

Commission for the Rereading of the OCD Constitutions

A Lamp for my Feet

Rereading the Constitutions for a Renewal of Life

Study Guide 0 – Attachments

Concluding Document of the 91st
OCD General Chapter



Casa General
Carmelitas Descalzos
Roma 2015

A Lamp for my Feet

Rereading the Constitutions for a Renewal of Life



Study Guide 0 – Attachments

Concluding Document of the 91st
OCD General Chapter

Appendix 1

Introduction to the Instrumentum Laboris (Working Document), 91st General Chapter

Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, ocd

Superior General

The celebration of the fifth centenary of the birth of holy Mother St. Teresa is for the whole Order a special time of grace. We have prepared for it and are living it mainly through listening to Teresa's words, whose unchanged freshness and power we rediscover every day. Teresa always tells us anew of her experience of Jesus and the Gospel and calls us to share in the liberating joy and the capacity it has to transform both the person and human history.

This grace challenges us deeply, poses questions that jolt us and call us to a serious review of our lives. In this sense, it is not a cheap grace that fades with the celebration of a feast. Accepting this grace means not remaining as we are, but following a path supported and guided by Teresa's hand. Yes, "it is time to walk on" in her footsteps, attracted by the quiet call of the Good Shepherd (4M, 3.2). It is time to retrace the highways of our vocation, prayer, fraternal life, service to the Church and humanity so as to free us from what hinders and prevents us from reaching the fullness of the goal. We need to recommit ourselves to the journey with renewed enthusiasm and creativity, strongly motivated by our fundamental choices.

BUSYNESS AND WORK

This exhortation to journey does not mean that we are not doing anything right in the present. In fact, we are doing a lot. It is rare to find communities or confreres inert or unproductive. They carry out countless activities and services, ranging from the celebration of the sacraments to

preaching, from parish ministry to spiritual direction, from teaching to social commitments, to name just a few of the areas where we are present. It is not by chance that the people and the local churches greatly appreciate our service and request it.

We are hard-working, we struggle a great deal, sometimes even too much. And yet we must recognize that the effort does not always coincide with the “work”, if by work we mean not simply carrying out works or providing services, but expanding within ourselves, cultivating and facilitating the growth of our own being and that of our brothers and sisters. Responding to requests for services, managing structures, carrying on the works we are engaged in is what may be termed “ordinary administration”, but, as Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, “*Mere administration can no longer be enough*”(EG 25). He adds: “There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling’, any new structure will soon prove ineffective”(EG 26).

Herein lies the difference between “busyness”, which simply administers and manages, and “work” which is oriented to the revitalization of our charism and our vocation, without which the structures are inevitably doomed to aging and extinction. Our Order, together with all of consecrated life, is in urgent need of this work: it is a work on ourselves, on our communities, and on our way of living, thinking, and assessing. We can “work hard” all day without ever touching these critical points. Indeed, activities can even function as a screen or diversion from essential issues or difficult questions.

However, without convincing answers to these questions, what motivating factors have we for present commitments and, especially, what prospects have we for the future?



OUR CONSTITUTIONS

To the question which Teresa places before us: “What kind of persons do you want to be? What kind of life do you want to live?” we could respond by simply referring to our Constitutions in which our charism and our way of life has certainly been described in a systematic, comprehensive, and objective way. They are the result of a long process of development begun after the Second Vatican Council with the Special Chapter of 1967-1968 and substantially completed in 1981, coinciding with the beginning of the fourth centenary of the death St. Teresa. Later on, in 1986, some additions and amendments were introduced following the publication of the new *Code of Canon Law*).

The reference to our Constitutions is logical, and yet it does not solve all the problems. We must recognize, in fact, that between the legislative texts and our life there is a distance that is not merely the normal tension that exists between the ideal and the real. Rather, the fact is that this tension, beneficial and healthy towards the achievement of the goal, now seems somewhat weakened, if not absent. Father General wrote in his report to the Extraordinary Definitory of 2014: “It has thus happened that in freeing ourselves from any link and bond potentially constraining the freedom of our expansion, we have also freed ourselves from the *telos*, the goal, to which it tends. Yes, it is a bond, but an attractive and energizing one, something that holds and draws us. In reality, the absence of such a “bond” disconnects us from the engine, the force that pushes us forward and leaves us standing like a wagon, detached from the locomotive lying dead on the tracks.”

If we compare the legislative text and our life, we can ask ourselves some questions about the relationship between these two poles: what kind of interaction has been created between the life and the text that describes and directs it? Do the Constitutions actually orient the vital choices of our communities? Have they changed the way we live? If so, in what way? Was it a renewal in the way desired by the Council or something else? The goal of



the Council (and more specifically of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, the document concerning the application of *Perfectae Caritatis*,) was to overcome a purely juridical vision of legislation regulating the religious life: “The union of both elements, spiritual and juridical, is necessary so that the principal codes of the institutes have a stable foundation and that the true spirit and life-giving norm pervade them; care must therefore be taken that a merely juridical or purely exhortatory text is not composed” (ES 13). The fundamental code of a religious institute, therefore, should be considered as a text-guide which gives guidelines and criteria for our personal and communal life choices.

We have the impression, however, that in the reception of the Constitutions, albeit excellent in themselves, this result was not attained. Rather than a text of ongoing formation, in the light of which we constantly renew our way of life, we usually refer to the Constitutions as a code of legal norms to which we adhere for the regularity of our institutional acts. The contents of a theological, charismatic, and spiritual nature, that should motivate, guide, and monitor our concrete way of living, seem to remain on a theoretical level, of abstract truths, which do not exercise any real authority or power of attraction over us; they are not “a lamp for our feet and a light for our path” (Ps 119.105). This vital and experiential estrangement between us and the texts, on the basis of which we have committed our lives, is a symptom that should be seriously considered. It calls us to work so as to overcome this distance, to bring into dialogue our lives and our laws, the mentality of our world and the logic of our ideal of life, the criteria for our choices, and the values placed at the center by our rules.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKING ON OUR CONSTITUTIONS

The intention of such a work is to continue the journey we began with the reading of the works of Teresa. As St. Paul writes to Timothy, it is to “stir up the gift of the Spirit that is in us”; he adds: “For God has not given us the spirit of timidity, but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1, 6-7). The fact that with the passage of time our charismatic identity has become more timid,

more uncertain, and less precise should not surprise us. They are normal historical processes, which we can quickly enumerate here:

- So many questions that arise in the face of new situations don't find an answer in our rhythm of daily life; we do not face them as a community, do not reflect on them, and this weakens our capacity for discernment.
- Many personal and community choices are made more out of real or supposed necessity, than out of authentic conviction, for reasons that are more from the flesh than from the Spirit.
- Many elements of our life from which we should draw nourishment and strength, are neglected out of laziness or inertia, and gradually lose their meaning and value.

Many riches deriving from the history of the Church and the modern world are not assimilated within our Carmelite identity, which, consequently, appears confined and narrow as they are linked to a culture and a sensitivity that today are profoundly changed. It would be enough to re-read chapter II of the aforementioned *Evangelii Gaudium* to get an idea of the context in which we live today as Christians and religious. But do we let it passively flow over us, or are we able to react to it creatively?

Therefore, the meaning of working on the Constitutions is to regain strength, love, and wisdom in regard to our charismatic identity. The intention is not a legalistic re-reading which is limited to pointing out a lack of observance of the written norm. Rather, it is to provide once more motivation for the norm and to find once again its meaning, possibly expressing it in a form more appropriate to our time.

Nor is it an issue of wanting to “mitigate” our rule of life, reducing the ideal to the way we live. On the contrary, it is to recreate the tension – where weakened or lost – between the reality and the ideal, between the path and the goal; it is to direct our actions towards a determined and shared purpose.



In truth, we cannot at this point say where a serious re-reading of our Constitutions and verification of our way of life will lead us. Beyond the possible changes or additions that we might decide to introduce into our legislation, to update or to perfect them, a need might emerge for a document different from the Constitutions, a sort of statement about our life, shared by the whole Order, in which in a less legal and more experiential language and style we can formulate the criteria for our choices, the paths that we propose to follow, and the goals we want to achieve in order to revitalize our vocation.

If we do not take seriously the need to revive this tension, rekindling “the hope to which we have been called, that of our vocation” (Eph 4,4), not only would we be pleasing ourselves by living our present in a “grey pragmatism” (EG 83), but we would also fail in our duty to future generations. Indeed, we have a grave responsibility to provide them, not with a package of concepts or historical data around the Teresian Carmel, but with a charism that is lived, interpreted, and witnessed in a manner that can be understood in present historical circumstances.

Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council, the atmosphere in our Order, like that of the Church as a whole, is no longer that of burning passion, bitter disputes, and ideological inflexibility. In this sense, we can say that the historical moment we are living is more conducive to a peaceful review of our life in the light of our Constitutions and *vice versa*. However, we cannot take for granted that we are also in a subjectively right disposition to perform such work. It would be useless to work on our life if there was no willingness to change it, to question it, and to rekindle our energies which today are perhaps invested in other directions. It is not certain that we are capable of “opening up”, of overcoming resistance and inertia, and of putting uncomfortable questions to ourselves. Teresa once again reminds us that the most important virtue for those who really want to walk in her footsteps is humility, which is nothing other than *andar en verdad* (“to walk in the truth”). Seeing the truth about ourselves, listening with humility – Teresa would say – “disillusioning ourselves” (cf. L 16.7), freeing ourselves from a number of contradictions and inconsistencies that take away from us strength and clarity.

IDENTITY IN GOING FORTH

A person or a community does not find their identity simply by looking in the mirror, in a self-referential manner. Pope Francis is calling the whole church to go forth from herself, to go and meet the other, to the Lord who is present in history, in the flesh of our humanity.

This experience of going forth from herself was of paramount importance for Teresa too, as we know. In her journey, we can identify three progressive stages:

1) Going forth from herself to meet Jesus Christ: this is what happened around 1554, at the time of her “conversion”, when she felt herself pervaded by the presence of Jesus Christ (cf. L 9), and from there on she began a new life, which was no longer simply her life, but “the life of God who lives in me” (L 22.1). Teresa found that she was “inhabited”, that is, that she possessed an interior life, in which her true and deep identity, her freedom and the source of her strength lied hidden. It was a time of joyful knowledge of God as “her God” (“*quien a Dios tiene*”) and of the humble awareness of herself as an unfathomable and mysterious interiority (Teresa recognized herself especially in the Samaritan woman, who found out who Jesus was and how he was intimately bonded to her own life to the point of becoming a source of living water that flowed from his bosom).

2) Going forth from herself to meet the sisters: this is the moment when Teresa decided to start a new community with characteristics very different from those of the community in which she lived (cf. L 32, 10 to 11). Teresa felt “forced” to leave the comfort and safety and face a new adventure, full of risks, doubts, and contrasts. But it is only thanks to this going out that Teresa discovered a new way of living the religious life and witnessing to the Gospel, no longer alone, but as the “family of Nazareth”, the “home of Bethany,” and the “college of Christ.” Contemplative life assumed a different orientation, no longer centered on a monastic life-style, but on the exercise of



certain fundamental virtues: mutual love, detachment from the world, and true humility.

3) Going forth from herself to encounter the Church and suffering humanity. This is what happened after some crucial meetings, like the one with the General of the Order, Fr. Rossi, in April 1567 (cf. *F* 2), and a year earlier with Fr. Maldonado, a missionary in the New World. Teresa listened, allowing herself to be moved, to be taken by a Church and a humanity she loved and decided that she must give her life entirely for them. The goal of the journey is not rest, but becoming servants, to be sold as slaves, as it was for him, for Jesus (7M 4.8). The crucifix becomes the definitive biblical icon Teresa's journey.

These references to Teresa's journey are not just historical records, but serve as a paradigm and model for us. In them we recognize the journey, the way of seeking our identity, which cannot be known and fortified by standing still. We cannot just comment on written texts; reading and reflection on them must be accompanied by experiences of an encounter with the Lord, with our brothers and sisters, and with humanity around us. The reading of our Constitutions will be fruitful only to the extent that it moves us to come out of ourselves so as to discover the Father's will for us. This is really the ultimate goal of this work, to give an answer to the question of St. Paul (Acts 22:10), that Teresa made her own: "Lord, what do you want us to do?"

Appendix 2

Religious Constitutions Yesterday and Today

Fr. Grzegorz Firszt, ocd

Commission for the rereading of the Constitutions, OCD

IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO VATICAN COUNCIL II

The constitutions were seen as a code of norms that directed the life of a religious institute. What was important was the normative element that defined the discipline of the religious institute. According to the instruction of the Congregation for Religious of 1921, based on the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the scope of the constitutions was limited to the preceptive field favoring the criterion to establish clear norms, and only norms. Doctrinal and spiritual elements were destined to find their place in other complementary codes.

This resulted in constitutions that were partial, limited, overly detailed, almost as a community rule book.

AFTER VATICAN COUNCIL II

The concept of religious constitutions coming from the Second Vatican Council was different (cf. ES II, 12-14; CIC 587 compared with CIC 578). It returned to the earlier understanding of constitutions. The constitutions must define in an authoritative manner the identity, vocation, and the mission of a religious institute in the Church, as well as its manner of Gospel life deriving from its particular foundational character. This ensured that the constitutions become a true norm of life. This united the doctrinal, spiritual, and juridical norms. It did not intend to offer all the necessary norms but only those that were fundamental for the definition of the life and the Gospel commitment proper to a religious institute.

The doctrinal and spiritual element must embrace the Gospel, the theological principles of religious life, its union with the Church, the spirit and ideals of the founders, as well as the “wholesome traditions;” in other words, the patrimony of a religious institute.¹ Concerning the juridical element, this must determine clearly the nature, the finality, and the means necessary to accomplish the foundational ideals. It is necessary to emphasize that the doctrinal and spiritual elements are vitally united and harmonize with the juridical elements. This avoids the merely juridical or exhortative character of the constitutions. (cf. ES II, 12-13)

It’s important to specify that we must find in the constitutions norms that are more stable and necessary for the identity and the proper nature of the institute. Other necessary norms that are essential and thus subject to change and adaptation according to time and place must be included in complementary codes (ES II, 14). For example, they can be norms that correspond to the physical and psychological conditions of the religious or to particular circumstances.

Even more concretely and with greater clarity, the Code of Canon Law of 1983 defined the present concept of constitutions of the institutes of consecrated life:

¹ “Wholesome traditions” are those that refer to the nature, the end, and the spirit of the religious institute that were established by the competent authority of the Church. It refers to innovations brought to the patrimony without interrupting continuity with the sources of the constitutive elements. They are fruits of a long life that was gradually formed to constitute a true tradition. They form part of the sound tradition of the life style of religious, the concrete way of living the profession of the evangelical counsels, the specific apostolate, and the little things that crystalize a life style that finally becomes a tradition. The wholesome traditions do not refer so much to customs that have marked a certain period of time and characterized the life of the members. In every institute there exists many traditions, but the patrimony is constituted only of wholesome and legitimate traditions.

Can. 587 – §1: “In order to protect more faithfully the particular vocation and identity of each institute, its fundamental code or constitutions must contain, besides what must be observed according to can. 587, fundamental norms about the governance of the institute and the discipline of the members, the incorporation and formation of members, and the proper object of sacred bonds.”

Can. 578 – “The intention of the founders and their determination concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute which have been ratified by competent ecclesiastical authority as well as its wholesome traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the institute itself, are to be faithfully observed by all.”

In summary, the constitutions according to the present understanding are not considered a detailed code of norms, but rather a book of life that comprises, in the first place, the description of the attitudes that particular religious and the communities are called to translate into their daily life and work. In this sense, the constitutions are a law for life; a law meant to be written in the flesh of the heart. Because they are meant to be at the service of life, they are open to evolution and progress. Thus, they allow for diverse implementations in the life and mission of the religious institute.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- R. ZUBIETA, *El Derecho de los Carmelitas Descalzos. Comentario doctrinal y jurídico a las Constituciones de la Orden de los Carmelitas Descalzos* (1986), Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2008, 8-11.
- R. ZUBIETA, *Las Carmelitas Descalzas. Vocación y misión. Comentario doctrinal y jurídico a las Constituciones de las Monjas Carmelitas Descalzas* (1991), Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2006, 16-20.

—J. ALVAREZ GÓMEZ, *Costituzioni*, in *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consacrata*, a cura di T. Goffi – A. Palazzini, Ancora, Milano 1994, 536-537.

—V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita consacrata nella Chiesa*, Dehoniane, Bologna 1991, 99.

—J. F. CASTAÑO, *Gli istituti de vita consacrata*, Millenium, Roma 1995, 100-101.

Appendix 3

A Pedagogical Reading of the Sociological Model Adopted in the Chapter Document, “It is Time to Walk, 19-24.

Fr. Grzegorz Firszt, ocd

Commission for the rereading of the Constitutions OCD

Numbers 15-18 of the General Chapter’s Conclusive Document, “*It is Time to Walk*,” speaks of the necessity to “review our life in light of the signs of the times (n. 18). In order for this task to be effective, numbers 19-24 offer certain sociological criteria: *adaptation, strategies to reach goals, integration, and interiorization*.

Interiorization (n. 20) means that each person assimilates the Teresian charism with ever-deeper conviction. The vocational values need to be thoroughly interiorized by each member of the community. As the texts of our ideal have already expressed, it is not enough that the acceptance of the charism be limited to the individual in view of his self-realization. This personal task needs to take place in the context of community since for us the religious community is (with respective differences, of course) the natural family. In a natural family, a person comes to self-realization in relationship to others, members of the family, with whom he or she is necessarily bound. Similarly, it is the case with us and with the community to which we belong. The effort of such interiorization on the part of each person is indispensable so that our community can become what we are called to be: a college of Christ, charismatically awake, and not a group of people in which each person fulfills his own personal objectives, even though these may be valid. Understood in this way, interiorization is achieved mostly through charismatic-community formation.

Integration, the second criteria (n. 21), concerns the unity and integrity of the religious community that flows from interiorization. This emphasizes the necessity of a convinced and serene assumption, within the community, of the

concrete roles that are entrusted to us in respect to the roles of the other confreres. We are called to live in a harmonious way that reinforces communion among ourselves. In this sense, the challenge is a greater openness to others, to give oneself, and to allow others the right to be themselves. At the same time, there is the possibility of growing in dependency on others in the community. As is obvious in the natural family: the husband, wife, father, mother, and the children have rights and mutual obligations in the network of family relationships, so also in the religious family which is for us the domain of life as the natural family is for others. In this context, the identity of each member of the family is defined through relationships with another (there is no husband if there is no wife; there is no father without a son, etc.)

In order to explain the criteria of integration, the document, *It Is Time To Walk*, uses the metaphor of an orchestra composed of different instruments to produce one melody.

We need to recognize that the challenge of integration is even more demanding today since we are profoundly influenced by individualism and we are inclined to be independent. When we speak of the religious community, we contemplate it more as a fraternal community than as a community with defined roles.

Given the strong communitarian character of the criterion of integration, we can see the primary role that the government and animation of the community plays in this.

An integrated Teresian community, who has interiorized the charism, has a greater capacity to identify the purpose for which they are walking together and to work out strategies to achieve it. In other words, it has a greater capacity for **the attainment of the goal** (no. 22). This happens because a life characterized by a healthy spiritual life emits energies that help us to live in accord with the ideals professed through the vocational choice and naturally orients us towards the right direction. In these conditions, many things we have to do in faithfully following the Lord become clearer and evident. This also

concerns the capacity to listen to the needs of society and the community, and to be available to offer effective answers.

Without a healthy spiritual life that nourishes integration and interiorization there is not much clarity in respect to goals and strategies. Clarity about them can be further obscured by the danger of immobility related to attachment to structures that often characterize us. The criterion of attainment of the goal, being in good part mission in action, more than anything else concerns our apostolate.

The criterion of **adaptation** (no. 23) looks to maintain contact with the historical reality in which we live. Without this, the possibility of growth diminishes as we distance ourselves from the human, social, and cultural context of our lives. The lack of adaptation makes our presence less significant, less capable of entering into contact with others, and constrains us to influence only those few who share our point of view. We cannot be satisfied with always reaching less people. Religious life should be “a visible sign,” we can say even a “legible sign” for our contemporaries. We cannot carry out the task assigned to us by Pope Francis to “awaken the world” without incarnating the criterion of adaptation. To do anything other than this would mean that we assume a style of modern life that does not take into consideration the meaning of interiorization, integration, and a lively interest in order to achieve the aim indicated by our identity. On the other hand, we have to emphasize, as Fr. General has affirmed, that this cannot be achieved through “small strategies or operations of the imagination,” but through a responsible “acceptance of the aim of religious life that does not avoid the challenge of adaptation.” The criterion of adaptation is part of paying attention to the signs of the times.

In this process of giving a more effective response to the signs of the times, the reading of the Constitutions can play a helping role (n. 24). It can help us to *interiorize* more the model of life proposed to us by St. Teresa, to accept in our communities and circumscriptions the interdependence of tasks in openness to others, even fraternal correction according to the style of St.

Teresa (*integration*), to verify the aims of our collective action (*the attainment of the goal*) and to evaluate the level of inculturation (*adaptation*).



OCD General House
Corso d'Italia, 38
ROMA