

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

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 Mt. Carmel.

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

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

Philippine 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 California.

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

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 Bolargue 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 any province may, with permission of the superior general, 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.

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

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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