



GENERAL
CHAPTER
2021 | DISCALCED
CARMELITES

Being
Discalced Carmelite Friars
Today

Declaration on the
Carmelite-Teresian Charism

Casa Generalizia Carmelitani Scalzi
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Foreword

Dear Brothers,

We are united by the same vocation to Carmel and the same desire to serve the Lord in today's history. These are times of crisis, opportunity, and beautiful times; difficult times, fruitful times; hard times, as Teresa said, and for that reason, God gives himself with a new face and new vitality. Carmel is reborn in every Carmelite; it is re-enacted in the small great history of the hidden and living bond between Christ and his friends. The crises, far from intimidating and frightening us, throw us back to the essential and to the fire of our origins. "This crisis, if it has something good —and it certainly has— is precisely to bring us back to the essential, to not living distracted by false securities." This is what the Pope told us last September 11 (2021) in our meeting with him during the General Chapter. The moment in which we live propels us to the 'essential' more than ever. Moreover, the Pope encouraged us to review our health and to fan the living flame of our origins: "This context is also favorable for you to examine the state of the health of your Order and to nourish the fire of your origins."

The fire of our origins is not longing for the past. It is faith in God's fruitful present. The charism is not exhausted in the founders but becomes richly incarnated in every era, in every historical and geographical context, in different languages, and in every Carmelite

called to be a faithful and original expression of that living experience that animated Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Teresa of the Child Jesus, Edith Stein, Father Gracián, Brother Lawrence, Chiquitunga... and so many anonymous sons and daughters of St. Teresa. The challenge of the call received urges us to an unprecedented adventure in the same family of our past holy Fathers, in deep communion with all our brothers and sisters today, and with an eye on those who are yet to come, living stones of a Carmel that allows itself to be recreated because it is faithful to its roots.

With joy and hope I present to you the Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism, approved at the last General Chapter of 2021. This document is the fruit of a long and careful process of reflection and dialogue carried out in recent years by friars from all over the world in the context of the ongoing renewal to which the Church insistently calls us.

The proposal to develop a synthetic and updated text on our identity was raised in the General Chapter of 2015, held in Avila, during the Vth Centenary of the birth of Teresa of Jesus. The journey that the whole Order made together to reread the writings of Saint Teresa in preparation for the Centenary of her birth encouraged us to deepen our knowledge of her experience and her magisterium but, above all, it awakened in us the desire to understand and live in depth the charism that she received and that we would like to incarnate and revitalize today, here and now.

From there, we took a step further and the communities intensified the commitment to review our life in light of our charism and mission in the Church with the shared rereading of the Constitutions. At the end of that stage, the Extraordinary Definitory held in Goa (India) in 2019 decided to undertake the elaboration of a Declaration on Carmelite-Teresian life that would express in a synthetic and updated way our identity as Discalced Carmelites.

Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, General of the Order, summarized the intention of this proposal as follows: “The objective of a charismatic statement should be to help us read and understand the charism and the

Constitutions in a way that is appropriate to the present time, to its challenges, and to the different socio-cultural contexts in which the Order is present (...). Even if the essential elements of our charismatic identity have not changed, we need to say them again in a way that helps us to understand and assimilate them in depth so that we can then translate them into a concrete style of personal and community life. It is not a matter of introducing new elements, but of repositioning what has been transmitted in today's anthropological and cultural context.”

Immediately afterwards, the drafting of the document began under the coordination of the Definitory. The initial draft was enriched thanks to the reflections of the triennial Chapters of the circumscriptions and of the friars of the whole Order who wanted to make their contributions, with a special participation of young friars gathered from different geographical areas. Finally, the General Chapter of 2021 took up, discussed, dialogued, and concluded the elaboration of the document, and officially approved it.

The Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism that you have in your hands is a new, original, and creative document. At the same time, it contains the elements that have marked our tradition and our heritage. We, the friars of the Order who are also its first addressees, have written it. We do not forget our sisters, the Discalced Carmelites nuns, nor the members of the Secular Carmel, with whom we feel and form the family of the Teresian Carmel. We offer with a fraternal spirit a text that can be a source of meditation, reflection, and inspiration for the whole Order. However, we are aware that both our sisters, the nuns, and our secular brothers and sisters, have their own characteristics and specificity, and we know that if we wanted to elaborate a text equally valid for the three branches of Carmel it would have to be born from a shared reflection among all, nuns, laity, and friars. This is the path that we wish to follow as an Order in this moment in which we live and that will mature with a necessary common dialogue. The Declaration on the Charism was born from what the Pope has expressed as a vital urgency:

to review our health and the fire of our origins, renaming what it means to be a Discalced Carmelite today.

The Declaration does not have a juridical character but expresses in a summarized and articulated way the essential elements of the Carmelite-Teresian charism as we feel capable of expressing them today. The charism contained in it is offered as a criterion of discernment for our way of living and for the decisions we are called to make. The Declaration, as a summary of the essentials of our way of life, is fully binding and synthesizes the current formulation of the charism.

We invite all of you, superiors, communities, professed, and formandi, young and old, to accept and assimilate it, and draw from it the necessary practical consequences. The first step will be a slow, reflective, and meditative reading, and to receive it in such a way that we can grasp its scope, assimilate its content, so that it may energize and challenge us and set us on our way. It invites us to a life experience, not just a beautiful and inoffensive theory. How can we trace concrete ways to put its vitality into practice so that it brings forth fruits of renewal for all of us?

The charism, like the Gospel, can only be lived in an inculturated way. At a time in which our presence is truly universal, it is essential to work seriously and deeply in dialogue between the traditional charism and the different cultures in which we live in such a way that they nourish each other. We want to encourage one another in the practical application of this Declaration: the General Definitory, the Provincial Superiors and their Councils, the local Superiors and the individual friars. Again, the Chapters of the circumscriptions, knowing and evaluating their own local reality, will be able to identify and propose the most adequate means to give life to the principles contained in the Declaration.

The Pope also told us on September 11: “You must not imitate the mission of other charisms, but be faithful to your own in order to give to the world what the Lord has given you for the good of all, that is, the living water of contemplation,” adding that “the harmony between these three elements: friendship with God, fraternal life, and mission, is a

fascinating goal, capable of motivating your present and future decisions.”

We place this Declaration in your hands, dear brothers and sisters, may it be an instrument of renewal which impels and encourages us to live and serve together, one and the same family in a true and authentic communion. In the depths of our hearts, we hear a provocative challenge that urges us to rediscover the call of God personally and communally and asks us to renew our passion for him, our desire to respond first to his love, and to live always in his friendship.

Let's get going! God is tradition and newness, permanence and challenge, home and journey. In this exodus (Church and Carmel in departure), obedient (attentive listening to life), in which we find ourselves today with all humanity in search of the promised land, we feel ourselves brothers of all men and women, elders and children, who experience the need to seek with courage and humility who we are, who we are called to be, and what is the saving dream of God for our land. We are called to be children of God, Discalced Carmelites in the school of Mary and Joseph, by their hand, pilgrims of Faith, listening day and night to the Voice of God, his Word, in the heart of the history of our days.

“Holy Mother Teresa, look down from heaven on this your family and care for it with love, crown the work you once undertook on earth.”

Fr. Miguel Márquez Calle
Superior General

October 15, 2021, feast of St. Teresa of Jesus

Being Discalced Carmelite Friars Today

Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism

Approved by the OCD General Chapter 2021

Introduction [C (= Constitutions OCD) 1, 14]¹

The Teresian Carmel, founded by St. Teresa of Jesus in the wake of the ancient religious family of Carmel, has a long and fruitful history. Over time it has spread throughout the world and has taken on different forms and styles, incarnating itself in a multiplicity of cultures and flourishing in multiple figures of holiness. The diversity present in 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, asks us to foster fidelity to the perennial elements of the

¹ Abbreviations of the Works of St. Teresa of Jesus: F: Foundations; L: Life; M: The Mansions (Interior Castle); W: Way of Perfection (Valladolid).

charism and the unity of our family, drawing on the common spirit that constitutes us as one body.

Today we feel a pressing challenge to embrace the richness of the charism that has been given to us and to continue to update it so that it may acquire new vitality and remain ever current. The charism that Teresa of Jesus received, lived, and transmitted is a dynamic reality that develops and expresses itself in ever new forms. Originating from prophetic and Marian roots, the Teresian charism has been enriched and developed over the centuries thanks to the principal saints of our Order. In addition to St. John of the Cross who, with St. Teresa, represents the initial and founding moment of the Reformation, think of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Doctor of the Church along with the two Spanish mystics, who traced the path of spiritual childhood; Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, who bore witness to the unique and intimate experience of the mystery of the Trinity; Saint Raphael of Saint Joseph (Kalinowski), promoter of the unity of the Church; Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who united her profound love for the truth with the offering of her life in the death camps. In the same way, the richness of the Carmelite charism is entrusted to us, both at the personal level and at the level of our communities.

We must “always begin” anew (F 29:32), in order to be a “foundation for those who will come” (F 4:6) without remaining prisoners of a glorious past now gone 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 the initiation of an adequate renewal (*accommodata renovatio*) of religious life and, shortly thereafter, Paul VI clarified that this process must remain constantly in progress: “Adequate renewal, moreover, cannot be accomplished once and for all, but must be carried out continuously in a certain sense, through the fervor of the members and the concern 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 called for by the Council. However, the rapid and profound evolution that is taking place in society and cultures, as well as within the Order, requires ongoing discernment to respond in a charismatic and always updated way to today’s reality. Following the indications of the Church, we are urged to revive the desire and the practice of constant renewal—as requested by the Second Vatican Council—, an essential condition for incarnated fidelity to our charism. The updating required by the Council is not concluded because it can never end.

In the journey of conformation to what we have been called to, we also have a sure model in “our glorious father St. Joseph”. Our vocation begins with the generous gift of self, but the summit is the maturation of the gift of fatherhood. Of this, the heart of Saint Joseph, father of Jesus, whose full and happy fatherhood consisted in the total gift of self, is a luminous model (cf. Pope Francis, *Patris corde*, 7). To such a father, along with Saint Teresa of Jesus

and the saints of Carmel, we entrust ourselves in the reading and application of this document.

I. Responding to a Call

1. The experience of vocation [C 15b, 104]

Each one of us recognizes a personal call from God at the origin of our journey of religious and Carmelite life. It was not our own decision that led us to Carmel, but a free divine choice which each of us experienced in his or her own way. We are aware that the call and response are the work of the Spirit: the Spirit of the Risen Lord, that we received in Baptism, who calls and who animates the freedom of the person who responds.

2. The path towards identity

The free personal response with which we consent to the call becomes the beginning of a path of discernment, acceptance, and progressive assimilation of the charismatic identity. This identification will grow and mature in a process that will last a lifetime.

3. The ever-present call [C Epilogue]

In our concern for the future, we must not lose sight of the experience of our call which is the solid foundation on which our existence rests. We do not know what the future of the Order will be, much less of that portion to which we belong. Nor do we know what form consecrated life will take or what changes the ecclesial

institutions that we consider unchangeable will undergo. But this is not what we need to worry about; rather, we need to take concrete steps in the light of the experience we hold in our hearts from which our life and our spiritual identity have sprung and continue to spring. Everything can be taken away from us, but not this “hidden source” that nourishes our hope.

II. Charism and Formation

4. An identity in formation

We cannot separate the discourse on formation from the discourse on identity. In fact, charismatic identity exists only as identity-in-formation, that is, as a process of personal and communal identification. Formation exists only in function of an identity to be recognized and developed.

5. The Teresian reform as a path of formation [C 5, 9]

Teresa’s reform was first and foremost a journey of formation to re-learn to live the Carmelite vocation based on a new experience of union with God. Her writings, particularly the *Way of Perfection*, were born as instruments of formation for a certain way of living our relationship with God, with ourselves, and with our companions on the journey. Similarly, the return to the sources of the charism called for by the Second Vatican Council should also be undertaken with a view to a re-formation, to re-learning to live religious life as Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross taught us. In fact, we must recognize that despite the path taken by the

Order since the Council, especially in terms of theoretical reflection, we are still searching for a form of life that is fully faithful to Teresa's original intuitions and adequate to the times and places in which we live.

6. Integral formation [C 108]

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

7. The community as space for formation [C 109]

A good formation can never be the task of an individual alone, but of a cohesive community with a specific style of fraternity, committed to "freeing each other from illusion" (L 16:7). The concrete identity of a group can be recognized precisely in the quality of its collective work of formation regarding itself, as well as to new members. Living in community day after day "forms" us, that is, it accustoms us to thinking, judging and acting in one way rather than another.

8. *Every community is formative [C 129]*

Formation is not only relegated to houses of initial formation. All our communities are called to be formative structures, capable of stimulating and accompanying the development of persons and giving them a new identity. Every community must be a reality that encourages people to grow, to become more mature, more prayerful, more fraternal, more loving of God, and more concerned for the good of his people. Certainly, there are no ideal or perfect communities, but a religious community exists only insofar as it is in search of and on the way to the fullness of its Carmelite vocation. If it loses sight of this goal, it will inevitably turn into something else.

9. *Always in formation [C 126]*

It is a question, therefore, of knowing that we are inhabited by a dynamic identity which grows and develops. Once it has been assumed, it is constantly safeguarded and updated as a response to changes in the context in which we live and to the signs of the times. The whole life of a Carmelite becomes a journey without rest, knowing that when we do not move forward, we remain stationary, and that whoever does not increase, decreases (cf. 7M 4:9). Above all, we are invited to live in an attitude of constant willingness to learn and grow with a true *docibilitas* which opens us to permanent updating. This applies to individuals, to each community, and to the entire Order. In this formation process, the progressive integration of the vows into our Carmelite religious life becomes fundamental. The vows are not an acquired and static

state of life, but values to be assimilated and cultivated day by day. In this way, the lived experience of the vows contributes decisively to the process of ongoing formation.

10. Intellectual preparation [C 90, 101, 125]

In addition to the experience of God in prayer, a fundamental dimension of formation, of which Saint Teresa was well aware, is the serious and in-depth study of theology and spirituality, as well as of those human sciences which help us to know ourselves better and the world in which we live. To be able to offer qualified service to the Church and to humanity, none of us can do without an accurate and always up-to-date preparation. The Order needs to intensify research and study, especially on our Saints, in dialogue with contemporary thought. Only in this way will we be able to continue to present in a meaningful way the richness of the spirituality of the Teresian Carmel.

III. Charism and the Teresian Vision of the Human Person

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 a man or woman, which is no different from that proposed by the Gospel, seen from a specific perspective. We are convinced that the Teresian vision of the human person demonstrates its

relevance in the face of humanity's search for meaning and happiness today.

12. True human dignity [C 10]

In our cultural context, the anthropological proposal of Teresa of Jesus, based upon her personal experience of the extraordinary dignity of the human person, is enlightening: "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 on social prestige, based on wealth, power, or aristocratic origin. All this is part of the "*negra honra*", one of the idols of her time to which Teresa refused to pay homage. The incomparable greatness of the human person derives from the fact that we were created by God and chosen by him as his dwelling place.

13. Inhabited Interiority

The intuition of Teresa of Jesus, which is the foundation of the Teresian charism, is that the answer to the deepest desires and needs of the human heart is found within us, in the "inner castle" of the soul, in our interiority, which is inhabited by the Triune God himself. In this respect, there is great similarity with Sacred Scripture, that proclaims: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16), and again, "If you love me, you will keep my word, and my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our dwelling in you." (Jn 14:23).

14. Entering into oneself [C 63]

Unfortunately, it is possible, and even frequent, to spend one's life outside oneself in externality, appearance, and superficiality: "For there are many souls who are in the outer courtyards, and don't care at all about entering into the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, nor even how many rooms it has." (1M 1:5). We must return to ourselves to discover the riches that lie within us, first and foremost the guest who dwells with us, the otherness from which we come and towards which we are going. Returning to ourselves means learning to listen to the inner dialogue that takes place within us, the fundamental relationship on which our being is grounded. It is by seeing ourselves in him that it is possible to enter fearlessly into ourselves and face the darkness, wounds, and conflicts that are part of our identity. "Well now, it is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, coming to know ourselves, reflecting on our misery and what we owe God, and begging Him often for mercy." (2M 11).

15. Living and Witnessing to the New Man

We Discalced Carmelites have the responsibility and the obligation to show humanity this treasure that has been transmitted to us and that we have received. However, to be able to do this, we must first have a profound experience of our interiority and union with God who transforms us into the image of Christ, the new man (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). An authentic experience of God present within us leads us to recognize the presence of his Spirit in the situations of

the world and calls us to go out of ourselves to recognize the signs of God in history.

16. Living in Relationship

What, therefore, do we need to relearn in the school of Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross and the other Carmelite masters? In a few words, we could say: We must learn to “be in relationship,” a relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, with the Church and with the world. In fact, relationship is the weakest link in our way of life today. The culture that surrounds us and the lifestyle it produces tends to focus on the ego and to exclude relationships insofar as they are a potentially destabilizing element, the bearer of unforeseen novelties, uncontrollable and impossible to integrate into a system. In fact, it is precisely in relationships that the enduring mystery of the human person dwells.

17. Divine initiative

The central element of the Teresian experience is relationship with God. It is first and foremost relationship that God desires to establish with each one of us, making us sharers in Trinitarian life and relationships. For Teresa and John, the first and decisive step in the development of a relationship with God is “to become aware” (Canticle B 1:1; cf. also W 6:3) of who the revealed God is, of his presence and of his working within us. This is not a matter of “knowing” on an intellectual level, but of an experiential knowledge that transforms our way of being in the world.

18. The God revealed in Jesus Christ

This lofty and sublime reality comes close to us. It is experienced in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son made man. In his humanity, he 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 the truth, beauty, and goodness of the mystery of communion between God and humanity and reflected in the communion of life within the Trinity. Teresa does not speak only of an article of faith, but of what she has heard, seen and contemplated (cf. 1 Jn 1:1), of an experience that has radically changed her, becoming the center of her existence and the light that guides her path. The force that attracts and draws Teresa is God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. "He loved me and gave himself up for me." (Gal 2:20). Teresa is literally conquered by the "for me" inscribed in the whole being and activity of Jesus Christ. From him "all good blessings have come" to her (L 22:4) and for this reason her human and spiritual growth can only develop as a deepening of her relationship with him, as a penetration into the "depth" of his truth which is unfolding as the truth of God in his Trinitarian life, as the truth of the Church in need of reform, as the truth of the world awaiting salvation.

19. "In obsequio Iesu Christi" [C 3a, 15a]

The Carmelite Rule reminds us that the purpose of every form of religious life is "*in obsequio Iesu Christi vivere*," to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ. This formula is rooted in a Pauline text in which the apostle expresses his desire and his efforts to bring all

men “to the obedience of Christ” (2Cor 10:5), that is, to a relationship of faith-filled obedience to Christ. The term used by Paul indicates an attitude of docile listening, which becomes total availability to him who offer us salvation and the love of God. *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.” (Gal 2:20). This is actually the invitation and call addressed to all Christians: “God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor 1:9).

20. The intimate relationship with God [C 15c, 53-55]

Teresa of Jesus, starting from her story of Carmelite life, and even more from her own intimate and spousal experience with Christ, translates the obsequium Iesu Christi in friendship with the Beloved. God is the one who dwells in the interior castle of the human person, and from there, from within, he makes his voice heard, offers his love and awaits a loving response. The Teresian charism consists essentially in a profound experience of relationship, which has at the same time the characteristics of friendship and love. It is an experience of friendship, which aspires to be perfect in its confidence and reciprocity. “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.” (*Meditations on Song of Songs*, 2:21). We are created for love and destined to love, and for Saint Teresa friendship is nothing other than the fullness of a loving relationship with God and with others: “But 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.” (*Meditation on Song of Songs*, 2:16), and it is an experience of love, which can be defined as spousal, because it leads the soul towards intimate union with God through a progressive journey of purification and recollection: “From this day forward you will be my bride. Until now you have not deserved it; from now on you will take care of my honor, not only because I am your Creator, your King, and your God, but also because you are my true spouse: my honor is now yours, and yours is mine” (*Relations* 35). “Perhaps this is what St. Paul means in saying He that is joined or united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him, and is referring to this sovereign marriage, presupposing that His Majesty has brought the soul to it through union.” (7M 2:5).

IV. Essential Elements of the Charism

IV.A. The Life of Prayer

21. An experience of love [C 15a, 49, 55]

From this fundamental reality, which is friendship with God, many essential elements of the Teresian experience and proposal take on meaning: attention to interiority, contemplation, unceasing prayer. The content of 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; cf. L 8:5.9; W 21,1).

It is a relationship of friendship, a reality of theological life (faith, hope, love), which we recognize present in its fullness in the person of Mary, model of our vocation.

22. Seeking God and not oneself [C 54]

The search for inner peace, meditation as a way to personal serenity, silence, and interiority, often without any religious content or reference, is widespread in modern society. However, as good and positive as 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) of an encounter, a conversation, and a relationship. Prayer cannot be limited to a search for inner peace, serenity or well-being, and even less can it be a mere obligation to be observed.

23. Friendship with God as a permanent state [C 2, 15c, 66]

Our relationship with God is not an occasional experience, but must become a permanent state, like any true 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 goes back to the prophet Elijah, we often speak of “living in the presence of God”. This expression indicates the goal towards which we are striving, that our whole life becomes prayer, remaining constantly before the face of God.

24. Listening to the Word [C 65]

Constant listening to 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 received, meditated upon and lived. It is enough to recall the invitation of the Rule to “meditate day and night on the law of the Lord” (Rule 10), and the testimony of all the Saints of Carmel who recognize the voice of the Lord himself in Scripture and in personal prayer.

25. The community that prays [C 56-61, 78]

The relationship with the Lord is lived not only in community, but also as community, particularly in the celebration of the liturgy. Each individual member needs the company of his or her brothers and sisters in order to present himself or herself before the Lord as the Church which says to her Bridegroom: “Come!” (Rev 22:17). A privileged expression of the communal encounter with him is the concelebrated Eucharist. The same is true of celebrating together the prayer of the Church in the Liturgy of the Hours and of practicing mental prayer together.

26. Mental prayer [C 64]

To maintain a 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 type of prayer. This is a fundamental requirement of our vocation which is constantly reaffirmed and renewed, and of our mission in the Church and the world.

27. *Solitude and silence [C 68]*

The need for solitude and silence in our contemplative vocation remains imperative, the need to “take time frequently to be alone with Him whom we know loves us.” (L 8:5). It is necessary to have the experience of the desert, allowing a large space to remain empty and a long time to spend in silence so that the presence of God can occupy it. In the 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, projects us backwards in an inescapable confrontation with ourselves. In the silence of information, images and contacts, the emptiness of an unexplored, unfamiliar, and yet our own interior region opens, and for this reason it is disturbing.

28. *Detachment [C 25, 30, 33, 67]*

One of the elements most emphasized in our tradition, beginning with Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross, is detachment which is absolutely necessary in order to become free and to be able to find our true wealth in God alone and to experience that “God alone suffices.” Detachment must be above all interior, but also exterior. In a society oriented towards consumerism, even we religious are easily tempted to possess or use so many things and to always have new experiences. Without a radical detachment and a sober lifestyle, it is not possible to live

the contemplative-community life: “prayer and comfortable living are incompatible.” (W 4:2).

29. Passion for God

Our communion with the Lord gives meaning and vigor to our charismatic life. It must be cultivated and nourished every day so that the flame of love is not extinguished, and life does not become gray and routine. Acedia is undoubtedly one of the dangers of our present situation, often hidden under the guise of activism and multiple ever-changing interests. Only a renewed passion for God can protect us from such risks.

IV.B. Fraternity

30. Solitude and fraternity

There is a way of understanding and living the contemplative life that is specifically Teresian. Friendship with God is personal, but in no way individualistic. One cannot live it alone. For this reason, the Teresian charism has a strong community dimension. In Teresa’s experience and teaching, the fraternity with its joys and labors is an indispensable help in realizing our vocation as friends of God.

31. Hermits in community [C 11]

In fact, while Teresa remains faithful to the ancient tradition of Carmel, reaffirming the importance of certain dimensions of the eremitical way of life (solitude, silence, detachment), she considers

the experience of living in community equally essential. The balance between these two aspects of the contemplative life is fundamental to the Teresian Carmel, as is the tension between them, which enriches and purifies each other. Teresa wants her daughters to be “not only nuns, but hermits” (W 13:6), “who rejoice solely in Christ, their Spouse” (L 36:29), and who look to the model of the first generation of hermits of Mount Carmel (cf. F 29:33; W 11:4; 5M 1:2). At the same time, she excludes a purely eremitical life for her nuns. The “style of fraternity” practiced in her communities, especially at times of recreation, is such an important element of their lives that Teresa wanted John of the Cross to know and learn it as well. (cf. F 13:5).

32. Friends of God's Friends

For Teresa, the relationship with people who are friends is a fundamental means of growing in one's relationship with God, as she writes in a passage of the *Way of Perfection*: “They will tell you that it is not necessary, because it is enough to have God. But a good means to having God is to speak with His friends, for one always gains very much from this. I know through experience.” (W 7:4). From this perspective, it is not possible to separate the relationship with God from the relationship with God's friends. Weakening the practice of relationship with our brother or sister weakens our life of communion with God, just as the loss or weakening of the eremitical dimension inevitably leads to a style of human relationship that is more worldly than evangelical, more proper to the flesh than to the Spirit.

33. A family around Jesus [C 15e, 73]

The mystical experience of the closeness of Jesus and of his concrete humanity awakens in Teresa the need to give life to a new community capable of welcoming his presence on the model of the family of Nazareth (L 32:11), the house of Bethany (W 17:5) and of the apostolic college (W 27:6). It is a matter of building a family whose way of being and living is transformed by the presence of the Lord in their midst. Models of this life project are in a special way Mary and Joseph. The novelty of this intuition took centuries to be truly understood and assimilated. At the heart of it is not so much “regular observance” as a fabric of relationships with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters that transforms us and brings us together in unity.

34. Brothers of Mary [C 47, 127]

The name which identifies us in the Church is “Discalced Brothers of Mary”. We are “brothers,” and therefore fraternity is not an accessory but a substantial element. The majority of friars are also priests, and our service is largely ministerial. This can unconsciously lead to our identity as friars and Discalced Carmelites being overshadowed, or only considered as a condition for priestly ordination. Eventual ordination must be integrated into our religious identity. In this way it enriches it but does not replace it. We do not call ourselves “fathers”, that is, priests who live in fraternity, but brothers, and “discalced” brothers, that is, without other riches or resources to present to the world except that of our fraternity that unites us to Mary and to each other. Like fraternity,

our relationship with Mary is not a particular aspect or devotion in Carmel but expresses the essence of our vocation. There is a kind of mutual mirroring between Mary and the community. On the one hand, Mary is the image and model of the community, and on the other hand, the community is the image of Mary.

35. Building community life [C 86]

For religious life in the Teresian Carmel, building community is essential. If we want to be Carmelites, we must, first of all, be part of the same family. Strengthening community life is the condition for embarking on the contemplative journey of which Teresa speaks (W 4:4). Religious vows themselves acquire their full meaning in Carmel insofar as they promote fraternal life, based on welcoming others, sharing goods, and committing oneself to a common life purpose. We are a Teresian community when we are not together to do something else, but because being together for the love of Christ is a value in itself. Being a family is not a means to an end: it is an end in itself. This should also be an important criterion for discerning a vocation to the Teresian Carmel.

36. Community and individuality [C 72-73]

Community is a gathering of different persons, each with his own way of being and his individuality, not kept for himself but given to his brothers and sisters. Unity is not uniformity; it does not level out differences but brings them together in a fruitful and enriching tension. It would be very risky if the community were to ask each person to annul or disguise everything that makes him or her unique and different from others. It would be a community held

together by law, not by love. Instead, the Teresian community is called to be the place where each member can experience God's mercy by welcoming his or her brothers and sisters.

37. The community that helps one to grow [C 85, 137]

The community is the environment in which all encourage and correct each other to better respond to God's love. Even before founding her communities, Teresa, with the small group of people with whom she shared her anxieties, wanted "to gather together some time to free each other from illusion and to speak about how we might mend our ways and please God more." (L 16:7). This requires a person's openness to fraternal relationships, in which the truth of our humanity, the level of maturity and the need to grow are laid bare. It is a matter of opening ourselves to the other with trust, of letting the other enter into our life and thus we become brothers and sisters. For the community to become an authentic place of personal growth, we must live humbly, walk in the truth, that is, become transparent before our brothers and sisters, show ourselves as we are, with our weaknesses and riches, and allow others to help us with patient and respectful love, in order to know ourselves and become reconciled with ourselves.

38. The Teresian community as a response to individualism

The relationship with one's own self, made up of recollection, listening, and a progressive deepening of consciousness, is the opposite of the current "self-obsession," in which ignorance of the truth of the person corresponds to an obsessive preoccupation with one's own image, one's own well-being and one's own presumed

self-realization. Opposite are also the outcomes of these two different ways of relating to oneself: on the one hand, openness to the community, on the other hand, locked in 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, "Who am I"? In the face of this, the Christian proposal would be to ask rather "for whom am I", to which from a Carmelite perspective we can add "with whom am I."

39. Ecclesiology of communion [C 15e]

The Teresian community is, moreover, 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 one another.

40. An organized community [C 37-38, 78-80]

Listening to the Word, inspired by the Spirit, leads to obedience to God with a full acceptance of his will, which is then translated into communal obedience. The organized community with its norms of life and the tasks assigned to each one is the concrete form of transcending one's selfishness and living daily life in openness before God. In the community, the common search for the will of God is carried out through such means as obedience to superiors, community meetings, review of life, fraternal

correction, and recreation, all of which are to be recovered creatively in a manner appropriate to the sensibilities and conditions of our time.

41. The role of the superior [C 39,143]

The community is made up of brothers, and therefore of persons who are on the same level. It is a community of equals, but not a community without a leader. It needs a superior, a leader whose office is to care for the unity of the body and the growth of each member. The task of the superior is not simply to “coordinate” or “administer” the lives and activities of the members of the community so that they unfold in an orderly fashion. His primary task is to be a builder of peace, weaver of relationships, and animator of fraternal life. For this reason, it is fundamental that his relationship with everyone be one of love, in the spirit of Teresa who told the prioresses: “She should strive to be loved so that she may be obeyed.” (*Constitutions 1567*, 34 [XI,1]).

42. Communities small but not too small [C 129]

In contrast to her earlier experience of a large number of nuns in the monastery of the Incarnation, Teresa founded small communities. 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, and all must be helped.” (W 4:7). For this reason, she indicated a maximum number of members for her communities of nuns (which has fluctuated between thirteen and twenty-one). However, in the present

situation of our communities of friars, we see the opposite tendency, namely, an ever-decreasing number in the older provinces because of a decrease in vocations, and in the younger provinces because the prevailing criterion is pastoral needs. Therefore, each community, ensuring a sufficient number of members, must find adequate ways to express the essential community dimension of the charism not only juridically but also in reality.

43. One Order with three branches [C 8, 11, 103]

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. The pluriform reality of the Carmelite family — which is also composed of religious and lay aggregated institutes— requires that we enter into a close relationship between nuns, friars and laity that makes their complementarity fruitful. Sharing among the members of the three branches is a source of mutual stimulation and new vitality. Moreover, 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 friars in a mixed life of prayer and apostolate, and the laity in the commitment to family life and work.

44. New relationships

A new way of relating and helping each other is needed among the three groups of the Order. Without feelings or attitudes of superiority on the part of anyone, each one should make available the riches of his or her life and be ready to welcome the witness and teaching that comes from the others 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. Mission

45. Called for mission [C 99]

A vocation always corresponds to a mission in salvation history. The mission does not belong to the order of activities but is an integral part of the identity of the one who is called. It is proper for the Carmelite mission to manifest itself and to communicate itself to the world by entering into the number of the many charismatic identities that enrich the Church.

The mission of our religious family is unique and unifying, intimately linked to the primacy of the search for union with God in prayer. From this source radiates the apostolic and social work carried out by the Order in many forms and in many nations of the world.

However, together with the pastoral work at the service of the local Churches, up to the peripheries of the world passing through

the poorest missions, we are invited to a work of deepening our mission in relation to the continuous changes that affect humanity.

46. The Mission of the Order [C 15d, 100]

The mission of Teresian Carmel in the Church is to live and bear witness to our call 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 their 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. Without this foundation of lived experience there can be no specific mission of the Teresian Carmel.

47. The apostolic dimension in the Teresian experience [C 6-7, 89]

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

48. Pleasing the Lord

Teresa’s apostolic desire always had a Christocentric orientation, that is, the desire to “please the Lord in some way” and to help “this Lord of mine as best I can.” (W 1:2). Teresa even said:

“I aim for nothing else but to please him” (L 25:19). The true friend always tries to do what pleases his friend, collaborating with him in the same project. To enter into friendship with God and to do it together with others in order to help one another entails the unavoidable consequence to remain always at his disposal: “Perhaps we do not know what love is. I wouldn’t be very surprised, because it doesn’t consist in great delight, but great determination to please God in everything.” (4M 1:7) .

49. A life commitment [C 87-88, 128]

The mission for the Carmelite translates, first of all, into fidelity to one’s own commitment to religious life in community: “To follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could and strive so that these few persons who live here do the same” (W 1:2). Carmel, like any form of religious life, is not to be measured by its usefulness or effectiveness. Rather, we are called to be a visible sign of Christ and the Gospel (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 44). It is not a matter of doing much, but of giving ourselves totally for the love of Christ. This requires moving from activism to service, from what pleases me to what serves the other. What counts, then, is not the numbers but the quality of charismatic life and the witness that comes with it.

50. The apostolic value of prayer [C 15d]

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 even realizing how it happens. Our daily

prayer has an apostolic and ecclesial intention, and not just a personal or private one, as so many examples from the biblical tradition and the history of Carmel remind us.

51. The multifaceted ecclesial work [C 91-93, 98]

Our mission develops through the concrete work that Christ and the Church need in every time and place. We are open to all the commitments in which we can express, develop, and communicate our experience of God, especially those that are requested of us by the local Church in which we are inserted. There are many and varied ecclesial activities that are compatible with our form of life, but not every way of carrying them out is an adequate expression of our charism.

52. Ministry of spirituality [C 100-101]

In our pastoral service the desire to help others to experience a relationship with God occupies an eminent place. This is achieved, first of all, through confession, spiritual direction, and through specific activities such as initiation into prayer and the ministry of spirituality, but also by giving a Carmelite stamp to any other ecclesial commitment we undertake. In this sense, a concrete way can be to welcome people into our communities to share our life with them and to speak to them by example and witness rather than with words.

53. The mission ad gentes [C 94]

Explicit missionary activity has been strongly present in the life of the Order throughout the centuries. The missionary spirit

remains fundamental for us and must not wane. In today's context, it must be extended to the diverse realities of our world and must include the necessary re-evangelization of regions that until recently were predominantly Christian and are no longer so. On the other hand, we know well that mission is accomplished not so much by what we do, but by who we are; it is essentially a matter of being rather than doing. It flows from our personal encounter with Jesus Christ who calls us to be with him and to accompany him in his permanent mission in the world.

54. Attentive to today's world [C 90]

If Teresa was particularly attentive to the reality of her time, we too, called to live her charism today, are obliged to discern the needs of our contemporaries. We cannot be insensitive to the countless needs and sufferings of contemporary humanity. We feel called to collaborate in the Church's evangelizing activity even in the simple, everyday ways characteristic of our lives. Our presence as Carmelites can also be significant in areas relevant today such as the pastoral care of youth and the family, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the struggle for justice and peace, and ecological commitment.

55. Community discernment on mission [C 37]

Faced with the diversity of possible commitments and the many needs of the Church and of humanity, and often also with the limited personnel at our disposal, a good communal discernment of the commitments to be undertaken is more necessary than ever so that they may be truly consonant with the charism God has

entrusted to us and with what the Church expects of us. John of the Cross asks, “What does it profit you to give God one thing if he asks of you another?” (*Sayings of Light and Love*, 73)

56. The communal character of the apostolate [C 15e]

Each of us is called to participate in the mission of the Order by our personal collaboration. The normal manifestation of our service to Christ and the Church are the commitments which the community assumes and carries out with the coordinated collaboration of its members. An individual friar may also undertake a personal assignment, suited to his gifts and abilities, always with the community’s consent 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 “Christ’s body and individually part of it.” (1 Cor 12:27).

57. The apostolate shared between friars-nuns-laity [C 102-103]

The first recipients of the apostolic dimension of our life is within the same family of the Teresian Carmel. The apostolic commitment in its multiple forms (prayer, witness, preaching, spiritual direction, teaching, publications) is addressed first of all to the friars, the nuns, and the 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 its own form of life.

IV.D. Unity of prayer-fraternity-mission [C 15b, d, e]

58. Three aspects of an indivisible reality

The three fundamental elements of the Teresian charism are prayer, fraternity, and mission. However, what truly characterizes it is the fact that all three are intrinsically linked and do not make sense independently but call upon one another.

59. Three elements that nourish one another

In fact, one cannot live 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 lead to witness and service to him and his Church. Apostolic activity becomes a worldly occupation if it does not spring from a loving relationship with God and is not lived as an expression of commitment and communal discernment.

60. A harmony to be fostered

One of the great challenges for the present and future of the Order is not only to increase and consolidate prayer, fraternity, and service in daily life, but also to establish in practice a profound and coherent relationship between them.

V. Unity and diversity

61. A creative plurality and harmony [C 151]

In recent times, the Order has become universal and new and different ways of living the charism have developed, so that the charism is gradually being inculturated and adapted to the variety of places and peoples. Different choices are made with regard to community relationships, apostolic commitments, and prayer style. This reveals that the charism is not a static and uniform reality; it manifests its multicultural beauty. However, not all 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 the plurality within the Order be lived with “one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32).

62. Charism and inculturation

The Gospel can be lived only 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 that is the Teresian Carmel. In the different regions of the world, our charism comes into contact with the cultures of humanity. Charism and culture meet for a dialogue called to become fruitful and enriching for both. Critical discernment will always be necessary to decide which elements of the traditions of different peoples are compatible with the life and identity of the Teresian Carmel.

63. Expansion of the Order

The first and fundamental condition for implanting Carmelite life in a new region is to possess a true mastery of the charism obtained, not only through theory and concept, but above all through personal assimilation and lived experience. Only by starting from a deep knowledge of the Carmelite-Teresian ideal, and a personal identification with it, can it be effectively transmitted. For the expansion of the Order, therefore, it is necessary to focus rather on the quality of the charismatic life of the missionaries and on their attractive witness than on the fulfillment of external works, however useful they may be for social and human development. Furthermore, concerning the reception of possible vocations, it is necessary to abandon concern for numerical growth and to ensure, first of all, the candidates' aptitude for our form of life and our ability to offer them good discernment and accompaniment in the formation process.

64. Discernment regarding inculturation

A fundamental criterion for adequate inculturation is communion with the Order. The adoption, in a particular region, of new lifestyles or community practices, liturgical, pastoral, etc., must be decided upon from communion with the Order, the values of the charism and an objective understanding of the cultural situation of the region, through prior dialogue and discernment shared with other members of the Carmelite family.

65. An Order formed by provinces [C 146]

The friars of our Order live in community. Communities are usually grouped into provinces. According to the tradition from the beginning, a province is made up of a sufficient number of communities and friars to guarantee its autonomy in the areas of government, formation, and economic administration. To each province corresponds a delimited territory with the purpose of fostering a relationship of knowledge, fraternity, and collaboration among the friars who form part of it, thus, a sense of family, as well as to facilitate its internal organization. Other types of minor circumscriptions are possible, but usually for exceptional or temporary situations.

66. Provinces in times of change [C 145]

In times of rapid change such as 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 respond with timely and appropriate decisions that are the result of careful discernment in light of the charism. Provincial and other structures must be adapted to the conditions of the moment to continue to promote the essential values of the Order. The fundamental criterion is not to maintain presences but to protect and revitalize the spiritual patrimony of the Teresian Carmel. In many cases it will be necessary and positive to merge circumscriptions, to modify their juridical status or territorial limits, and in any case, to

increase interprovincial collaboration everywhere, starting with formation and vocational promotion.

67. Provinces and territoriality [C 144]

In recent times, the presence of communities and friars of one province in the territory of another is increasing. Some provinces have communities in different regions of the world, in places very distant from one another. This is a new practice for us, one that has traditionally been characteristic of modern congregations of an apostolic type and with a centralized structure. The necessary discernment regarding 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, the safeguarding of the essential aspects of the life of a province which must not lose cohesion, a family spirit, and the possibility of relationships and collaboration among its members.

68. The sense of belonging to the Order [C 143]

All together we form the one family of the Teresian Carmel, expressed in provinces and communities. The sense of belonging to the Order must be nurtured and a deep communion fostered within it. Each one must feel that the experiences and needs, the joys and sufferings of the others are his own, and try to contribute with his commitment to prayer, fraternity, and service for the good of all. Coordination and mutual aid at all levels must be strengthened by promoting interprovincial collaborative initiatives, attention to the needs of the Order, mutual trust between the various instances of local, provincial and general government,

and above all, by the availability of friars to the services that are required for the good of the Order.

Conclusion: From Text to Action

The ultimate goal of this Declaration is not only to reformulate the essential elements of our identity in light of the historical context in which we live, but also to initiate paths that will 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 commit themselves to pray and reflect, and then decide concrete ways to put into practice the letter and spirit of this document to help each other to live as Discalced Carmelites today. Provincial chapters will be the most appropriate place to evaluate and translate into decisions, suggestions, and proposals that arise from reading and meditating on the Declaration. In a special way, the General Superior and the Definitory will be vigilant for a fruitful practical application of this Declaration on the charism.

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