

Returning to What is Essential in the Teresian Carmel

(Part of a continuing series on Journeying with Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross)

Discalced Carmelite Friars Extraordinary Definitory

III. Returning To What Is Essential In Our Charism And Spirituality

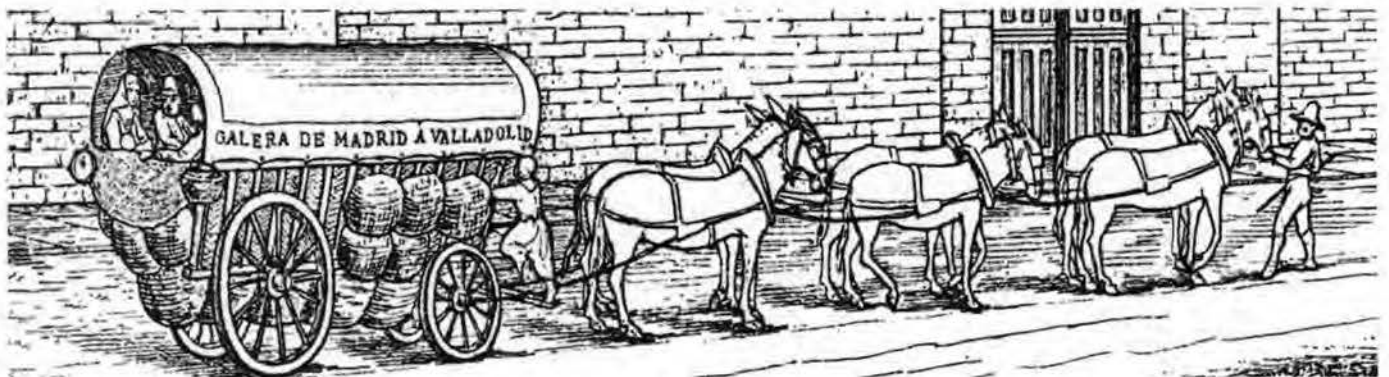
The charism of Teresian Carmelite life is inserted in the great movement of following Christ in the religious life. There are three fundamental elements in Teresian Carmelite life: the Rule our inspiration, the experience and doctrine of St Teresa and St John of the Cross, and the post-council expression of our charism and spirituality in our Constitutions.

Returning to essentials implies a renewed awareness of those elements, which constitute the central nucleus of our charism in the Church. This will allow us to face up to the challenges of the signs of the times in the Church and in the world.

1. What is essential in the Rule of St Albert

Our Constitutions clearly sum up the fundamental elements of the Rule of St Albert when they speak of our earliest 'pattern of life' in Carmel. This synthesis appears in the list of the principal prescriptions governing our life, which are as follows:

- a) "to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ, serving him with a pure heart and a good conscience, looking to him alone for salvation, as we obey our superior in a spirit of faith, with our mind more on Christ than on the superior;
- b) to ponder unceasingly the law of the Lord in the Scriptures, and strengthen our hearts with holy thoughts, so that the Word of God may be always in our hearts and on our lips, and guide us in everything we do;
- c) to come together daily for the celebration of the sacred liturgy;
- d) to put on the armor of God, as we live an intense life of faith, hope and charity, in a spirit of evangelical self-denial and a generous commitment to work, after the example of Paul the Apostle;
- e) to enter into a genuine sharing of life, having at heart the good of the community and the salvation of souls, sustained by the charity of fraternal correction; to hold everything in common under the guidance of a superior placed at the service of his brothers;
- f) above all to lead a life of unceasing prayer in silence and solitude, in accordance with the



gospel admonition to watch and pray;
g) to use prudent discretion in all that we do, especially when this entails more than duty requires of us"³¹.

These points of the Rule continue to be valid, but we need to incarnate and live them with the nuances of the signs of times and places. These fundamental elements of the Rule of St Albert ought to be looked at today from the various ecclesial, social and cultural viewpoints, which are like different windows which help us discover its integral richness and pertinence for responding to the new challenges for our Teresian Carmelite life, expressed in various cultures. These basic points of the Rule continue to have validity, but they must be expressed and lived in the framework of the signs of times and places. In this way, while still searching with dynamic fidelity, we will discover the value and pertinence of the experience of those who have gone before us³². A re-reading of the Rule of Carmel made with this attitude, as the Order already has been doing and has crystallized in the Constitutions, will make it possible to unite our experience as today's Carmelites with that of our antecedents who, guided by the Spirit, lived and transmitted to us a charism and a spirituality: "Let us keep before us our true founders, those holy fathers from whom we descend, for we know that by means of that path of poverty and humility they now enjoy God"³³.

We need to take up the rereading of the Rule made by our Holy Parents and, setting out from our vocational experience, remain open to what reveals in the best way its richness and structure for coming generations. The Rule guides us to what is essential in our vocation: purity of heart, forming an interior world that must be purified in order to be receptive to the living God. The Rule offers a plan for life based on the gospel, simple and unifying, centered on Jesus Christ and within ecclesial communion, with its place in salvation history. It also offers a structured plan for the individual. It states clearly and with restraint the three relationships

within the human person: with God (prayer), with others (community acts) and with oneself (spiritual life and personal meditation). The Rule offers a plan for community life where community has its place, existing in dialogue with authority in the Church and those living in community, including those from outside (guests or people helping the friars) as well as with other communities. In a society where everything has its price, the Rule emphasizes the importance of the gratuity of love.

At present the Order is found in all the continents and in the most diverse of cultures. This requires us to assume the fundamental elements of the Rule in the attempt to express them in other cultures. It is also important to keep in mind a feminine re-reading of the Rule.

Our Holy Parents fashioned, in this way, the re-foundation they made: the absolute primacy of God (to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ), the contemplative dimension as avid listeners to the Word, personal and community life, marked and re-clothed with the weapons of God, by the "penance of reason and discretion"³⁴, by the Teresian ideal of love, detachment, humility³⁵.

Teresa came in contact with the Rule well on in her spiritual life, when she was giving shape to a new plan to live her vocation and was interested in underlining the connection between the new way of life and Carmel in its origins. She adopted the Rule as the basic law of the house; she applied it with spiritual liberty and enriched it with the experience of her vocation. St John of the Cross has no explicit allusion to the Rule, however his teaching reveals and deepens for us its fundamental values: allegiance to Christ, God the sole absolute, abnegation, listening to the Word and responding to it through faith, hope and charity.

Our Holy Parents made a "re-foundation". In going back to the roots of Carmel they opened up new horizons for the Order, in this way replying to the challenges of their era. First of all came their experience, which they set down in their writings, which shed light on our own journey. We have to go back to this experi-

ence and to this doctrine if we are to recover what is essential in the charism and spirituality of the Carmel of Teresa and John of the Cross.

2. What is essential in Teresian experience and teaching

Our Holy Mother was always innately very gifted for interpersonal relationships and friendship. Her own experience lies at the source of our vocational identity in the Church. She was centered on God, "caught up" by him and in him, the Trinitarian mystery. Her conscious awareness was totally occupied with the Divine Persons (God), which launched in her a strong and vivid interpersonal relationship, immersing her in the life of intra-Trinitarian relationship. She experienced the presence and nearness of the Father. "All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself"³⁶. In her Spiritual Testimonies she speaks to us about her experience of the Father who drew near to her and spoke very pleasant words. "Among them, while showing me what He wanted, He told me: I gave you My Son, and the Holy Spirit"³⁷.

By assuming our human nature through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, our Holy Mother tell us, not only assumed our frailty, work and limitations and thus understands our weakness, but he also reveals the direction and the limits of our divine filiation: our human condition and, because of this, he is a companion and true friend: "We are not angels but we have a body. To desire to be angels while we are on earth. . . . is foolishness . . . and in times of dryness, Christ is a very good friend because we behold Him as man and see Him with weaknesses and trials — and He is company for us"³⁸. For this reason St Teresa was opposed to the opinion of many theologians who demanded that one leave aside the humanity of Christ in order to be able to ascend to higher grades of contemplation. She states strongly that there is never a need to separate oneself from Christ's humanity³⁹. According to Teresa's teaching, following Jesus under the action of the Spirit also implies accepting our human nature and

living it as a grace, as a vehicle of grace. This also means experiencing its limitations and weaknesses. To become like Christ is also to become human, or if you wish, to become a person, to be a person.

Naturally, St Teresa teaches us as well that, joined to this process of humanization, there happens a process of divinization. She also defines for us this combination of the human and divine. All Teresian asceticism searches for liberation and the strengthening of the human, the adornment of the person, so that we can be transformed into signs and instruments of the Man-God and the God-Man: "the holier they are the more sociable they are with their Sisters. . . . be affable, agreeable, and pleasing to persons with whom we deal"⁴⁰. Teresa communicates to us her delightful discovering of God and his demands that reach into the core of our human relationships. According to her, the fact that God became human, opens the way for us and makes possible our own humanization, that is carried into the humanization of every structure, always for the service of persons, as Vatican II reminds us: "the human person is and ought to be the beginning, the subject and the object of every social organization"⁴¹. In her project of renewing Carmel, Teresa was totally committed to this alleviation of structures. She managed to pass from a rigid, hieratic attitude, to a gospel humanism: "understand, my father, that I am a friend of intensifying virtue, but not rigor, as will be seen in our houses"⁴² St Teresa always defended tolerance and humanism in structures and in applying laws, since "a weighed down soul cannot serve God well"⁴³.

Joined to the experience of Father and Son, St Teresa was aware of the presence and action of the Spirit in her life. "It seems to me the Holy Spirit must be a mediator between the soul and God"⁴⁴. He it is who guides the life of persons and communicates the faith to them, as to the Apostles. He accompanies us in prayer and lets us experience the presence of the Father and Son.

Her journey, as expressed in the way she

lived and much later in what she taught, consisted of prayer, considered as friendship⁴⁵. It is the “means” and “place” par excellence of her experience of God. St Teresa emphasizes the importance of encounter with the Lord in silence and solitude, yet, though already in the fullness of union with God, she could write “the Lord walks among the pots and pans”⁴⁶. God communicates himself by many paths⁴⁷, not only when we are “off in some corner”⁴⁸.

Prayer is the center and axis of her spiritual message. Understood as friendship it extends to the whole of life, and leads to being God’s friends. For this reason, when she presents her teaching on prayer she insists on being: “what we must be like”⁴⁹. She also speaks of the recreation of being (fraternal love, detachment, humility equaling truth) as “things that are necessary for those who seek to follow the way of prayer”⁵⁰.

This approach allowed her to give instruction on life in community, another extremely essential point in the experience and teaching of Teresa. She compares her communities to the group of the Twelve surrounding Christ and calls them the “college of Christ”⁵¹. It is the Lord who “brought us together here”⁵². Community arises because the Lord summons it and brings it together for a collective gift to him: “to give ourselves to the All entirely and without reserve,⁵³ He makes us into relatives of one another. In this way we become a new family: “You will not find better relatives than those He sends”⁵⁴. Right from the beginning, this prayer-as-friendship is centered on Christ Jesus⁵⁵. In him, the “living book”, she learned “the truths”⁵⁶ of God’s nature and our own, of our call to “being conformed” to him⁵⁷. It must be emphasized that Teresian humanism springs from this very point.

Consecrated persons are transformed into friends and spouses of Jesus, and must be a gift for others: in the Church and in the world.

Prayer, for St Teresa, is not reduced to a few moments, let alone locking us up in ourselves⁵⁸. Thus she educated her nuns to: “dedicate themselves to the good of souls and the increase of His Church”⁵⁹. “Those who truly love this Lord and know their own nature”, their own self becomes a gift⁶⁰. It is not the gift of self that sanctifies; rather it is in giving oneself that one becomes sanctified. In this way they are “fighting for Christ”⁶¹. Mary is the supreme expression of the Carmelite vocation: “you have such a good mother”⁶² we ought to “live our lives as true children of the Blessed Virgin”⁶³, then the reform is “Our Lady’s cause”⁶⁴. “We are “her Order”⁶⁵.



This intimate experience of the three divine Persons and their action in ourselves and in history is vivid and nourishing in prayer that is friendship with the Trinity. Humanism rises out of the incarnation of the Word. Communion is a proclamation of the Gospel when it is fruit of the presence and action of the Spirit stimulating the mission to proclaim the Good News of salvation and to live in faith (humility-truth), hope (detachment) and love⁶⁶.

3. Essentials of the experience and teaching of St John of the Cross

St John of the Cross was also strongly influenced — in his experience and teaching — by the mystery of the tri-personal God who is self-communicating. It was an experience that made him “go out”, to make a personal commitment of his life, to react positively to God’s loving-action in the soul: “if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more”⁶⁷.

"The soul's center is God"⁶⁸. The saint, in explaining the nature of our being children of God, speaks of the desire to understand the deep ways and mysteries of the Incarnation which holds the person transformed in Christ by the action of the Spirit: "One of the reasons urging the soul most to enter this thicket of God's wisdom and to know its beauty from further within is . . . to unite her intellect with God in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation, in which is contained the highest and most savory wisdom of all his works"⁶⁹. The believer desires to penetrate into these "caverns" of Christ to be absorbed, transformed and intoxicated, that is, to live in real and total participation the filial modality of being companions in the divine nature, "equals and companions of God,"⁷⁰ This process of being transformed into children in the Son is brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit, who purifies believers of all that is not



God and gives them the possibility of loving God with God's own love, and to arrive at the fullness of God's image which we are from the moment of our birth⁷¹. St John of the Cross emphasizes that this participation in the intra-Trinitarian life, through the working of the Holy Spirit, makes the soul like God, and so the soul can be raised to God's image and likeness. "No knowledge or power can describe how this happens, unless by explaining how the Son of God attained and merited such a high state for us, the power to be children of God"⁷².

Encounter with God arises always from the theological virtues: the action of God in which, at one and the same time, he himself communicates and is communicated,⁷³ as well as being the one who enables and is the way for

mankind, through the virtues' purifying and unitive aspect⁷⁴. Through the theological virtues, the saint explains the whole process of God gifting himself and the human response: "the sole proximate means to union". In substance, Christian life is uniquely the life of the theological virtues. This approach is also deepened through prayer-contemplation: "it brings to prayer no other support than faith, hope, and love"⁷⁵. The Holy Spirit is the agent of contemplation: "the Holy Spirit will not illumine it (the soul) . . . more than in faith"⁷⁶. He is the "living flame"

who purifies (true and profound "ascesis") and unites, "makes divine". The whole of the spiritual journey is made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is a spiritual journey consisting simultaneously of purification and of union, quite marked in what happened to the saint and was taught by him. It passes through the Night, "moments" of experiencing purification

more intensely, decisive "moments" in the journey consisting of union, which merited special treatment by the Mystical Doctor. Union is the vocation of mankind, a reality in evolution, dynamic, in development, which presides over the believer's journey and "conditioned" and shed light on the whole of St John's exposition⁷⁷. This union, which in its ultimate realization is profound immersion in the mystery of Trinitarian life⁷⁸, brings to fulfillment our filial state in an efficient manner⁷⁹.

Jesus Christ, the Son, the modality of our participation in the Trinitarian mystery⁸⁰, is also, through his passion and death, our own way, who justifies and verifies our "passion and death", our "process of asceticism": to "follow him to Calvary and the sepulchre"⁸¹. This is the

meaning of chapter 7 of the second book of the Ascent, in which the saint offers us his understanding of “the mystery of the door and way which is Christ”⁸², our way⁸³. This is the word he uses in the tiny group of recommendations in 1 Ascent 13:3; thus he sums up the Night: “we enter further, deep into the thicket”.⁸⁴ It is to die to whatever “still impedes the inner resurrection of the Spirit” by “following in his (Christ’s) footsteps”⁸⁵ St John of the Cross presents Jesus as the Word of the Father, in what he said to us, in giving everything to us and in remaining silent. The Father has given us his Son as a brother, companion, our ransom price and pledge. This ought to nourish in us a basic attitude: to fix our gaze on Christ since in him the Father has revealed everything, “since he has finished revealing the faith through Christ, there is no more faith to reveal, nor will there ever be”⁸⁶.

What is essential in the experience and teaching of St John is found, as in St Teresa, in the area of the Trinity: the three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are those who bring about the work of union of the human being with God.⁸⁷ This is accomplished by means of a journey enlightened by Christ, the Word of the Father, and guided by the Holy Spirit. It passes through nights of purification, which lead to maturity in faith, hope and charity. These three fundamental attitudes are the means and preparation for union with God⁸⁸ and guide the practice of an authentic Christian prayer. The humanism of St John of the Cross complements that of St Teresa. This humanism is found in his sensitivity to the beauty of nature, his love for music, his preoccupation for the sick and poor, and particularly in his poetical writings.

4. What is essential in the charism and spirituality of the Teresian Carmel

Vita Consecrata invites religious “courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s World”⁸⁹ In the

Carmel of Teresa and St John this historical dynamism of the charism has been incarnated and enriched by the sanctity of so many of our brothers and sisters who, in various eras and places, were a living testimony of this gift transmitted to our Order, which they converted into a silent and eloquent basis for an authentic creative fidelity. Among others, stand out Therese of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Edith Stein, Raphael Kalinowski, Teresa of los Andes and many others, either officially recognized as blessed or saints or without official recognition.

It is urgent that the spiritual life “must therefore have first place in the program of Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality”⁹⁰. This charismatic experience is a particular mark of our Order, which, through its Constitutions approved by the Church, has obtained the guarantee that “in its spiritual and apostolic charism are found all the objective requisites for achieving personal and communal perfection according to the Gospel”⁹¹.

Number 15 of our Constitutions presents in synthesis the essentials of our charism and spirituality. Reflecting on this will help us to take up again what truly is basic to our vocation and mission. “Having considered our roots in history and our Teresian charism, we are now in a position to outline the principal elements of the way of life we profess:

- a) We are committed to a consecrated life of allegiance to Jesus Christ. In this we are sustained by the companionship, the example and protection of our Lady. Her life of union with Christ we regard, as it were, the prototype of ours.
- b) Our vocation is a grace by which we are called to a ‘hidden union with God’, in a form of life and fraternal sharing in which contemplation and action are blended to become a signal apostolic service of the Church.
- c) This call to prayer embraces our whole life. Sustained by the word of God and the sacred

liturgy, we are led to live in intimate friendship with God. By growing in faith, hope and above all charity, we deepen our prayer life. With our heart thus purified we are enabled to share more closely in the life of Christ himself, and prepare the way for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In this way the Teresian charism and the original spirit of Carmel become a reality in our lives as we walk in the presence of the living God.

- d) The very nature of our charism demands that our prayer and our whole religious life be ardently apostolic, and that we put ourselves at the service of the Church and of all mankind. This must be done in such a way that 'our apostolic activity stems from our close union with Christ'. Indeed we must aim at that most fruitful of all apostolates, which derives from the 'state of union with God'.
- e) It is for this twofold service, contemplative and active, that we share life as brothers in the community. United by the bond of love in fraternal life, we also bear witness to the unity of the Church, faithful in this to our Holy Mother, who wanted her communities to resemble 'the college of Christ'.
- f) This way of life, based on the primitive Rule and the teaching of our Holy Parents, must be sustained by constant evangelical self-denial".

St Teresa deals, as well, with the practical way of living these realities of our charism and spirituality. "The way of life she proposed to us was to be marked with a distinctive style and character. She wanted social virtues and human values to be duly fostered. She inculcated a joyous family spirit, affability in community life, nobility of soul and mutual respect. Our young religious were to be carefully trained; study and culture were to be encouraged. The ascetical practices of our communities were to be at the service of a deeper theological life, and geared to the demands of the apostolic ministry. There was to be a bond of unity between our commu-

nities and of evangelical friendship between our religious"⁹².

SECOND PART

Building Our future in the Light of Our Teresian Carmelite Identity

In the first part we spoke of the principal challenges arising in today's social, cultural and ecclesial world and which seek answers from us. The Teresian Carmel of the future ought to try to reply to them from its own identity in the various fields: social and cultural, religious, ecclesial and Carmelite. In all these areas we now point out some challenges while indicating a few operative conclusions, which will allow us to undertake practical ways of renewal within creative fidelity.

A. Social and cultural aspect

The phenomenon of secularization finds in Carmel's experience an evaluation and guidelines. The value of temporal realities have been sung by our mystics who discovered in all these the imprint of God. At the same time our saints saw them as means for going much further and opening oneself to God's transcendence, present and close to us, but always greater than what we experience. The contemplative and prayer dimension of Carmel ought to be lived and presented as an opening to the transcendent, as a source of commitment and hope in efforts to transform the world, as a way for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue according to the various social and cultural situations.

The challenges of liberty and liberation, fruit of the awareness of human dignity, demand an efficient commitment from all people of good will in the defense and promotion of human rights. Carmel of the future cannot remain detached from these challenges, knowing how Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross and our other saints, masters of the spiritual life, spoke of the dignity of persons created in the imaged of God and called to be transformed in him. St John of

the Cross invites us to consider the greatness of the human being who has the vocation of living the divine life, for this reason "one human thought alone is worth more than the entire world, hence God alone is worthy of it"⁹³.

Globalization puts the world in communication and transforms it, yet it is the cause of poverty and isolates people. Carmelite prayer, understood as friendly conversation with God and a journey of communion with him, allows Carmel of the future to be a sign and instrument of dialogue and communion. The contemplative experience of God, on the other hand, will emphasize the need to include God in working out ethical values. God is their foundation and without him nothing that is authentic can be created.

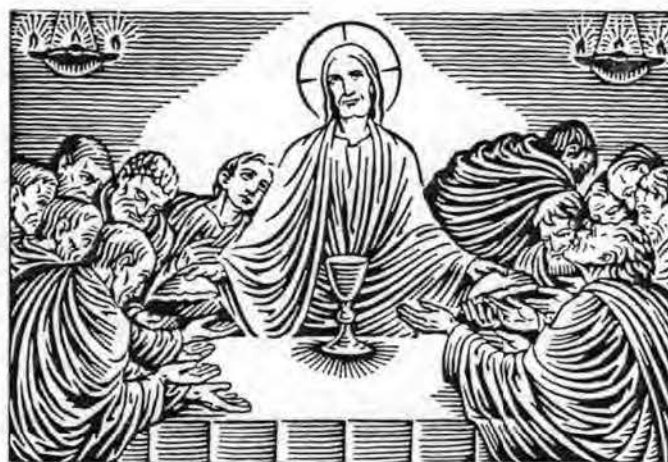
Operative conclusions

1. As Teresian Carmelites we need to incarnate our charism in today's world and, from our identity, face up to the challenges this presents. As a result, it is necessary that right from initial formation help be given to "be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live"⁹⁴.
2. In continuing formation there would be present a deepening understanding of how things stand in the world of the day, in general, and of the various social and cultural contexts in particular.
3. As Teresian Carmelites we must live and transmit our spirituality as a way of authentic liberty and commitment to justice and peace.

B. Religious aspect

In today's world there exists a great thirst for spirituality that often degenerates into spiritualism. The vocation and mission of Carmel is precisely to help go, according to the experience and teachings of our saints, to the root of an authentic spirituality that is superior to superficial experiences of the sacred.

Our communities, centered on God as the absolute, should be schools of prayer which continue to transform their members into true



contemplatives, capable of discovering God present and near in what happens, in person, in what is positive and negative in history — a God who questions us and pleads with us.

This committed contemplation will be capable of revealing the face of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ to people who are groping to find him. As members of the Teresian Carmel we ought to try to diffuse love and knowledge of this God encountered in prayer, who also leads us to be committed to justice and peace.

Living and witnessing to experience of God will take place in the midst of the challenges of each social, cultural and ecclesial environment. We need to give help in discovering God as a source of plenitude, as a liberator, as the God of hope, as a Father and Mother, as somebody always near.

In the effort to find the truth and meaning of life, which is characteristic of humanity's journey in every age, the Word of God is a light, which illumines and directs believers through Christ, the Word of the Father. Carmel, which, from its beginnings, has held as an ideal meditation, night and day, on the Word of the Lord, has before it a need and a duty — the need to live listening to the Word and the duty of educating others to do so. It is an active reading made with the conviction that scripture arises from the life and experience of a people guided by God, who, in faith, have discovered his presence and questioning in history and that he gives them strength to reply. The Bible is the model experience with which we ought deal

with our own experiences. The mission of Carmelite communities will be that of being center of spiritual accompaniment in reading the Bible so that it can be transformed into a prayerful, contemplative and involved approach since "we speak to God when we pray; we listen to him when we read his divine words". In this way a spiritualistic and reductive reading of scripture is avoided and help is given to discover God's call in everyday life and in one's own vocation and mission.

Here lies a challenge for Carmel in the future to renew its life and fulfill its mission.

Carmel of the future is called to offer means that respond to the thirst for God that exists in the present world. Carmelite spirituality has immense possibilities for responding to this thirst for God and for leading people into a deeper relationship with God. All our communities of apostolic and contemplative life, friars, nuns and laity, ought to be committed to the task of living a deep spiritual life based on the Gospel and sharing it. Starting with this, the Teresian Carmel of the future will be able to offer a professional service in the Church whether it be in sharing, or in hospitality offering space and means for this experience to others, or in the creation of Spirituality Centers and Institutes.



Operative conclusions

1. There is a need to rediscover the importance of reading and meditation on the Word of God in connection with life in order to be able to educate the People of God in a prayerful reading of Scripture as a point of departure for an evangelizing commitment. Mary, the prayerful Virgin who listened to the

Word of God and put it into practice, is the model to follow.

2. It is necessary to create national or regional Institutes of Teresian Carmelite spirituality for internal service to the Order, that bring our friars into vital contact with the teaching of our saints interpreted according to the various social, cultural and ecclesial contexts.
3. We ought continue on ahead in opening structure helpful to our service in the field of spirituality at all levels. In particular there is a need to bring about the creation of Spirituality Institutes that form part of the culture of the various environments. At the same time our religious need to be capable of using the means of communication for the service of our spirituality ministry.
4. It is essential to cultivate a renewed fidelity to the special times of personal and liturgical prayer in order to continue growing in a contemplative attitude which allows us to experience God in all circumstances, persons and happenings, and which leads us to a committed contemplation which gives witness to and proclaims the presence of God in our history.
5. We need to make the effort to re-read our Holy Parents so that they can be presented as intermediaries for the religious world in the ecumenical and interreligious fields and various cultures.

C. The ecclesial aspect

Creative fidelity and the demands of our era have brought to the fore the pertinence of the Teresian ideal of being small praying communities that are fraternal and committed to proclaiming the Gospel. These small communities, close to reality, will be called to be signs of the presence of God in the heart of history and in the world. When people are close to life as it is, it will of necessity create a diversity of inculturated Carmelite fraternities. This will demand a change of structures.

These communities will need to stay open to sharing our charism and spirituality with the laity,

who will give the communities the needed nearness to reality in order to take on the great challenges and to form part of this reality. This requires deep revision of the models for life, of organization, of the channels through which witness is given to prayerful and apostolic fraternity. They will have to be communities that can live Carmelite life in a simple, humble and more spontaneous form in ordinary conditions, in order to transform themselves into true places of encounter for those who seek contemplative prayer.

Operative conclusions

1. Formation and renewal of fraternal life in community will have to be one of the priorities of the Order if we wish to be faithful to the Teresian Carmelite charism. Along the lines of the Teresian ideal they will have to try to be communities that are prayerful and fraternal in the service of God's kingdom. This requires bringing about community projects that are authentic and viable and that help overcome growing individualism. Concrete forms of community organization will take into account the requirements set out in our Constitutions and in the various social and cultural settings that require diverse styles of organization and of life.
2. Along the lines set down in the post-synodal document *Vita Consecrata*⁹⁶, our communities will have to be more open to sharing their life, charism and spirituality with the laity. New experiences in this field, accompanied by periodic evaluation, are necessary. Community dialogue, involving those in charge of areas of jurisdiction and with the laity, will manage to establish experiences of this type.
3. We ought to be open to collaborating with the Church in the field of evangelization, particularly in offering our particular service of spirituality also in missionary territories.

D. Carmelite aspect

The beginning point is, and always will be, forming our communities in the charism of

Teresa and John of the Cross with the type of fraternity and the essential values of our vocation in the Church. What remains evident is the necessity of a training in the charism that is capable of making people aware of their personal and community charism and open to giving witness to it and sharing it by participating in the various charisms. This requires an ecclesiology of communion that does not diminish the particular qualities of each charism and does not cover over the differences; instead it makes diversity a source of enrichment. Of particular importance is training in the relationship between the members of the Order and the laity, and in contact with the various contexts of communion and collaboration, not only in the apostolic field but also in how the sources inspiring our charism and spirituality are lived.

One of the means for making more efficient and putting new life into the service that the charism and spirituality of Carmel can offer to people is that of dialogue and collaboration between the various components making up the Teresian Carmelite family, as well as being open to cultural diversity.

In the spiritual and apostolic field, Carmel has a numerous group of affiliated religious congregations and secular institutes. The spiritual source and the various frameworks of the Carmelite charism contribute to making present the wealth of the Carmelite charism and spirituality in the various fields of ministry, in formation and in the new evangelization. In the future we need to increase this work together. Along with this, what will give greater efficiency to the witness and mission of Carmel is a new relationship with Secular Carmel and the other groups that have been born and continue to be born in the heart of the family of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross.

Operative conclusions

1. There is need to promote dialogue and reflection together with the members of Secular Carmel, with the affiliated institutes and the other Teresian Carmelite groups in

order to discover new prospects of living our charism and spirituality and placing it at the service of the Church. Particular topics for dialogue and reflection could be, among others: the experience of the absolute and the centrality of God in our life; fraternal life in community; prayer as a place for experiencing God and as a distinctive quality of the Teresian Carmelite family.

2. It is necessary to give preference to special dialogue with our contemplative Carmelite sisters in order to enrich the perception we have of our charism and spirituality with the feminine outlook which complements and gives balance to the masculine perception through a dimension that is intuitive and affective, realistic, nuptial and maternal, Marian, and which is oriented towards acceptance, intimacy and compassion.

E. New skins for new wine

All these considerations, which we have made from the viewpoint of returning to what is essential in what has been handed down from our Holy Parents, cannot be transformed into reality without a profound change of life, as we previously pointed out, and without adequate restructuring that helps us to live our fraternal life in an improved manner in praying communities, while serving the Church from within our particular charism and spirituality.

This means, above all, being open to an organization of our communities that has very diverse forms and is adapted to different cultures and situations. This will take place in various ways: where a monastic structure prevails, with

a good number in community; in other contexts, the reverse will happen, the solution will be to have much smaller communities that are more inserted into the reality of the people. In some places the accent will be placed on some aspects, in others these will have to take second place, but there will always exist commitment to preserve essential values.

The challenge arising from what is essential is how to find the key to open the door leading to new replies for new situations. We are called to run the risk of faith in order to journey along the unknown ways of the Spirit. This demands that we bring our charism up to date and, at times, redesign our presences keeping in mind certain criteria, various viewpoints and concrete methods.

We need, above all, to live the identity of our charism and know how to transmit it in an intelligible manner, faithful to the Church and in dialogue with things as they stand. An authentic restructuring ought to be guided by these criteria. The viewpoints ought to be the signs of times and places, in a particular manner that of inculturation which leads to unity in diversity.

Practical methods open a range of possibilities that vary from internal restructuring of some of our presences and activities (rearranging our aims, finding new addressees, changing our role, reducing or amplifying it according to occasions, opening ourselves to collaboration with the Secular Order and associated laity) to the redistribution of our resources (strengthening some presences, diminishing others). On other occasions we may need to close down some of our houses, when they no longer correspond to the present day conditions of our Teresian



Carmelite life, our personnel, or our needs. Lastly, and this is the way of creative fidelity, we might need to open up other presences, which would be more consonant with our charism and with present day challenges in different social, cultural and ecclesial contexts.

Operative conclusions

1. The Provinces and Circumscriptions will make a study of the circumstance in which they find themselves and the questions that the signs of times and place present them, in order to consider seriously if there is need to organize a plan of restructuring that would allow an improvement in our fraternal life in community and the offering of a more professional Carmelite service in the local Churches.
2. As a basis and foundation of an authentic renewal, a program of continuing formation will be organized in Provinces and other circumscription that will help to deepen knowledge of present day theology on consecrated life and the spirituality of our Order.
3. At national or regional levels will be studied the way of growing in collaboration in order

to improve living our Teresian Carmelite life, for formation and for continuing ahead with common initiatives characterizing our presence and service in the Church.

CONCLUSION

We cannot deny a glorious and fruitful past that has contained its light and certain areas of shade. We certainly must face up to the new and great challenges in society and in the Church. Because of this we need a clear Christian, religious and Teresian Carmelite identity. Returning to what is essential is the way to keep alive this gift of the Spirit to the Church: a universal and multicultural Church, a sign and instrument of God's plan in this era of transition.

Carmel in the Third Millennium will have much to live and give witness to, if it is capable of returning to what is essential and of discarding those social, cultural and ecclesial accretions that are solely the fruit of an era, of a mentality or a social-cultural context. Gospel self-denial, contemplation, Teresian fraternity, will continue to be valid but with a renewed commitment to the dynamic values of creative fidelity, to accepting risks with decision and confidence, to

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conversion, justice and love, and to personal responsibility. Obviously, there is need to have the Holy Spirit as the foundation for moving about in the dark night of faith guided by love. On the other hand the long and difficult journey we have ahead will not be a source of discouragement. There is no doubt that we must always be setting out from prayer, like St Teresa and St John of the Cross, so that life "in Christ" and "according to the Spirit" can inundate our existence. Yet, at the same time, there is need to demonstrate the fruit of prayer in service to others. As St Teresa said, "the purpose of this spiri-

tual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works"⁹⁷.

May Mary, the Virgin of the Visitation, as Vita Consecrata calls her, teach us to "go to the help of human needs in order to relieve them", but, above all, to carry Jesus with us, proclaiming his wonders. May she, who knew how to do the Father's will, "with willing obedience, intrepid poverty and welcoming in her fruitful virginity"⁹⁸ ask the Lord for all the graces we need to live as children of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross and be prophetic witnesses of God in the New Millennium. ■

Notes

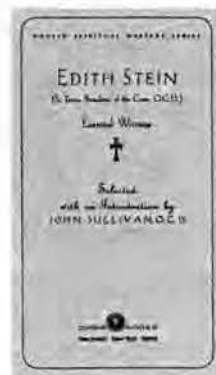
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FOURTH PART

To the union of the will Ten Chapters

Here we approach contemplative prayer. Teresa places the beginning of this stage in the fourth Dwelling Place. Saint John of the Cross calls this period that of beginners.

Let us note first of all that, to encourage us, Fr Marie-Eugene begins by showing the part that God takes in this advance to him, which will be difficult; at the determining part where the soul is passive, it submits to the divine communications. Thus will it be in the fifth part of the book, "divine enrichments".

The first two chapters, "first experiences of contemplative prayer" and "God light and God love" turn us toward conversion: the divine source in the most intimate depths of the soul draws us. God acting by the gifts of knowledge, intelligence and wisdom creates a supernatural recollection and calls our being to a movement of interiorization. At first his action reaches in us "the perceptible powers and is progressively localized in the more interior faculties of intellect and will" (what John of the Cross calls "the senses". This influence produces Saint Teresa's prayer of quiet with the predominance of a certain perception of love that captivates the will but leaves the other faculties in agitation and disarray. According to Saint John of the Cross, this is the prayer of contemplative dryness or the prayer of faith, with the predominance of the divine light that, positing itself on the intellect, produces darkness and powerlessness but creates a certain general, indistinct and loving knowledge of God. This was the habitual prayer

of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. Ordinarily it is also ours.

In these first experiences of prayer the action of the Wisdom of God is intermittent — there is no constant union with God.

The Nights

"O night that guided me." In this part, this theme of Saint John of the Cross runs through the third to the seventh chapters inclusive.

He makes us understand this: it is God who makes saints. The night, Fr Marie-Eugene tells us, is the entire journey of the soul to God. In these chapters, we are dealing with the "night of sense" that adapts this part of our being, so bound to the external world, to the spirit. For the valiant, this will later be "the night of the spirit", the profound purification that adapts the spirit to God and makes union possible.

Why this term "night":

- on account of the goal of the spiritual life: God, infinitely perfect, incomprehensible;
- on account of the way: faith, mysterious to ourselves;
- on account of the detachment that the soul must practice to return to God (the active night).

The texts of John of the Cross quoted by Fr Marie-Eugene grapple with the notion of attachment, the desire of all goods with covetousness, the root of sin.

Throughout the spiritual life God will demand an energetic collaboration to this plan. The deprivation of goods leads to detachment. Detachment brings about a rectification of our faculties, which it frees from their evil tendencies. It produces a return to God by the renunciation of self. And that leads us to spiritual poverty. This can be seen in the teachings of the

Catechism of the Catholic Church and in the evangelical law.

This passive and active purification occurs during prayer with the painful puritive effects of powerlessness and anguish; one will even be able to see pathological tendencies come to the surface. But it also has beneficial effects for it gives true self-knowledge, knowledge of one's poverty before the grandeur of God; it produces a calming of the senses, which sets the spirit free.

The soul must keep its faith awakened, sound, pure and detached from everything, must respect the action of God and tend toward the peaceful region of the spirit with patience and love because a transformation is taking place. "Outside of prayer. The active night", the soul must work with all its energy to reduce the opposition between God and sin, between grace and its evil tendencies. The Christian must be convinced that the Wisdom of love is there, living, active, watching over all, full of solicitude. It makes use of fortunate and unfortunate events and situations.

Fr Marie-Eugene places the chapter "obedience" after this. It is one of the great virtues of the spiritual life. It unites man to God by submitting him to the divine will manifested by God himself or his representatives; it also unites him in the carrying out of all details of the mission entrusted to the Christian.

In all the states of life, as in fidelity to the church, obedience, as submission of the spirit (and not simply exterior submission), brings about participation in the light of wisdom and its richness. Such are the saints who are prestigious in the accomplishment of God's will. Thus by doing the part expected by God, the Christian, with errors and falls, acquires the knowledge of love, which is the knowledge of humility.

This progression in the spiritual life leads to a spiritual stage of the utmost importance in the way of perfection: "the union of the will" linked with "the mystery of the church". Such is the union I have desired my whole life and for which I have never ceased to ask our Lord (Teresa of Avila).

The union of the will is an impulse of God by a merciful, loving intervention of Wisdom on the will which thus becomes abandoned and supple under his motions. The soul receives a qualified love, an abundant infusion of charity, which brings about in it a true transformation.

This impulse is effected in two ways: by an extraordinary mystical grace (this was the case for Teresa of Avila), during which there was a true union of God with the essence of the soul although with no awareness on Teresa's part. The soul goes out from these secret regions where God has led it marked with a certain seal which bears within it a mission. This is the shortcut.

Or else in the life of the Christian practicing the ordinary way of the gift of self, of detachment and humility: the Holy Spirit alone mercifully intervenes at a given moment and places the soul in this state of union which has now become stable.

Here we arrive at the prayer of union.

The Mystery of the Church, "that they may be one." This transformation, says Fr Marie-Eugene, places the soul at the threshold of a new world, that of its incorporation into Christ in the church, of its insertion in the whole Christ lived as an actual event. In the soul arise powerful desires to glorify God and a fundamental orientation toward the salvation of souls. It is the apostle who is formed and whom God wants to make use of for his designs.

While guarding necessary prudence, for the union is not yet definitive and can yet be lost through the malice of the devil, warns Saint Teresa, the soul must give itself and let itself be carried away by the movement of the thought and of the love of Christ who loved his church and gave himself up for it.

The union of the will, says Fr Marie-Eugene, is the point of departure for the last stages to sanctity: the purifying, redemptive work of the sixth Dwelling Place that will precede the union and the perfect gift to the church of the seventh Dwelling Place.

PART FIVE

Holiness for The Church: Nine Chapters. The sixth and seventh Dwelling Places — the Proficient and the Perfect

To be born again in the Spirit. These stages, for the proficient and the perfect, lead us to what the grace received in seed form in baptism promises us: divine filiation in the Spirit, the resemblance of Christ. The human person, the Christian, transformed in his profound being by divine love possesses the resemblance to the only Son, Jesus, the God-Man. This perfect love gives him a knowledge by connaturality of God and, uniting him with Christ, makes him accomplish the task that the Holy Spirit desires for the church, to become saint and apostle.

He will participate in the life and operations of the Holy Trinity in glory. It is good to read the lives of the saints and their writings for they shed light on these regions, these divine workshops, where Wisdom brings about the sanctity of souls.

The stage of the sixth Dwelling Place is the progressive approach to the summit. Before opening to perfect union with God, the transforming union of the seventh Dwelling Place, it includes a period of very profound purification called “the night of the spirit” (the image of darkest night) which is also the night of inestimable spiritual enrichment.

Divine Enrichment: It is God himself who brings it about – Chapter 1

By opening this last part with this chapter (on which we insist), Fr Marie-Eugene emphasizes, in the first place, the work of love because it is the truth that explains everything in this supreme stage of ascension and that gives the real, living perspective into which must be inserted the phenomena encountered there, namely sufferings and works.

The action of God is localized in the center of the soul, which is the dwelling place of God. Wisdom is at work in the sixth dwelling place,

in a soul already wounded by love, and which must allow itself to be led by the hand there where she would not know where to go. It is the unknown way of Saint John of the Cross. To grasp what occurs in this dark night of contemplation where God works in secret, Fr Marie-Eugene takes up the image of fire consuming the wood: the same flame, the Holy Spirit, that later will glorify it, now penetrates it to purify it. These assaults of love in the soul resemble those of material fire that attacks a beam, envelops it, dries it, penetrates it and transforms it into fire. This growing love in the soul possesses a quality, a strength and a weight that brings it ceaselessly to God. In this period, some will be the object of supernatural, extraordinary favors that will have as a principle effect the development of love. But it is very important to note that it is by purifying, transforming and uniting to God that love becomes the source of light, of knowledge of God as he is, but which remains enveloped in darkness. And this concerns all Christians.

Quoting Saint John of the Cross, Fr Marie-Eugene says: the supernatural truths are inscribed in our soul in two ways: by means of faith in the understanding and by love in the will. From this inter-penetration springs forth, thanks to the gift of wisdom, an affective experience and a fruitful knowledge. Love immerses the soul in God like the drop of water in the ocean and by this contact makes it experience God in itself and gives it knowledge by connaturality (. . .). This subtle, secret knowledge (. . .) will lead to each of the divine persons, perceived in a more or less distinct manner.

Fr Marie-Eugene will insist on this knowledge by connaturality, this dawn, which will become continuous in the seventh Dwelling Place for, independent of any vision or extraordinary perception, it will spring forth from the interior experience of love, or the grace of baptism fully developed. Love has also formed the perfect apostle whose dynamic love follows Christ wherever he leads. In speaking of God’s ways of acting to effect this transformation, Fr

Marie-Eugene gives the example of the saints, in particular Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, who in her simplicity brings these things within our reach.

Extraordinary favors – Chapter 2

These favors indicated above, whose discernment is delicate, are a particular expression of divine action, special forms of God's direct action on the soul, that produce a distinct knowledge, either by the help of an impression on the senses, or by an infusion of light in the intellect. They are to be put into perspective in this process, says Fr Marie-Eugene, like flashes of precious light, but are not to be placed in the forefront, even if some have a powerful charismatic character. He adds: they are not necessary for sanctity, nor are they a proof of it and they disappear when the union with God becomes perfect. For from this uniting prayer springs forth a loftier knowledge, the fruit of love.

The Night of the Spirit: the drama — Chapter 3 **The effects of the night – Chapter 6**

This is the place of the rebirth of the Spirit. So that union with God may be possible, the soul must become very pure (pure spirit). This purification takes place in the substance of the soul; the divine fire comes forth from the depths, and it wounds to glorify, cure and transform.

The saints tell us that this is a mysterious drama in the soul, the supernatural escaping from observation, and they describe its effects; the description is harsh and makes us consider what sin is. The painful effects felt are only the opposite of the sublime underlying rebirth during which the Holy Spirit is present who gives support and sometimes manifests his presence. This night of the spirit bears two interrelated aspects, the moral purification and the psychological reversal about which Fr Marie-Eugene has said that it is an almost marvelously surprising occurrence.

Causes of the Night (the dark night) during

which the Good Shepherd veils his face for the coming of the Spirit. We are at the level of a lofty contemplation, secret wisdom infused by the Holy Spirit.

The psychological reversal

The fire of divine love, at the center of the soul, wants to inflame the spirit. God wants to reign as master over all activity of the faculties; the faculties offer resistance and a certain inaptitude for being moved by him for that is contrary to their normal ways of acting (fundamental imperfection).

Moral purification

The purity of God confronts the impurity of the soul for the tendencies of sin (attachments, actual and habitual imperfections) are rooted in it, at the base of the faculties, thus making the movement to God more difficult. The purification of the senses (fourth Dwelling Place) was only a prelude (like cutting a branch from a tree), that of the spirit is like uprooting the tree. But this will bring about the purification of the whole being.

Painful Effects

The divine, blinding light given by the infused contemplation will make more evident the opposition between God and the soul. It sees its sin, particularly the voluntary tendencies (like pride or egoism) and their manifestations in ordinary life. In the face of this strongly accusatory contrast the soul feels overwhelmed, far from God, abandoned and even separated from God. Its faculties (memory, intellect and will) find no support and feel powerless to grasp or to act. It will know the anguish of the void. God will allow the devil to enter the combat, especially when the holiness of the one who submits to the painful rebirth becomes his personal enemy. To the interior sufferings will be added external sufferings due to the events of life.

All this brings about an upheaval in the soul; an intense spiritual suffering that has repercussions in the body (illnesses, psycholog-

ical disturbances). It is a kind of purgatory. Fr Marie-Eugene, bringing this into a human perspective, compares this state to Gethsemani.

The soul's cooperation will be in the surpassing, the going out of self, the continual gaze on Christ, in abandonment and recourse to Mary, mother of the poor. But through all this, in the depths of self, the soul will find peace.

The inestimable benefits

Proceeding from love, the light not only reaches the intellect, but it penetrates the entire being which it makes supple and forms it according to its demands. The soul is no longer directed to the external world to find its nourishment; it is only attentive to God, the source that springs forth from its depths. Its faculties, also freed from the troubles and functional disorders that effect it, are dominated by love. In their turn, the theological virtues are also brought to their perfection. The soul clothes itself in white, green and red tunics, that is in faith, hope and love, as St John of the Cross states, which preserve it from the devil, the world and the flesh.

Thanks to the gift of knowledge and understanding, it possesses a love of very lofty esteem for God. The will dominated by love manifests a strength, a rectitude, a firmness of adhesion and an ardent desire to please God in everything. This will lead it to perfect union with the will of God.

These descriptions, as Fr Marie-Eugene indicates, could leave us to believe that this is a clinical operation. Since the divine fire is intelligent, it assumes for each one a special form shaped by the daily life and events that form the background. It is interesting to note that the action of the Wisdom of love is in harmony with the temperament that has been given for the accomplishments of its designs. Though the Holy Spirit tries in a special manner those who are to be leaders in the church, he also sustains them by singular graces in view of their mission.

It is good to note that in transforming, God leaves to the person his human nature and his sinfulness. This experience is necessary to safe-

guard humility and to always keep flowing the sources of mercy. The saints at the summit of their life manifest an ardent love impregnated with filial fear.

Toward the middle of this long state that is the night occurs "the Spiritual betrothal" – Chapter 7 Evangelical promises (Jn 14:21)

They inaugurate by a rapture the most intense period of preparation for perfect union with God. This will be the perfect accomplishment of the evangelical promises made to us: Whoever loves me will keep my commands, my Father will love him and we will come to him and dwell in him. This betrothal is a touch of God in the substance of the soul, enriching it with all kinds of benefits and with love. This touch brings about a very lofty knowledge, ascendancy and union. God herein reveals his definitive choice. This soul is his and he will protect it against all the assaults of the world and the devil.

Since its fidelity has been acquired, God will incite the soul to offer him great services for the church. These difficult works will assure the last purifications, accompanied by a supernatural richness associated with the accomplishments of the Holy Spirit. The accomplishment of the mission is linked with the powerful quality of grace: fidelity of love by works and the contemplative gaze. It was at this stage that Teresa of Avila undertook her reform and received the power to communicate to others her supernatural riches. The dynamism of love is such that it will lead the soul to complete union with God. This will be the transforming union that constitutes the state of the spiritual marriage.

The "soul's conduct" (Chapter 4) and "help and models in the night" (Chapter 5) Hope.

In these chapters Fr Marie-Eugene will give to the doctrine of Saint Therese of the Child the place it merits.

In this night of the spirit the cooperation of

the soul finds its expression in the virtue of hope that expects everything from God Himself, and his powerful intervention in order to attain union with him. Hope is the gaze of the soul fixed above (the helmet of salvation). It manifests an active, dynamic character, to press on, the wings of the spiritual life, says Fr Marie-Eugene. But in this night of generalized stagnation where it must feed on God, the passive aspect of hope is the most important, he states. The soul can only sigh before God to attract him, and this is what he waits for: these sighs which spring forth from the depths and open them to his action.

Hope bears on what one does not possess. All possession is opposed to it, all spirit of ownership having to do with no matter what goods, even the most spiritual. It thus demands the purification of the memory and its perfection is found in spiritual poverty: Blessed are the poor in spirit (Mt 5:3).

Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, thanks to her unheard of experiential knowledge of God-Love grasped this in an outstanding fashion. It is her entire doctrine of spiritual childhood: to liberate the filial instinct of grace by constantly having recourse to God like a weak child by means of confidence and abandonment. Confidence and poverty are basic virtues that cultivate a heroic energy in the ordinary actions of one's state of life. This way of ascension is not reserved to the perfect for it is open to all souls, states Fr Marie-Eugene.

Jesus and Mary

This rebirth revealed to Nicodemus by Jesus himself can only be accomplished by the meditation of Christ, the God-Man, in close union with him. He is more than ever the companion of this hour, even if he seems to be very distant. The soul must nourish itself by gazing on him, considering him in his suffering face, in his abandonment to the will of his Father, in his love for us and in the hope of his triumph.



Christian perfection is in this resemblance and this affinity. The painful experience of the sixth Dwelling Place makes the soul penetrate into the depths of the Passion (the Holy Face) and reveals to it the union accomplished therein.

Christ is not alone for his Mother, the Virgin Mary, mother of all, mediatrix of grace, has a providential role in the struggle against the forces of hell and in the night of the soul. She is mother of mercy, the star shining in the night. As in the gospel, the discrete presence of Mary is found throughout *I want to see God*. The lives of the saints show us their closeness with Mary. Such is the case with Therese of the Child Jesus.

The fullness of love, of the Christian life. Perfect contemplation, sanctity Transforming union – Chapter 8

I am the vine. you are the branches (Jn 15:5)

Transforming union designates the reality that constitutes the state of spiritual marriage inaugurated by an extraordinary favor received by Teresa of Avila. This reality is perfect union with God by transformation and resemblance of love.

The grace of baptism has penetrated the soul and the faculties with divine life; it immerses it in the infinite brazier that is God and maintains it there by a constant and definitive union (confirmation in grace). But it must be appreciated that the grace properly belongs to the soul and remains truly distinct from God; we thus see that God respects the hu-

man personality he creates and exalts.

Even though it has arrived at this state, love can only progress. It will open itself to the beatific vision when death breaks the wrapping of the body. God has become the soul's all. They are bound to each other.

The knowledge of connaturality, the clarity of the dawn, the most pure light of living faith, permits it to perceive in its center the presence of the three divine Persons who have taken possession of it and dwell within it. Such is the intellectual vision of Saint Teresa of Avila that en-

lightens the data of faith. This is Therese's experience of merciful love. This is the manifestation of the Word-Spouse and the flame of the Trinity of John of the Cross.

Thus the soul discovers the active, dominating presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who has created this equality of love. He is the master but the soul possesses a sovereign liberty; it also can command. The Spirit of love is caught in his trap. He has begotten a child of God and the rights of sonship must be respected.

This union has for its goal identification with Christ Jesus, the resemblance of Christ, the resemblance of the depth of being, not a superficial resemblance, the resemblance to the Word, for it is an incarnation of divine life in us, says Fr Marie-Eugene. We have become sons, able to make divine acts. And that, for the accomplishment of the total Christ, the church. In fact, the whole being, body, soul, and all the faculties (John of the Cross) are directed to the service of God. After her offering to merciful Love, Therese of the Child Jesus had a penetrating insight into the saving love of Christ. She gave herself entirely with him for sinners and for the church, keeping nothing for herself. Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, in union with Christ, the external richness of the saint and his apostolate are considerable.

This is why Fr Marie-Eugene concludes with "the saint in the total Christ" (Chapter 9). First of all he explains that charism — grace and mission for the church, (like priesthood) — cannot be considered as power in itself. Bound to supernatural love, perfection is found in their union. Human collaboration is inscribed in God's designs and fidelity to mission is the condition for his friendship.

Fr Marie-Eugene then takes up the growth stages of grace to show clearly that true richness springs forth from fully developed supernatural love. In the sixth and seventh Dwelling Places the saints discover their mission, given to some by the grace of "paternity or maternity". Possessed by God they accomplish these great works that stand the test of time and in

the total Christ, the church, they find their end, their perfection and their glory.

Relying on grace, on the favors received by the great saints of Carmel and on their insightful writings, Fr Marie-Eugene wants to instruct us on the richness we receive in baptism: to truly become sons of God.

Even if we are only a very modest stone in the building up of the church, we are destined to the same fullness of love and the same glory. We must make fruitful use of the talent we have received. Love is the only perfect gift here below. ■

CARMEL'S DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH
Wisdom for the New Millennium
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June 13 – June 16, 2002

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Note: Meals on Thursday (other than patio reception), Dinner on Friday and lunch on Saturday are on your own.

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