



SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITES
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LETTER TO THE DISCALCED CARMELITE SECULAR ORDER

TWENTY YEARS OF GRACE

Dear brothers and sister in the Secular Carmel: Peace and Hope!

It is with great joy for me to address you, once again, brothers and sisters in Secular Carmel in all the world, a family on the path, in the attention to the Voice of our Lord in the present days of our history. There is an event that focusses this letter written for you, it is the twenty years of the OCDS Constitutions, that are much more than a simple legislative and organizational text, they comprehend a Project for an alliance in continuous renovation and updating.

Ever since the foundation in Holy Land, Carmel has made it own a spirituality based in the prophet Elijah's spirit, in the presence of Blessed Virgin Mary, and in "obsequium Jesu Christi". In the center of the Carmelite Charism is the prayer and contemplation, lived in communion-community. This spirituality has inspired generations of men and women in many parts of the world; granting them motivation, a path towards sanctity in the search of the union with God.

But it has been the genius and experience of Teresa of Jesus, along with the first discalced Carmelite, saint John of the Cross, who have conformed an identity and a charisma that, rooted in the old tree of Carmel, define and inspire the life of the present secular discalced Carmelite. And we know that the treasure of the spirituality and the richness of the path of Saint Teresa and Saint John it's not exclusive only to them or destined only to religious men and women, friars or nuns, but essentially a provocative experience of God and a path walked in community.

A charism of a religious family isn't defined or worn out by their founders, it rather grows in richness and continuous updating thru the experience of new sons and daughters that, deepening the experience of the founder, with creative fidelity and without mimicry, and welcome the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to live, with freshness, the passion, the risk and the grace that inspired our founders. Today we are in great need to listen one another, lay, nuns and friars, so that the charism may be alive and that it may nourish our identity in our current history. Let us not be afraid to listen to one another!

The Teresian spirituality and Carmelite has enriched the life of the Church and has granted great Saints brothers and sisters that are witnesses that it is possible to any Cristian to live with depth and in its fullness the friendship and union with God. Vatican Council II has acknowledged that "all faithful people, out of any condition, are called to live in a fully manner the Christian life and the perfection of the charity" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 40). You, secular Carmelites of all the world, are for me living witnesses of this charism, living in the presence of God, bearing witness of his love and mercy.

Today we want to remember an important event in our Carmelite family. Twenty years ago, on June 16th 2003, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life (now a Dicastery), approved the text of the *Constitutions of the Secular Order*, after having meticulously revised them, and declared: “May the new text of the *Constitutions of the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites* be a really effective means, so that its members can reinvigorate more and more their baptismal consecration in the concrete situations of family, social, civilian and ecclesial life.” (cfr. *Decree* Prot. 228 1-2003). Thru this decree, our Holy Mother the Church expressed that the vocation of the Secular Carmelite is truly a path towards sanctity.

The *Constitutions of the Secular Order* expresses the elements that comprehend the vocation. They help the Secular Carmelite to understand and live in all its fulness his vocation to love and serve the Church and our world. The *Constitutions* are divided in seven parts:

1. Identity, values and commitment.
2. The following of Jesus Christ in the lay Teresian Carmel.
3. Witnesses of the experience of God and the fraternal communion.
4. In the service of God’s project.
5. With Mary Mother of Jesus.
6. Formation in the Carmelite school.
7. Organizations and government.

I. IDENTITY, VALUES AND COMMITMENT

The secular Carmelites find their identity in the Teresian and Carmelite spirituality. A center out of which they can live their vocation to sanctity in the midst of the world, “are sons and daughters of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Teresa of Jesus” (C [=Constit. OCDS] 1). This identity is present in all the environments of their lives, helps them to have a Cristian and Carmelite perspective. The secular Carmelites find inspiration mostly in the life and example of the blessed Virgin Mary, saint Joseph, Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint John of the Cross and the prophet Elijah, and are called to live in communion with God and with the brothers and sisters. Each secular Carmelite is committed, thru his promise, to live a life of prayer, communion and service to the Order, in the Church and in the world, from his own Carmelite identity.

In his book, *Welcome to the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelite*”, father Aloysius Deeney, OCD, says that “an important aspect of this commitment is that of community life. A person that desires to be a member of the OCDS has to be able to form a community, to be part of the group that is dedicated to common goal, to show interest for the other members, to be supportive in the search of a life of prayer, and to be capable of receiving help from others”¹.

This identity and values are a dynamic and living heritage, that with every day that passes is deepen and ever new. Refers to a fire that burns and a living fountain, he who is not burned in this fire and doesn’t drink from this fountain every day, betrays his heritage. Fidelity now is today, here. In love we do not live out of house rent and all the memory of the past is to exercise love today.

II. THE FOLLOWING OF JESUS IN THE LAY TERESIAN CARMEL

Jesus’s invitation is ongoing: “Come, follow me” (cfr. Lk 18;22: Mt 16;24: Mk 1; 17: Lk 9;23). For a Secular Carmelite “Christ is the center of our life and of Cristian experience... [They] are called to live the demands of following Christ in union with Him, by accepting His

¹ Aloysius Deeney, *Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites*, ICS Publications, Washington, 2009, p.17.

teachings and devoting themselves to Him” (C 10). Falling in love with Jesus, listening to his Word, growing day by day in intimacy with Him, making our own his desires and his will, longing to know him daily and listening what beats in his heart like the beloved disciple. The secular Carmelites are available to share with others their experience of God, bearing witness to the living risen Christ, that is capable to transform the life of those who trust him, those who let themselves be looked upon and be loved by Him.

III. WITNESSES OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD AND FRATERNAL COMMUNION

We are all called to “go to the world and preach the good news” (Mc 16;15). Jesus sends us to proclaim that “God is love” (1Jn 4;16), that there is hope, that we have a God that accompanies us and has loved us so much that in the fulness of times, “sent us his Son” (Ga 4,4). We need to stop fearing to say what God has given us. The first disciples didn’t have academic degrees, their school was that of living with Jesus, undergoing his paschal experience, and let themselves to be transformed with Blessed Virgin Mary by the experience in Pentecost. Each one of the disciples was transformed, with their gifts and weaknesses, in a channel of Jesus in the world.

Nevertheless, before going out to proclaim to the world that this love transforms and heals, we ourselves are immersed in a personal experience, in order to be witnesses of the love of God that, by his grace, has been granted to us, and to announce it to the world with courage and simplicity, more thru our life itself, than thru only words, and also thru the words sprung out of silence and contemplation. It is essential to take care and cultivate prayer life: “the time to be with God and to strengthen their relationship with Him so that they can be true witnesses to His presence in the world” (C 21). Thru prayer, contemplation, fraternity and apostolic life, the secular Carmelites bear witness of their friendship with Jesus Christ and express their first mission which is to be a true community of prayer, on the go and missionary: “the local community of the Secular Order of the Teresian Carmel, a visible sign of the Church and of the Order, is a place to live and promote personal and communal fellowship with God in Christ and in the Spirit and with other brothers and sisters” (C 24a). We acknowledge that this is our first mission and apostolate, living that which has been granted to us. Not many words or speeches, the many reunions with endless words, or pointless arguments and many times ideological in nature, of premeditated approaches, instead of a humble openness to listen of what God wants, in a *Lectio Divina* that rises out of silence, out of life itself and searches the truth, without self-defensive approaches. Carmel is not a school of ideas well reassured or that of an already enclosed doctrine, but of a school of a God experience and gratitude, creativity and enthusiasm that is born out of the Holy Spirit. When we dialogue searching the truth, empty of ideological approaches, and with the desire to understand, before God, the truth opens itself a path out of somewhere that we didn’t imagine. ‘Ideas are not imposed but proposed’, said Pope John Paul II (*Meeting with young people*, Air Base of Cuatro Vientos in Madrid, 3 May 2003). Let us cultivate a dialogue without impositions and without fear of letting our hearts speak, creating environments of trust, without silences that hide hurt feelings, with time to true listening and shared silence.

IV. IN THE SERVICE OF GOD’S PROJECT

The vocation of the Secular Carmelite has a missionary dimension. Out of its friendly relation with the Lord springs a desire to share this experience with the Order, with the Church and the entire world: “The vocation of the Secular Carmelite is truly ecclesiastical” (C 26). For this purpose, the service to the church is a fundamental part of its calling. Saint Teresa of Jesus founded the discalced Carmelites precisely to help and rebuild the Church from her own reality. The secular Carmelites place special attention onto serving the local dioceses in which is located

their community. Its members promote the communion with the bishop and with the parishioners of the dioceses. The secular Carmelite brings with him the Carmelite charism wherever he is present. In his book *“Orden Seglar del Carmelo Descalzo: Regla, Constituciones y Comentario”*, Father Pedro Zubieta, OCD, highlights that “the lay member of the secular order, commits himself to live gospellike sanctity in the world and with proper means of a lay person: matrimonial and familiar love, the use of the temporal goods with gospel sensibility, the common responsibilities of a lay persona in the family, society, coping with trust in God the challenges of life and the struggles and the everyday difficulties. To transform the world from within it, like the evangelical yeast” (2003, 56-57). The acknowledgement of being part of the Secular Order and its formation give the secular Carmelites strength and motivation to persevere (“determined determination”) in prayer and in apostolical service. I invite you all to be creative in your transmission of the Carmelite spirituality. We can mutually cooperate, in many environments, each one of us from our religious or lay being, but sharing what we have. Without fear of not being humble. The lay people are not small acolytes of the friars, you are mature bringers of the charism, competent witnesses, humble and docile to the Holy Spirit, but capable of recreating with new initiatives the Carmelite spirituality, without infant arrogance, without clumsy self-sufficiencies, we all are, in this hour, channels of a charism, that has been granted to us, in order to make it shine. Let us help each other to give wings to the charisma present in our brothers, to discern together what the Holy Spirit suggests us. Do not be afraid to make suggestions and to listen, to take risks and to acknowledge what needs to be corrected and to grow! We do not preach of ourselves!

V. WITH MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Ever since its origins, the Carmelite Order has been accompanied by the loving presence of Mary, under the title of Lady of Mount Carmel. It is to her that the first church that existed in the Order was dedicated to, and the official name of the Order is Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. The Blessed Virgin Mary accompanies the secular Carmelite and she “is present in a special way, most of all as a model of faithfulness in listening to the Lord and in service to Him and to others” (C 4). Therefore, the vocation of the Secular Carmelite can’t be understood without the presence of the Virgin Mary. She is mother that protects and takes care, teacher that guides, encourages and educates, sister and friend that accompanies and inspires a type of community. Mary is present always in each circumstance of our lives. The icon of Mary that inspired the beginnings of the first Carmelites was that of the Virgin of the Visitation that, bringing the mystery of God within her bowels, directs herself towards her cousin Isabel to serve her. Perfect image of the contemplation. The secular Carmelite is, like Mary, a contemplative, “faith pilgrim” that, preserving and meditating everything in his heart (Lk 2;19), allows that God may enlighten in his own time, the appropriate moment, each event in life. We also want to discover God alive in the present day in history, discerning together his paths and listening, like Mary, the desire of God to build his kingdom on earth. I invite all Secular Carmelites, in this time, to rediscover the presence of Mary in our lives, and to renew the experience and Marian spirituality of the Order, to evangelize her devotion and intensify a deep Marian theology, clear and creative, that may make us committed to a family project in communion and the care of the dignity of her children. Return to Mary so that Carmel may be renewed. Help me to renew the Marian experience in the Order, so that She may kindle our lives and may make us day by day more her children in his Son!

VI. FORMATION IN THE SCHOOL OF CARMEL

The commitment to make Jesus present in the world and to share with all others the personal experience of friendship with Him requires us to live an authentic prayer life and an integral formation (human, spiritual and psychological). The formation in the Secular Carmel

is an essential and necessary dimension: “the central object of the process of formation in the Secular Order is to prepare the person to live the charism and spirituality of Carmel in its following of Christ, and in service to its mission” (C 32). The diverse periods of the secular Carmelite formation help him to gradually deepen his identity and his vocation in order to serve the Church and the world. The fundamental dimensions of the formation are the human, Christian and Carmelite ones. Thru them the secular Carmelite prepares himself to be a true disciple of Jesus and to serve his brothers and sisters in the Order, in the Church and in the world. The first agent of the formation is the person itself, receiving help from the community in order to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. The formation never ends. We educate ourselves mutually in an attitude of humbleness that makes us to be always growing and in the trustworthy and mature obedience, that is in an attentive hearing to the brothers and to the Church. Sometimes we observe attitudes of self-sufficiency, or of a certain belief of possessing the truth, that doesn't correspond to the Teresian spirit. Saint Teresa, all her life, welcomed feedback and teachings, she did not believe herself to be in possession of the truth, she trembled every day requesting light and she prayed continuously for the Holy Spirit. Let us not become fundamentalists of the path already walked, or of the truths that we already conquered, let us be each day apprentices of the essentials, happy acknowledging we have many things more to learn and to discover.

VII. ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT

The secular Carmelites are present in 95 countries. Juridically belonging to the circumscriptions of the Discalced Carmelite Friars where they are and the “Council, composed of the President and three Councilors and the Director of Formation, constitutes the immediate authority of the community. The primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community” (C 46). The legitimate superiors are the Father General of the Order and the mayor superior of the circumscription. The Secular Order seeks always communication with other OCDS communities in their region and with the friars and nuns of the Carmelite family, giving testimony of fraternal communion, because the three branches of the Order form one family (Cf. *Declaration of the Teresian Carmelite Charism*, nn.43-44). It is inherent to a religious family and to the religious and evangelical spirit, not to covet for positions and not to strive at all costs to have positions of power. It is not an appropriate attitude of the Carmelites to think that I am the only person fit for governing the community. I welcome with joy the arrival of the moment of changing positions of power and I don't feed groups or dialogues that favor parties. In this moment of Carmel, I request you all to work to eradicate all that does not unify and what does not nourish dynamics of communion within the community. To study in each community wounds and fractures born out of divisions. The true experience of God takes you to form community. The “spiritual mundaneness”, mentioned by Pope Francis, can find its way in our community disguised as zeal for the community, when we have self-affirmation and the syndrome of being indispensable. Take care in generating an environment of healthy demand in liberty.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER, THE CHURCH AND WORLD

The constitutions of the Secular Carmelites have been approved for the good, not only of the members of the Secular Order, but also for the Order, Church and world. The Teresian Carmelite charism is a gift granted by God, that isn't only for those who belong to the Order, but to share it with the entire world. Each secular Carmelite, is a preacher of the Good News of the Gospel and thru his prayer life and apostolic service he shares his charism and identity with the entire world. The Secular Discalced Carmel continues to attract many men and women that feel themselves called to form part in this great family, and commit themselves, like Saint Teresa of Jesus states, to “walk from good to better” (*Foundations* 29,32), being faithful to their

vocation. This fruitfulness of the Carmel is a great joy to me and to all Carmel. It fills me with enthusiasm and thrills me very much when I visit any community of the Secular Carmel, and to see the joy and vitality of your belonging to Carmel.

I truly desire that the Lord may keep on blessing your vocation, enthusiasm and friendship with Jesus, prayer and community life, love and service to the Church and world, close friendship with Blessed Virgin Mary, and that thru your Constitutions may keep on walking under the protection of Virgen of Mount Carmel, Star of the sea and saint Joseph, in “obsequium Jesu Christi” glorifying God in your lives.

Thanks to all of those that worked in the elaboration of the *Constitutions*, all those who live it day by day, and those who will come in the future. I pray for each community. Let us begin today from good towards better, giving thanks for the precious heritage received.

To all you, my brothers and sisters, a blessing and fraternal hug.

Br. Miguel Márquez Calle, OCD
Superior General

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