



CARMELITE SECULARS AND THE APOSTOLATE OF THE ORDER.

Et foredrag af Sekularordenens overordnede i Rom

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It is not my task to present the theories or principles of Carmelite spirituality or the theology of the Church on the role of lay persons. That has been done by the others who spoke here and in the First International Congress in Rome of 1996. The purpose of my talk is to present some of the practical aspects of those principles and propose possibilities for a new vision of the Secular Order as that vision might be expressed in a constitutional form.

I would like to begin with two quotes, one from our Holy Mother, Saint Teresa of Jesus, and the second from an Anglican priest, very devoted to Teresian-sanjuanist spirituality.

Teresa VII Mansions "This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual matrimony, the birth always of good works, of good works."

Truman Dicken, an Anglican priest wrote a book, the purpose of which he expressed in the preface. He said that he wanted his book "The Crucible of Love" a synopsis of Teresian and Sanjuanist spirituality, not to be just another theoretical dissertation on the spiritual life, but he wanted to make a practical contribution to "the most urgent pastoral problem of our times: to teach our people to pray."

Keep those two thoughts in mind: Saint Theresa says that the purpose of prayer is the birth of good works and Truman Dicken says that the most urgent pastoral problem is to teach people to pray.

PROPOSALS FOR A REVIEW OF THE RULE OF LIFE.

Teresian Charism in the Rule of Life

A few preliminary notes of clarification:

It is necessary to recognize that the Teresian Carmelite charism is lived in three distinct styles of life. What are these styles of life? The life of the friars, of the nuns and of the lay persons, who by ecclesial commitment form the one Order known as the Discalced Carmelites. The Teresian charism is one and is distinct from the style of life in which it is lived in each branch.

The vocation of the friars is contemplative, mendicant and apostolic. It is mendicant in that the friars are obliged to live in communities that form parts of a province but not obliged to one specific monastery. They can be moved within the province or to other provinces for various reasons. And the friars are apostolic in that they exercise ministries in the service of the Church. Those friars who are ordained are obliged by ordination to exercise sacramental ministry and to preach the word.

The vocation of the nuns is contemplative, monastic and cloistered and from the monastic cloister they exercise their apostolate. Their style of life is monastic in that they commit themselves for life to one monastery. They are not transferred except for the rarest of causes or to make a new foundation. They are cloistered in that they are obliged by the laws of the Church to observe papal enclosure. The specific apostolate that the nuns exercise is that of the service of prayer for the church.



The vocation of the secular is contemplative, lay and apostolic. It is lay in that the secular is called to live in the world in the community of the proper family in most cases or in a single state of life and are called to form communities with other seculars who have the same Carmelite vocation. It is apostolic in all of the senses that the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II have emphasized in the documents *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Christifideles Laici*. The vocation to be a Carmelite deepens and directs the call to personal sanctity so that personal sanctity becomes the means to exercise an apostolic service in the world.

The nuns, the friars and the seculars all have one common vocation: to realize personal sanctification through the charismatic tradition of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross. This personal sanctification then becomes the source of graces and gifts for the Church, the basis of apostolic service. Apostolic service is a necessary fruit of personal sanctification. Without apostolic service, the efforts of the friar or the nun or the secular to be holy become frustrated. What we do not have in common is the style of life in which that realization takes place. One possible identification of the Teresian charism might be the following: inspired by the life and teaching of Saint Teresa of Jesus, to seek the face of God so as to be of service to the Church and the World.

It is necessary to distinguish well between contemplation and cloister.

A common misunderstanding is to think that the nuns are the true Carmelites because they are cloistered and the rest of us do our best to imitate them, but always in some watered down version. It is not true. The Teresian Carmelite charism is ecclesial. Teresa, John and Therese are Doctors of the Universal Church, because their teaching applies to the universal church and is not confined to the world of the cloister. The nuns are not imitation friars or seculars, the friars are not imitation nuns or seculars, and the seculars are not imitation friars or nuns. *The grace of our vocation is to be Carmelite in everyway possible.*

In a broad way, and for the purpose of making this distinction, I would venture to say that most cloistered persons are still waiting for the grace of contemplation, and the greatest majority of contemplatives do not live in cloisters. All Carmelites of whatever style of life or vocational state are called to "meditate day and night on the law of the Lord." This is a responsibility imposed by the charism, but more importantly, born of the interior needs of our vocation. I would say that this need to "meditate on the law of the Lord" is precisely the interior impetus that brought us to Carmel. The cloister of the nuns is a requirement of the Church put in place as means to protect the style of life in which the nuns perfect their response to the Lord's call.

God has a purpose for calling us to this vocation.

The writings of Saint Teresa and the other Carmelite authors confirm that God has a purpose for calling us to this meditation. And God's purposes always take us out of ourselves and beyond our intentions. In the discernment of a vocation within the Church and within the Order there are always two questions that need to be asked. The first question is why do you want to be a Carmelite. Each one of us, friar, nun or secular has our individual and personal response to that question. The second question is why does God want you to be a Carmelite. The answer to that question comes from an understanding of the teaching of the Church on the different states of life of baptized persons. Applying this to the vocation to be a secular, the identity of the lay person within the Church and the understanding of the Order of the place of lay persons in this religious family must be clearly understood. The answer to this second question is not personal and individual. It is "institutional" in the sense that the answer comes from outside the person. The answer comes from the Order. This second question and answer purifies our personal motives and perfects them so that what God wants is done. It is also a life-long process.



The Call of the Church

In order to better know how to read the Teresian charism in the context of the needs of the Church and the world of the 21st century I think it would be helpful to cite the call of the Church expressed in the Synod on the Laity and the post-synodal document *Christifideles Laici*. There are three specific texts that are helpful here.

The first is a definition of the expression "charism". "Whether they be exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, the charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit that have, directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world." If our vocation as Carmelites is a true charism of the Holy Spirit, and it is, the Church recognizes it as such, then then we must ask ourselves and express ourselves in our legislation as to how precisely our ecclesial charism is useful for "building up the Church, the well-being of humanity and the needs of the world." (CL, #24)

The second is the specific reference to those lay groups juridically identified with religious families. "In recent days the phenomenon of lay people associating among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. In some ways lay associations have always been present throughout the Church's history as various confraternities, third orders and sodalities testify even today. However, in modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus, resulting in the birth and spread of a multiplicity of group forms: associations, groups, communities, movements. We can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful. In fact, "alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose, so great is the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community, and so great is the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people"(CL #29).

The Holy Father says that "in modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus." What is the special stimulus in modern times for the Secular Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Teresa of Jesus? I think that the special stimulus is the pastoral problem to which Truman Dicken refers and the responsibility of lay people as developed in the Council and CL to participate in the evangelization of the world. The world has a need of what Carmel has to offer and Carmel has a responsibility to speak its message to the world. The days of relying on the priest to do everything have long passed, as most of you already know. Every vocation brings a responsibility. Being a Carmelite is not a spiritual pastime, it is a spiritual responsibility.

The third citation is very important because it expresses clearly what the Church hopes for in the collaboration of lay groups:

"It is always from the perspective of the Church's communion and mission, and not in opposition to the freedom to associate, that one understands the necessity of having clear and definite criteria for discerning and recognizing such lay groups, also called "Criteria of Ecclesiality".

The following basic criteria might be helpful in evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church:

- The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful" and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.



In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith".

- The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.

- The witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church, and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity" in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate".

The communion with Pope and Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both Pope and Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.

- Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life".

From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization.

- A commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person.

Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society.

The fundamental criteria mentioned at this time find their verification in the actual fruits that various group forms show in their organizational life and the works they perform, such as: the renewed appreciation for prayer, contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life, the reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; a readiness to participate in programs and Church activities at the local, national and international levels; a commitment to catechesis and a capacity for teaching and forming Christians; a desire to be present as Christians in various settings of social life and the creation and awakening of charitable, cultural and spiritual works; the spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty leading to a greater generosity in charity towards all; conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized members who have fallen away from the faith." (CL #30)

While we can say that the first three criteria are well in place in the structure of the Secular Order, what needs to be more clearly expressed in the Rule of Life are the last two criteria. The point of these principles of ecclesiality is not the individual apostolates of members, but the apostolates of the group or the community. The idea expressed over and over again in *Christifideles Laici* is the participation in evangelization of the group. Before the Council and before the changes in the world and church that have taken place in the last 30 years, the participation of lay persons in the apostolate of the Church was generally understood as auxiliary to the apostolate exercised by the clergy and religious. With the Council and, above all, with *Christifideles Laici*, the movement of the Holy Spirit is the need for a more concentrated participation of the associations of lay persons in collaboration with the structures of the Church in the evangelization of the world. Applying this principle to Carmel and to the Secular Order of Carmel, there is a need for a greater collaboration in the apostolate of our charism. Every vocation is ecclesial – in and for the good of the whole church. If you have



received the grace of a vocation in Carmel, it is so that you might give what you have received. It is your children, your parents, your brothers and sisters, your neighbors, your co-workers, your fellow citizens who need what you have received. Again, I repeat, the question is not addressed to you as individuals. The question is addressed to your communities or fraternities. "What can WE do as a community of Carmelites to share with the church and the world the spirituality of Saints Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross?"

Specific Points for Review

To look at the actual Rule of Life, as it is and make observations on it and discuss how to improve it, is not a negative comment on what is there. It is simply a process to see what might be included to make it express what the vocation is ...

Remember this, if nothing else that I might say, please remember this: to be a Secular Carmelite is not a privilege. To be a Secular Carmelite is a responsibility.

Conclusion

We are not here to discuss the theories of the theology of the lay person in the Church. We are here to discover how to express in our legislation the richness and the responsibility of the charism of those lay persons who have been called to live the spirituality of Saint Teresa of Jesus at the service of the Church.

One element of the Teresian Carmelite charism is eremitical. One element is contemplative. One element is service. One element is community. One element is Marian. Please do not profess one or two elements to the exclusion of the other elements. Gilbert Chesterton, an English Catholic commentator defined a heretic as "one who has a part of the truth and thinks he has the whole truth."

Your vocation is rich. And it is also a responsibility. And you only discover the fullness of its richness by living its responsibility.