History of the Order

The Order of Discalced Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel (OCD) sprang from the 16th-century reform inaugurated by St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. The Discalced Carmelites, whose mode of life was a return to the observance of the primitive Carmelite rule, had their origin in Spain, but soon spread to Italy, the rest of Europe, and the missionary lands.

Reform Movement. Five years after Teresa of Avila had successfully launched the reform of the Carmelite nuns, she obtained permission, in 1567, from the prior general of the Carmelite friars, Giovanni Battista Rossi (1507–88), for the foundation of two monasteries of men who would follow the primitive rule. She acquired a small piece of property at Duruelo, a place equidistant between the Spanish towns of Salamanca and Avila, and there on Nov. 28, 1568, the first monastery was officially started. The original community comprised only three members: Joseph of Christ, a deacon; Anthony of Jesus, who had resigned as prior of the Carmelite monastery at Medina del Campo to become the new prior at Duruelo; and John of the Cross, then a young priest ordained

only a year previously. Soon new members joined the reform in great numbers; some came from the Carmelite Order itself, while others were new recruits. Under the sponsorship of Philip II, king of Spain, the Discalced Carmelites enjoyed an instant popularity and new monasteries were rapidly founded. By the time of Teresa's death (1582), there were 15 monasteries.

Teresa of Avila's purpose in sponsoring the reform of the Carmelite friars was to reestablish Carmelite objectives and disciplines that had become weakened over the 2 preceding centuries. The official mitigations in the rule allowed by Eugene IV in 1432, as well as the other unofficial mitigations of the pre-Tridentine era, were eliminated. Perpetual abstinence from meat and the yearly fast from September 14 to Easter were reinstated, and more time was given to the exercises of the spiritual life, particularly mental prayer. Members of the reform were originally called Contemplative Carmelites, but soon became known as Discalced Carmelites, because of their custom of wearing sandals. The older group hence came to be known, by way of contrast, as the Calced Carmelites.

discalced, however, began to found monasteries outside movement remain within the original Carmelite Order. The on the condition that the new monasteries be founded only in for the reformed monasteries was granted by the prior general the province of Castile in Spain and that the whole reform volved in severe difficulties at the outset. The initial permission obtained from the Holy See apostolic visitators for the various Castile, and there developed a desire to separate themselves orders. The visitators appointed for the Carmelites, Pedro interested in the regulation of the religious orders of Spain, had that regulated the activities of the reform. Philip II, intensely the discalced was based on the dual ecclesiastical jurisdiction from the original order. The difficulty between the calced and priest, Jerome Gratian. In 1574 Gratian received even wider general himself. The difficulty was compounded in 1573 when Dominicans, possessed more authority over the order than the Fernández de Recalde (d. 1580) and Francisco Vargas, both Vargas delegated his faculties to a young Discalced Carmelite Despite its rapid development, the reform movement was in-

faculties from the Apostolic Nuncio, Niccolò Ormaneto (d. 1577). In this peculiar jurisdictional arrangement, the discalced made new foundations with permission granted by Gratian. Primitive systems of communication and the uncertainty of both parties regarding the exact nature of Gratian's faculties produced a tense struggle.

At the general chapter conducted at Piacenza, Italy, in 1575, stern measures were adopted to curtail the activities of the discalced and limit them to a few monasteries in Castile. It was during the execution of these decrees that John of the Cross was apprehended by the calced friars in 1577 and imprisoned by them for 8 months in the monastery at Toledo. Ultimately, through the mediation of Philip II and the apostolic nuncio, the difficulties were settled, and the discalced were established as a separate province within the order in 1581. Finally, on Dec. 20, 1593, Clement VIII established the Discalced Carmelites as an independent religious order with their own superior general and administration.

Expansion and Subsequent History. In 1582 the discalced friars sent their first missionaries to the Congo, but the entire expedition was lost at sea. A second group suffered the same tragic consequences, but finally a third group reached the Congo successfully. The Spanish discalced, however, were not enthusiastic about the spread of the order beyond the confines of Spain. The worldwide expansion of the order thus fell to the Italian branch. Monasteries of the reform had already been founded in Genoa, Venice, and Rome, when Clement VIII in 1600 separated the three monasteries and their 30 priests from the Spanish Carmelites, thus creating two separate congregations within the reform, Spanish and Italian, a division that lasted until 1875. From the Italian group the reform spread throughout Europe in the early 17th century—to Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and even to missions in England.

Thomas of Jesus (Díaz Sánchez de Avila), whose work influenced the establishment of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, promoted missionary activity among the discalced. One of their more important mission endeavors was

in Persia. In Sumatra two Discalced Carmelites, Bl. Dionysius of the Nativity and Bl. Redemptus of the Cross, suffered martyrdom (1638). Prosper of the Holy Spirit led a small group to Palestine (1634) and reoccupied Mt. Carmel, the ancient seat of the order, which had not been inhabited by Carmelites since their expulsion by the Saracens in 1291. The monastery newly reconstructed there was twice destroyed by the Turks in 1720 and 1821. The present monastery on Mt. Carmel, completed in 1853, houses the international school of philosophy for the order. The superior general who resides at Rome, is, according to the legislation of the order, the prior of the monastery on

during the revolutions and suppressions of the 18th and 19th South America, and the U.S. In 1907 there was founded in ment ultimately brought Discalced Carmelites to the Orient, Spanish and Italian congregations. A new missionary movemiddle of the 19th century, and in 1875 Leo XIII united the centuries. The restoration of the provinces took place after the Mt. Carmel. international house of theology for members of the order; in Rome the College of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, an 1957 the Institute of Spiritual Theology was established there. sistory; and Cardinal Adeodato Piazza, who later occupied the the Propagation of the Faith under Pius X; Cardinal Raffaele Giuseppe Gotti, who served as prefect of the Congregation for Three outstanding churchmen came from the ranks of the C. Rossi, who was secretary of the Congregation of the Con-Discalced Carmelites during the 20th century: Cardinal The European provinces of the order were largely destroyed

The first permanent foundation in the U.S. was made at Holy Hill, Wis., in 1906 by friars from the Bavarian province. In 1916 friars from the province of Catalonia founded a monastery in Washington, D.C. These two groups were united in 1940, and 7 years later the monasteries of this union were established canonically as the Province of the Immaculate Heart, which now has monasteries in the states of New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia. This province has missions also in the

Phillipine Islands, where it staffs the Diocese of Infanta on the island of Luzon. In 1915 Spanish friars exiled from Mexico established themselves in Oklahoma, and ultimately made additional foundations in Texas and Arkansas. These monasteries of the southwestern section of the U.S. were constituted as the Province of St. Therese (1947). Since 1925 friars from the Irish province have staffed four monasteries in

the day, except for an hour of recreation in the afternoon and afternoon. Silence is maintained in the cloisters throughout meditation each day, 1 in the morning and the other in the Office is recited in common, and 2 hours are devoted to Carmelite combines prayer and apostolic activity. The Divine California. lives in a cell, a small room containing only a simple desk preaching, administration of the Sacraments, and spiritual and bed made of planks. Apostolic activities, such as an extra hour in the evening during the summer. The friar conformable to the contemplative ideal of the order. direction, are undertaken insofar as they are considered for the priesthood but do not conduct schools for lay people. Discalced Carmelites teach their own friars who are studying of Avila, and the 4 centuries of its existence has witnessed a writings and doctrine of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa The order has always considered itself the custodian of the spiritual theology. large production of books and periodicals concerning Carmelite Way of Life. The daily life of the Discalced

One of the early institutions of the order was the "desert," a monastery of complete eremitical life where the friars could retire for a year at a time to engage in a life of solitude and silence. The first desert was founded by Thomas of Jesus at Bolarque in Spain (1592). The deserts were destroyed during the revolutions, but a number have since been rebuilt. In 1964 there were four deserts in the order; at Roquebrune, near Nice in France; at La Reigada, in Navarre; at Las Batuecas, in Castile, and the most recent, near Florence, in Italy. Friars of spend a year in one of these deserts. The census of the order of

1961 showed there were 361 monasteries grouped in 28 provinces. The total membership in 1964 was more than 4,000.

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Carmelite Nuns, Discalced (DC). Founded in Spain in the 16th century by St. Teresa of Avila, the Discalced Carmelite nuns are probably the best-known of all cloistered orders of women. From the original foundation at Avila, this branch of the Carmelite reform movement spread throughout the world, and has numbered in its ranks many illustrious members.

cloistered Carmelite nuns. She spent the remainder of her life Spain encouraged her to establish additional convents for vent, but her private revelations and the requests of bishops in ciscan Peter of Alcantara and the Dominican Pedro Ibáñez of St. Joseph. During her difficulties before, and following stucco building in Avila, which became known as the convent vent would prove a financial burden to the area. But finally, on authorities, and the townspeople who feared that another contion convent. There was much resistance and reluctance or where a few nuns could follow the primitive Carmelite Rule tioned her superiors for permission to establish a single convent traveling through Spain organizing these convents, 15 of which (d. 1565). Teresa originally intended to found only one conthe foundation at Avila, she was greatly aided by the Fran-Aug. 24, 1562, Teresa and three others nuns occupied a small the part of her own Carmelite superiors, the local ecclesiastical and eliminate some of the abuses then existing at the Incarna-As part of her own plan for a more dedicated life, she petibarked on a completely generous program of spiritual living. nation at Avila in 1533, but 20 years passed before she em-Teresa of Avila entered the Carmelite convent of the Incar-

she had founded by the time of her death in 1582. In 1600 there were 47 convents of Discalced Carmelite nuns.

Anne of Jesus was the dominant personality among the nuns after Teresa's death, and it was she who established the first foundation in the Low Countries at Brussels. Bl. Anne of St. Bartholomew is credited with having saved the city of Antwerp by her prayers during the siege of 1622. Barbe Acarie (1566–1618), a noblewoman and mother of six children, introduced the nuns into France in 1604. She herself entered one of the convents in 1614, after her husband's death. Adopting the name of Mary of the Incarnation, she died after only 4 years in the convent of Pontoise, and was beatified in 1791.

In the 18th century, the order was distinguished by Bl. Mary of the Angels, daughter of a noted Italian family, who died at the Carmel of Turin in 1717; St. Teresa Margaret, who died at the age of 22 at the Carmel of Florence; and the 16 nuns from the Carmel of Compiègne who were guillotined during the French Revolution in 1794, and beatified by Pius X in 1906. The 19th-century Carmelite from the French province of Normandy, St. Thérèse de Lisieux, added new luster to her order. Her memoirs, published after her death, became a best-seller in spiritual literature, and Pius XI called her the greatest saint of modern times. A contemporary of Thérèse, a young French nun from the Carmel of Dijon, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, has also attracted considerable attention by her writings.

The first Discalced Carmelite convent in the U.S. was founded at Port Tobacco, Md., in 1790, by a group of nuns from the Carmel of Antwerp. This was also the first foundation of female religious in the original 13 colonies. In 1830 the Port Tobacco community moved to permanent quarters in Baltimore, Md. By 1964 there were 64 convents in the U.S. The Discalced Carmelite nuns have foundations in every part of the world, and the 1961 census of the order registered 727 convents, with a total membership of more than 15,000 nuns.

The life and work of the Carmelite nun is exclusively one of prayer and penance. There is no active apostolate, since the nuns dedicate themselves to praying for the work of the Church and for the sanctification of priests. Perpetual abstinence is ob-

served, as well as a yearly fast from September 14 until Easter. The Divine Office is recited in choir each day, and two hours are devoted daily to formal meditation. The nuns are cloistered; they speak to visitors only through a grillwork in the convent parlor. A nun remains all her life in the convent she first enters, except when she is sent to join a newly established convent.

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