicesimo globale," in *Civiltà cattolica*, 2021, II, 274.

³ *Ivi*.

of the future by looking at the number of religious in formation which are currently distributed as follows:

Asia	390	<i>44,6%</i>
Africa-Madagascar	255	<i>29,1%</i>
Europe	128	<i>14,6%</i>
Latin America	79	<i>9%</i>
North America	15	<i>1,7%</i>
Middle East	8	<i>1%</i>
Total	875	

Clearly the face of the Order, which already presents itself in the range of those in formation with 75% of its members in Asia and Africa and only 16-17% in Europe and North America, is profoundly different from what we have known only thirty years ago, as shown by the statistics presented in 1991, in which 57.4% of the members lived in the North of the planet and only 26.1% in Asia and Africa (and the remaining 16.5% in Latin America):

Europe	1897	<i>51.1%</i>
Asia	781	<i>21%</i>
Latin America	610	<i>16,5</i>
Africa-Madagascar	190	<i>5.1</i>
America Settentr.	167	<i>4.5%</i>
Middle East	65	<i>1.8%</i>
Total	3,710	

On the other hand, the internal data of our Order corresponds perfectly to the general statistical picture, so that it can be said, in extreme synthesis, that for the moment 40% of Discalced Carmelites live in the North of the planet and 60% in the South, but in about ten years it is foreseeable that the balance will tilt even more in favor of Africa and Asia, which will host up to 75% of the members of the entire Order. This geographical and cultural change is so profound that it throws into crisis any attempt to imagine the future from the traditional framework of

European and North American Carmel. The consequences are innumerable so as to constitute genuine challenges for the future, especially at the level of the general government of the Order.

A particularly instructive example concerns the Generalate and the other houses dependent on the General Definitory: the community and faculty of the Teresianum, the International College and the Cites of Avila. Currently, the composition of these communities, based on the geographical origin of the members, is as follows:

	EUROPE & M. EAST	ASIA (INDIA)	AFRICA	AMERICA LATINA
General Curia (Ext. Definitory)	9	1	1	1
Teresianum; Intern. Coll; Sem. Missio- num	20 + 1 + 1	4 + 2 + 1	1	2 + 1
CITeS	3			2
TOTAL	34	8	2	6

As we can see, the presence of European friars is by far the majority: out of a total of 50 friars, 34 (68%) are European, a proportion that reflects a demographic situation of the Order that has long since been overcome. At the same time, it must be said that the replacement of European friars with non-European ones is by no means simple, nor can it be taken for granted that it will be successful. Not a few attempts to insert non-European brothers into international houses have proved unsuccessful for various reasons, among which cultural differences with all their implications are certainly present.

The concrete case of international communities at the service of the whole Order brings to light one of the major challenges for the future of our Order, namely, the ability to overcome cultural barriers and promote interculturality in our circumscriptions and communities. It is now time to face this fundamental challenge, which has been put off for too long.

Even though the Order is made up of thousands of members from very different cultures, we can say that there are no experiences of intercultural communities or initiatives. If we exclude the centers that depend directly on the General Definitory, in Rome, Avila and the Holy Land, and some sporadic experiences of collaboration at the service of some Provinces, our communities are strictly monocultural.⁴ It seems that we apply the logic of *aut-aut*, not *et-et*. If Africans are growing in a mission in Africa, it is time for Europeans or Americans to leave. In Europe and the United States, we have witnessed the multiplication of presences of friars, especially Indians, in the territory of other Provinces without any concern for integrating themselves into the life of these Provinces. For twenty years, these phenomena continued on parallel tracks until the General Definitory intervened to put an end to this practice that contradicted the structure of our Order. We hope that we have finally succeeded in stemming the phenomenon, but it is nonetheless significant that it has happened and that a decisive intervention by the Order's supreme authority was necessary to put an end to it and to direct our confreres towards forms of collaboration among the Provinces. In this way, a great weakness of the Order came to light, namely, the fact that diversity is not at the service of unity but becomes rigid in parallel structures that do not communicate with one another.

In many religious congregations this work of intercultural exchange has been going on for many years. In our Order this has not happened, either because of the general resistance to change or because of the importance and strong autonomy that our tradition assigns to the provincial community. In fact, the form of interculturality adequate to our charism does not pass through the weakening of the structure of the province, but through the overcoming of "provincialism," understood as the withdrawal of the province on itself and on its internal dynamics. We need to

⁴ In this regard, I would like to recall the experience of interprovincial and intercultural collaboration that enabled us to save the mission in Cameroon a few years ago. Friars from the Provinces of Lombardy and Genoa, the Commissariat of Congo, the Vicariate of Nigeria and the Delegation of Central Africa participated. It is an exceptional example of what the Order can do when it is able to join forces in a common project.

get people moving again and into dialogue, just as is happening in our countries and cities, which are increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Allowing this current wave to enter our homes and our districts will force us to question many habits, behavior, and ways of thinking. But it is precisely this that we need: to come to terms with a history that has changed, with respect to which we have remained behind, suffering it passively without grasping its novelties and opportunities.

We cannot, however, forget or hide the difficulties and obstacles that stand in the way of achieving this goal. The first and most obvious difficulty, but not necessarily the most serious, concerns the advanced average age of the European provinces which generally count among their ranks a high number of elderly people and a small group of young or less elderly people. It is not automatic, but it is certainly common, that advanced age corresponds to a lesser willingness to change, even more so, if these changes are not only external, but of mentality. Adapting to new situations and different companions on the road is something that young people do best. In this respect, the Old Continent does not have many resources to deploy.

The greatest difficulty, however, depends on the path the Order has taken in the last thirty to forty years. In fact, the Order has developed and changed profoundly in its geographical and cultural composition, but this change does not seem to have been guided and directed by the orientations coming from our legislative texts. We have grown or declined without much questioning of the identity of what was being produced through these processes. We quickly dismissed the question of identity by answering that one can be a Discalced Carmelite in many different ways. This answer, however, takes for granted the very thing that was the subject of the question, and that is actually being consistent with the identity of the Carmelite-Teresian charism. What we have witnessed is not the unfolding of a multiplicity from the one charism, the blossoming of a tree firmly planted on its roots. To give an idea of what I think has happened, I would use a different metaphor, that of an image, of a photograph of which some details are enlarged to excess until the sharpness of the contours is lost. Instead of the richness of different perspectives, each in its

own way restoring the fullness of Carmelite life, we have witnessed the production of a series of copies of the same image that have blurred its original clarity by enlarging or shrinking one or another aspect.

This situation today makes the effort to bring the various regions and circumscriptions of our Order into dialogue with one another extremely complicated after decades of unrevised journeys and processes that are often not in dialogue with one another. But precisely for this reason we urgently need to begin to dialogue starting from a shared experience of life, a mutual knowledge, and a common commitment to collaboration. Only in this way will we be able to put our strengths back into circulation. If we continue to remain closed in our own monocultural shells, we will allow the grace that the Lord is offering us to emerge from the crisis to pass us by without grasping it.

Several concrete steps could and should be taken to bring us closer to one another. Among these is, for example, the learning of one or two common languages with which we can communicate freely among all the members of the Order. Many other religious Institutes have long since chosen to use one or, at most, two official languages, while we have so far resisted this change, which is small in itself, but which has in addition to its obvious practical usefulness, a great symbolic and spiritual value: the effort to leave our linguistic-cultural comfort zone in order to reach out to others.

Even the structures of communion and collaboration provided for by our law have generally been little used. The Conferences of Major Superiors, with the sole exception of Latin America, have played a very marginal and in some cases non-existent role. The tendency in recent years has been to invest even less in these structures, despite the objective need for greater collaboration. Yet there are important coordinating functions and services, once assigned to the center of the Order with its various secretariats, that today could be carried out more effectively at the level of the regional conferences (in the area of formation, vocation promotion, specific apostolates). Even the possibility of establishing inter-provincial communities, especially for initial formation, has been little

actualized. It is surprising to note how Provinces with very small numbers of friars believe that they do not need to collaborate with other circumscriptions to offer a better formation to their candidates and in view of a more shared future. A similar point can be made in the area of ongoing formation, which could be a valuable occasion to develop opportunities for meeting, exchange, and dialogue among members of the same region.

Formation

A reform has its privileged place of implementation in formation, that is, where we strive to "give historical form" to the gift of the Spirit that we received with our vocation to the Teresian Carmel. When I speak of formation, I do not simply mean the initial period, but the lifelong care and cultivation of one's vocation. Without a solid formation it is not possible to face the complexity of our times and give credible answers to the many questions that are asked of us. Even more radically, without a constant commitment to formation we will easily fall prey to a worldly mentality, we will yield to the pressure of a system that homogenizes us and, beyond our different subjective positions and beliefs, reduces us to the anonymous condition of producers/consumers in a society dominated by the market. The detachment from the world, of which Saint Teresa speaks, requires today more than ever not only an ascetic dimension of defense and distancing, but also the development of critical thinking, capable of discernment in the light of faith.

Also in this area, at the theoretical level, we all declare ourselves convinced that formation is the priority commitment of each circumscription and of the entire Order, in line with what is stated in the documents of the Church. Unfortunately, however, these declarations of principle are not followed by consistent choices. How many and which persons do we invest in formation? How much time, energy and financial resources do we dedicate to initial and ongoing formation? Do we ask ourselves some questions about the need to rethink the modalities of formation in order to make it more effective and adequate for the times we

are living? I am thinking, in particular, of our youngest members, both those who are still in the initial phase of formation and those who have only recently made their solemn profession or received presbyteral ordination. I wanted us to listen directly to their voices at the beginning of this Chapter so that all the Chapter members would have an idea of what is stirring in their minds and hearts.

We are moving with great strides towards a globalized world. The younger generations, especially in Europe and America, but the trend is spreading everywhere, are increasingly in contact with each other beyond political borders and cultural barriers. The typical place of this meeting is the virtual space of the web where one can communicate from one border of the Earth to another, thanks also to English, which has become the *koiné* of our time. I believe that our Order has not yet come to terms with this epochal change, especially in the area of initial and ongoing formation. We still have a very local image of formation, which in part is well justified and should be preserved, but which becomes an obstacle and a brake when it becomes rigid and closed to novelty. It is right, in fact, that in forming the young people of a province we should take care that they become integrated within the provincial community, getting to know it, and being known by it. There is a whole local tradition that a young person entering a particular circumscription must learn and assimilate. But this rightful concern should not turn into a fear of confrontation, dialogue, and sharing with young people from other provinces and traditions, as if this could alter the purity of the formation given or weaken the sense of belonging to a given community. Let us not forget that we are all members of the same Order and participants in the same charism. If we are unable to accept the challenge of opening our borders and overcoming barriers, we risk closing ourselves off in a small world, which sooner or later will be too narrow and artificially separated from the rest of the Order and the Church.

In recent years, the general administration has tried to promote formation experiences at the interprovincial level, unfortunately meeting with strong resistance. Some timid steps forward have been followed by decisive steps backward. Far-reaching proposals, such as that of a year

of formation a few years after solemn profession and presbyteral ordination, were not accepted. As European Provincials may remember, at the meeting of the Conference of Provincials of Europe and the Middle East held in Linz from November 4-11, 2017, I had proposed to introduce a year of Carmelite formation after solemn profession and presbyteral ordination, say between five and ten years later. The model I was inspired by was that of the so-called tertianship novitiate (or "third probation") year of the Jesuits. As is well known, it was an invention of St. Ignatius who established this time of spiritual deepening and renewal before a definitive commitment to the Society. In the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius speaks of the need to move from intellectual study to the *schola affectus*, the school of the heart, and precisely for this reason he instituted the period of the tertianship novitiate: "To this end, it will be useful for those who have been sent to study, once they have finished the concern and the commitment to cultivate the intellect, to insist during the time of the third probation in the school of the affection, applying themselves to those spiritual and corporal exercises, which are capable of procuring for them a greater humility and abnegation of every sensitive affection and of every will and proper judgment, and a greater knowledge and love of God our Lord. In this way, after having progressed themselves, they will be able to better advance others, to the glory of God our Lord."⁵

It is a mistake to reduce the transmission of the charism to learning a series of intellectual contents, such as the history of the Order, the study of the Rule and the Constitutions, the doctrine of our Saints. These contents must be put into concrete life practices if we want them to truly form a person and not only in-form him in our tradition. This was certainly the concern of St. Teresa and the generation immediately following her. What was already clear to Teresa and Ignatius in the sixteenth century we seem to have forgotten today. In fact, today we are witnessing a kind of paradox: on the one hand we are more aware of the concrete psychological dynamics of the person and insist on the value of

⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, *Constitutions*, n. 516.

experience, on the other hand, we seem to fail to adapt our formation processes to this deeper anthropological knowledge. We organize charismatic formation on the model of the academic study of philosophy and theology, and while noting that this method is not effective, since it neither educates the person nor helps him acquire a new way of thinking and acting, we fail to come up with anything better. I am aware, however, that on these issues we need to open a broad debate in our religious family, which so far has not happened. In the absence of such a clarification, I am not surprised that the proposal for a third year of formation has elicited lukewarm or frankly contrary reactions and has therefore been rejected in substance. What has been achieved, not without hesitation and resistance, is a second common novitiate for the European professed, which unfortunately was halted after the first year because of the pandemic. We hope that it can be resumed and strengthened in the years to come. Much of our future depends on our ability to form a new generation of Carmelites who are capable of assimilating and internalizing our charismatic patrimony and then communicating it creatively. The experience of meeting and getting to know each other among young people from different Provinces is also of fundamental importance. In the past, our International College was a crucial meeting point for friars from all over the Order. Today Rome seems to have lost much of its former centrality, and yet the void that has been created remains to be filled.

It is disturbing to note how much the sense of belonging to the Order as such has been weakened. What once constituted a source of pride and vital commitment for every friar today seems to be only a cold juridical-institutional fact. Affections, concerns, and motivations have their center elsewhere, in the promotion of oneself or, in the best of cases, of the circumscription of which one is an immediate part. The Order, in its global reality, appears as something distant and abstract which does not concern us directly. Hence the obstacles encountered by those who are called to govern the Order at the general level, both in finding people available to work for the centers at the service of the entire Order, and in finding a listening ear when addressing all the confreres, trying to involve them in interprovincial projects or in paths of animation and

ongoing formation. Even the preparation for and participation in the General Chapter do not arouse particular enthusiasm, as is evident from the responses received to the request to send proposals to be discussed here. Only a few regions sent contributions that reflect a broad discussion and a sincere desire to contribute to this essential moment in the life of the Order. It was even more difficult to draw from a series of wide-ranging reflections concrete proposals on which to orient the discussion in this Chapter. If all this is happening, we cannot limit ourselves to noticing and deploring it. We need to ask ourselves about the causes of this sort of disaffection with our "corporate personality," with our being one family in the Church that wants to speak with one voice and walk in the same direction. But do we really want this or does this prospect, rather, frighten us because we fear that it threatens our right to be free and different?

The communion of the three branches of the Order

Another strong point of our Order is the coexistence of the male, female, and lay branches. Friars, nuns, and seculars share the same charism, each living it in a way that corresponds to his or her own condition, we develop and express all its richness. We know that for St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross the exchange of experiences and the mutual support among nuns, friars and lay people was a very important help and stimulus. Without this exchange, sharing certain works would probably never have come into being. For John, and even more so for Gracián, the fraternal relationship with Teresa was decisive in fully understanding the Carmelite vocation and finding its correct translation in a masculine key. But the same can also be said for Teresa and for the first generations of her daughters: the relationship with the friars opened them to a broader ecclesial sensibility and to a deeper theological-spiritual formation. The contributions of the laity are less known and studied, but I believe that we all have in mind figures of Carmelites in the world who offer us luminous examples of love, prayer, intimacy with the Lord Jesus amid the noise and turmoil of daily life.

Even in this case, however, we can ask ourselves if we are really taking advantage of this extraordinary strength and richness of our vocation. It seems to me that we can and should do much more. Often, in fact, our relationship with the nuns and laity falls into the category of the apostolate. We are asked to provide services of celebration of the sacraments or preaching, and we offer them. At times, we also help each other by lending collaboration and support in facing the necessities of daily life, and this is certainly a beautiful testimony of fraternity. But much more rarely do we live our vocation in communion with our sister nuns and our lay brothers and sisters. I understand that this is neither easy nor obvious because it requires a journey of formation and maturation. We need to learn from experience what is appropriate and what is not, what benefits communion and what can damage it. But in any case, it is important to place at the center of our attention and care this network of relationships that should effectively and affectively constitute the reality of our family. The further we stray from the center of our vocation, the less attentive and interested we are in cultivating and animating the life of our family. The end result is that we find ourselves "without a family." In this way we are not faithful to the intention of our foundress, but above all, we lose that sense of belonging to the family of Carmel that is vital to arouse and channel our best energies.

The latest documents approved by the Holy See regarding women's contemplative life have certainly recognized greater autonomy of governance for nuns and have given greater importance to federations and associations of monasteries. But these changes, which in my opinion are not only opportune but necessary, in no way exempt us from cultivating our relationships with our sister nuns. What is asked of us is once again to evolve our relationship from a clerical and directive mode to a more fraternal and dialogical one. Something similar can also be said about our relationship with members of the Secular Order whom we must learn to relate to based on our common baptismal and charismatic vocation, learning to work not only for them, but also with them to build our common home.

Some Final Considerations

Please forgive me if in this report I have expressed too strongly and decisively the concerns I feel at the end of my service as Superior General. The intention that has guided me, however, is to point out resistances, closures, and delays in order to broaden the horizon of our reflection and open concrete paths toward the future of the Order. I have addressed some questions to this Chapter. They will be answered to the extent that, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to make a serious discernment of the Lord's will for our family. For my part, I would like to conclude with a couple of considerations.

The first concerns the manner of exercising the responsibility of governance. As I have mentioned - but the discussion deserves to be expanded and detailed - religious life is going through a time of strong individualism and dispersion. This is an almost inevitable consequence of the historical and cultural context in which we are immersed. We must respond to this challenge with intelligence and readiness. If we give up and let the boat drift, we already know that the consequences for religious life and for our Carmelite family will be disastrous. Therefore, today more than ever, it is required of those who are invested with governmental responsibilities to assume them with serious commitment, without giving in to the temptations of laxity and misunderstood goodness which allows everything and closes its eyes to any deviation. It is not possible to exercise the office of government in a naïve and uncritical way, least of all today. One must prepare oneself and have as a constant point of reference the study of canon law, of our Constitutions, of the determinations of the General and Provincial Chapters. We are not superiors to do what seems good to us or to allow others to do what they want, but to govern, that is, to follow a determined course, chosen and approved by the community. In a world where centrifugal forces prevail and the ego is put at the center, it is necessary for the superior to use the tools available to him to counteract these tendencies and build or rebuild a common fabric. This can certainly be done through pastoral work of sensitization and formation, but it will remain ineffective if, at the moment when action is needed, words are not confirmed by deeds.

The second and final consideration concerns the ability to have a broad, potentially universal vision of the Teresian Carmel. In this we would connect ourselves, among other things, to our origins. If we look back over the first twenty years of the 17th century, we are admired for the breadth of vision of the Fathers of the Italian Congregation, open to the whole world. There was no geographical or cultural distance that they did not feel ready to face, despite the limited means at their disposal. And they did not do so superficially or with facile enthusiasm, but invented the "seminaries for the missions," an avant-garde initiative that served as a model for the entire Church. They were not friars who were closed in on themselves and concerned with defending their own tranquil lifestyle: they were men of the Church founded on the solid rock of contemplation and inhabited by a profound passion for God and for all humanity.

As you can see, I am not talking about dreams, but about things that have already happened in our Order and have laid its foundations. We must continue to build on them and we can do so because the Spirit given to our fathers is the same Spirit that has been given to us. It is with this past that we must reckon if we are to have a future worthy of our vocation.

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ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL DEFINITORY 2015-2021

I. WHAT HAVE WE DONE IN THIS SIX YEARS?

Extraordinary Definitories

- Ariccia (Rom9): august 29 – september 6, 2017
- Old Goa (India): february 4-11, 2019

Rereading of the Constitutions

June 10, 2015: appointment of the Commission for the rereading of the OCD Constitutions

October 2015 – June 2018: 12 Study guides prepared by the Commission

August 27 – September 4, 2018: last meeting of the Commission

Declaration on the charism

- February 2019: decision of the Extraordinary Definitory in Old Goa to write a Declaration on the charism
- September 2019: preparation and sending of a first draft (to be discussed in the Provinces and Provincial Chapters of 2020)
- October-November 2019: regional meetings on the Declaration with young religious
- October 2020: evaluation of the contributions from the Chapters and drafting of a second draft
- December 2020: the General Definitory approves the second draft
- March 2021: sending the second draft to the Provincials

Revision of the Norms

- February 2019: decision of the Extraordinary Definitory in Old Goa to proceed with the revision of the Norms
- September 2019: meeting of the Norms Review Commission
- April 2020: evaluation of the Commission's work and drafting of the revision proposal
- June 2020: the General Definitory approves the proposal for revision
- June 2021: sending the revised Norms to the Chapter members

Renewal of the Curia

A) Spaces: archives, library, definitory room, postulation and bursar rooms, electrical system, photovoltaic system (in progress)

B) Staff:

- Superior of the house: a Definitor (2015)
- Secretary General and Archivist (2015)
- General Bursar (2017)
- General Postulator (2021)
- Secretary for missionary cooperation (2015)
- Secretary for Information (2015, 2021)
- Webmaster (2019)
- Assistant to the Secretary General and Secretary for Statistics, in charge of the library (2021)

Website and communications

- We changed the site once (2016) and this year another restyling was implemented.
- Archive and postulation sites (2016)
- Carmelite digital portal project (ongoing)

Pastoral visitations

Change in the procedure of pastoral visitations:

- Approval of the decisions by the General Definitory
- Report of the circumscription one year after the visitation

Changes in the juridical status of some circumscriptions

- Transfer to the Commissariat (Congo)
- Transfer to the Semiprovinces (Flanders, Germany, Malta, Napoli, Oklahoma)

Regularization of extraterritorial presences

Individual presences, new foundations, taking charge of houses erected belonging to other Provinces

Second novitiate at the European level and greater collaboration in formation in Latin America

Increase of the teaching staff of the Teresianum

Implementation of the new legislation of Vultum Dei quaerere and Cor Orans for the nuns

Mission Fund and Monastery Fund

Collaboration O.Carm. – O.C.D.

- Triennial meetings of the two General Councils:
Haifa-Stella Maris: november 27 – 2 december 2, 2016 (on the theme: Consecrated life and the local Church)
Dublino – Gort Muire: may 27-31, 2019 (on the theme: Baptized and sent: the mission of the Church)
- Letters from the Superiors General O.Carm. – O.C.D.:
May he be blessed forever, because he has waited so long for me, june 11, 2016, on the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy
The patronage of St. Joseph on Carmel, december 8, 2020

II. WHAT WE WANTED AND WE WERE NOT ABLE TO DO?

1. Renewal of the chapel of the Generalate
2. Missal ocd and proper to the liturgy of the hours after the approval of the liturgical calendar
3. One year of formation after solemn profession (and presbyteral ordination)
4. Formation program for nuns
5. Have a canonist at the service of the generalate
6. Works in Wadi-es-Siah and Kikar Paris in Haifa