

It Is Time To Walk!

Conclusive Document 91st General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelites Avila of Saint Teresa, May 2-24, 2015 In the V Centenary of Her Birth

Introduction

1. The present document collects the synthesis of the work completed by the Capitulars during the 91st General Chapter of the Order of Discalced Carmelites celebrated in Avila from the 2nd to the 24th of May, 2015, year of the V Centenary of the birth of St. Teresa of Jesus. It is also an invitation to the whole Order to continue on the journey we began these days during the Chapter. Encouraged by the words of our holy Mother before she died, we are convinced that it *is time to walk*.

The Constitutions: Guide for the Way

2. On October 4, 1981, Vespers of the IV Centenary of the death of St. Teresa of Jesus, the General Definitory, presided by Fr. Felipe Sáinz de Baranda, promulgated by means of decree (in its 93rd session) the Constitutions and Norms of the Teresian Carmel, after having been sanctioned with the appropriate modifications called for the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, now the CIVCSVA. As cited in the decree, they were: *"the fruit of a long task and of the loving and diligent deepening in our charism, that the Chapters carried out in collaboration with the whole Order."*
3. Applied experimentally beginning in 1976, the General Chapter of 1979 approved them. With the aim of adapting them to the new Canon Law, they were revised by the General Chapter of 1985, ratified and confirmed by degree n. 20-1/86 (March 5, 1986) of the SCRIS and definitively promulgated May 17, 1986 in the 45th session of the General Definitory. They took effect as law the 28th of November of that year.
4. This constitutional text happily culminated the task undertaken by the Order consisting in "deepening the charism according to the spirit of our holy Parents and the principles and customs of the primitive tradition and in enlightening it, looking to the signs of the times from a faith perspective, under the guide of the Church, with the aim that the first and fundamental code of the Order clearly defines the genuine nature of the Teresian Carmel, its ends and means, and presents them in our time in a wider and appropriate manner, and adequately consolidates them with precise juridical norms." (Cf. SCRIS, prot. n. C. 20-1/80).

5. This signifies that our Constitutions and Norms are an unavoidable source to which we should appeal, not only to resolve canonical questions, but also and especially in order to accompany new generations of Teresian Carmelites in initial and ongoing formation. We cannot deny that we are before a beautiful and accessible text, praised in and outside the Order. In response to the challenges of a new age, it should allow us to organize our life with creative fidelity to the charism of our Foundress, holy Mother Teresa of Jesus and the experience and teaching of St. John of the Cross.

Called to Keep Walking

6. From October of 2009 and throughout six years, as a preparation for the V Centenary of her birth, Teresa's sons and daughters undertook a personal and communal reading of her writings. One of the fruits of this reading, and perhaps the most valuable, has been the call "to the essential elements of our being Teresian Carmelites" in order to "fall in love with them again, to savor the pleasure of being sons and daughters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, united around her Son, with no other riches than to know the God's gift, that is, His friendship." We have meditated daily on our Holy Mother's words and they have accompanied us along the way towards achieving our aim. Teresa has exhorted us to verify in practice our way of living the values and experiences that for her were fundamental. (cf. P. Saverio Cannistrá, *Report on the State of the Order at 91st General Chapter reunited in Avila.*)
7. Thus, in the Extraordinary Definitory of Ariccia (2011) we asked ourselves in light of Teresa's word: "How are we to live?" In that of Korea (2014) we became conscious of the need to contrast our lived experience in light of the Teresian teaching and to promote a comparison between our Constitutions and our lived experience.
8. Saint Teresa calls us to be brothers and sisters who build a community in which *Christ walks with us*, (cf. *L. 32.11*) *his little college* (cf. *WP. 20.1*). If we wish to evaluate the truth of our life as a response to this call, the Constitutional text is an excellent departure point. For this reason, the Korean Definitory proposed that following the reading of the works of St. Teresa we read the Constitutions so that during the sexennium we are beginning we can respond better to the question about who we are as she wanted us to be.
9. A first comparison between the legislative text and our life must raise in us some questions about the relationship between both poles: What type of interaction is there between the text that describes our life and directs it? Do the Constitutions effectively orient the options of our community life? And if so, in what sense? Has it addressed a renovation in the sense desired by Vatican II?
10. After the Council had pointed out to consecrated life, through the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, "the path of renewal according to the Gospel" (Paul VI,

Evangelica Testificatio, 2), the *Moto Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, from the same Pope, called us to go beyond a purely juridical vision of the legislative texts that regulate our 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 should, therefore, be considered as a guiding text that gives orientations and criteria for our options of personal and communal life.

11. It is our perception that, in the reception of the Constitutions, even though being excellent, this result has not been completely achieved. More than a text of ongoing formation, in the light of which we should constantly revise our way of life, we are accustomed to turn to the Constitutions as a code of juridical norms to which we have to abide by in order to organize the regularity of our institutional acts. The contents of theology, charismatic and spiritual, that should motivate, direct, and verify our concrete way of life, cannot limit itself to a theoretical plane or reduce itself to abstract concepts that have no power to attract us. They have to be “a lamp for our feet and a light on our path.” (Ps. 119:105)
12. We should consider seriously this vital and experiential distance between our daily life and the texts of our Constitutions. This calls us to a task that we must undertake in order to verify, and in this case, to overcome such a distance so that there is an encounter with and dialogue between our life and our laws, the mentality of our world and the logic of our ideal of life, the criteria of our options, and the values contained in the center of our rules. We are conscious that an exact agreement between the Constitutional text and our life is impossible. Yet it is our duty to favor the maximum convergence, especially in light of the demands and needs of future Teresian Carmelites.
13. We boast, and rightly so, for having reached in our time a very profound and correct knowledge of the Teresian charism. Nevertheless, given that a greater understanding does not always guarantee a better living experience, it should not surprise us that our charismatic identity has become more timid, uncertain, and imprecise. Some indications – the fruit of normal historical processes – can help us to notice the strengthening or weakening of the lived charism. We can formulate them as questions: Do we find responses to new situations, reflecting on them and discerning them communally? Are our personal or community options the fruit of the Spirit? Do we assume them out of conviction? In the real life of our communities, are we conscious of the fundamental elements of our life and do we cultivate them? In Chapter II of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly presents to us the context in which we live as Christians and as religious. Are we capable of reacting creatively before these challenges?

14. In the face of all this, animated by the fruits of reading the works of St. Teresa, we can continue our path of renewal immersing ourselves in a rereading of our Constitutions. As Paul wrote to Timothy, we have “to revive the gift of the Spirit that lives in us,” and he adds: “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of strength, love and wisdom (good judgment and discernment.)” (2 Tim. 1:6-7)
15. Among the expectations that Pope Francis expressed in his *Apostolic Letter Directed to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* we find the following: *“I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them... Yet during this Year no one can feel excused from seriously examining his or her presence in the Church’s life and from responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, to the cry of the poor. Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic kairos, a time rich in God’s grace, a time of transformation.”* (n. 5)
16. For its part, the CIVCSVA, through the Prefect Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz and Archbishop Secretary José Rodríguez Carballo, told us on September 8, 2014: *“The time of grace that we are living through, with Pope Francis’ insistence on placing the Gospel and what is essentially Christian at the center of things, is for consecrated men and women a new call to watchfulness, to be ready for the signs of God. We have to fight against eyes weighed down with sleep (cf. Lk 9:32), so as not to lose the attitude of discerning the movements of the cloud that guides our journey (cf. Nm 9:17) and to recognize in the small and frail signs the presence of the Lord of life and hope. (Keep Watch, 7) Further on: “Pope Francis calls us to welcome today, which is God’s, and his “new things”; he invites us to welcome “God’s surprises” faithfully, without fear or resistance, to be prophets, in particular, by demonstrating how Jesus lived on this earth, and to proclaim how the kingdom of God will be in its perfection. A religious must never give up prophesying.”* (A. Spadero, *¡Awake the World! Colloquium of Pope Francis with General Superiors: La Civiltà Cattolica* 165 (2014/1), 7 (*Keep Watch*, 10)
17. In this year of consecrated life that providentially coincides with the V Centenary of the birth of St. Teresa, we feel encouraged by the words of Pope Francis, and we question the quality of our service to God and to others in fidelity to the Teresian charism. *“To search the horizons of our life and our times, in watchful prayer; to peer into the night in order to recognize the fire that illuminates and guides, to gaze into the heavens, looking for the heralds of blessing for our dryness. To keep awake and watch, and to make intercession, firm in faith. The time is short to align ourselves with the Spirit who creates.”* (*Keep Watch*, 1)
18. To review our life in light of the signs of the times is an exercise of charismatic fidelity. There are many stages in life and the works of St. Teresa can enlighten us. We must stop and reflect carefully on her call to *always begin anew and to advance from good to better.* (F. 29.32) In saying this, she wants to show us that within the strength of the charismatic gift there is always a “better” that we must

seek and pursue. Within the depth of our charism is the call to imitate her, to be *restless and wandering*, above all, to adventure out in life. (L.21.5)

19. Logically, this review of life has to follow some certain criteria. Our communities are composed of people; we are a human group and we have to establish some essential elements so that we can give a living and authentic witness adequate to the world in which we live. As Fr. Saverio reminded us in his report on the state of the Order, “the future of our family depends on the capacity to assume creatively the challenges that the historical cultural moment presents us.” Thus, we must fulfill a series of conditions and requirements: first of all, adaptation to the place in which we live; secondly, the capacity to devise strategies to reach the proposed goals; thirdly, respect for the norms and the roles that allow the integration of community, the Circumscription, and the Order; finally, the interiorization of cultural and ethical models that motivate people. These concepts are taken from sociology. We need to explain them with more detail so that we can understand them and apply them to our life as Teresian Carmelites.

20. We call *interiorization* the assimilation by all the members of the group of the patrimony the values that are organized and specified in a life project. Interiorization means that each one assumes this project as a personal life model to which one’s energies are directed and invested. Logically, if individuals invest their energies in personal projects rather than for the fulfillment of the common project, the group will lose intensity, density, and depth of meaning. The charismatic identity will fade and only an amalgam of “professional” projects or individual ministries will survive.

21. *Integration* maintains the group unity and allows it to function in a coordinated way. How? Through certain processes of socialization and institutionalization that presume the members are willing to assume some concrete roles. Fulfilling their role in the group, each member must respond to certain concrete expectations or, expressed in another way, each role presupposes some rights and obligations for individuals. We can see this in a simple example: the quality of an orchestra will be higher in so far as each musician accepts his or her piece of music, always following the lead of the director. This point is especially difficult for us religious to assimilate in the 21st century. To speak of an institution or reciprocal relationship of functions makes us feel uncomfortable. We prefer to speak of community or fraternal community. Regardless of the way we express ourselves, the community does not function without all the members assimilating some minimal norms, and fraternal communion requires the fulfillment of diverse obligations according to our position in the community.

22. If the group is sufficiently integrated and has correctly and deeply assimilated its life project, it will be easier for them to set goals that direct their action and discern efficacious strategies to obtain them, thus completing successfully the

attainment of the goal. In this step the art of government is of utmost importance, understood not only as administration, but also the capacity to listen to the requests of society and the needs of the group and people in order to give efficacious responses. Naturally, if a good model of interiorization does not exist for all the individuals that constitute the group, and if their integration is fragile, there will be no clarity of goals. If we add to this – as often happens in our life as religious – the danger of immobility because of attachment to structures, it will become very difficult to plan objectives and strategies to obtain them.

23. Finally, adaptation to its present historical reality is decisive for the survival of the group. In the measure that it loses contact with this reality, perspectives for growth diminish. We cannot live with our backs to the human, social, and cultural context that surrounds us because, if this is the case, the word and action of the group loses its significance and influence. Its word reaches less people. It is no use deceiving ourselves thinking that it is enough for us to influence a small social group who may listen to us, and yet we leave aside a society who walks along as though they are lost. On the other hand, we need to pay close attention; it is very important in this phase to become aware of the preceding conditions: *“An adaptation to the context that forgets the model of life that identifies us or ignores the requirement to maintain the integration of the group, would evidently be destructive. At the same time, to avoid the problem of adaptation, falling into a resigned acceptance of the end of religious life or hoping to resolve the problem with little strategies or image operations would be an irresponsible choice.”* (P. Saverio Cannistrá, Report on the State of the Order at the XCI General Chapter in Avila.)

24. Therefore, in reference to our Teresian charismatic identity, rereading the Constitutions will help us to assimilate more personally, to share communally, and to set out to live concretely the model of life that Teresa of Jesus has proposed to us (*interiorization*); to see if in the life of our communities and circumscriptions there is a real reciprocal relationship of roles – within a world of shared roles, - in which each one assumes his responsibilities and accepts the corrections according to the style of life that Teresa has bequeathed to us (*integration*); to verify if we are clear about the goals toward which we want to direct our collective action (*goal achievement*); and finally, to check if we are taking seriously the challenge of inculturation, assuming the life of people, their culture and their real problems (*adaptation*).

25. The Second Vatican Council has taught us that understanding the dogma of the living Tradition grows with contemplation, study, the teachings of the Magisterium, and with the experience of the faithful (cf. DV 8) Undoubtedly, we can affirm the same regarding updating a charism in the time that each one of us is called to live, precisely because the charism is something *living*. The work that is put before us is, in essence, an act of obedience to God who has gifted the

Church with a charism, and at the same time, has given us the strength of the Spirit to make it alive in our time.

26. This task of searching will allow us to recuperate strength, love, and wisdom with respect to our charismatic identity. It must remain clear that we are not proposing a legalistic rereading that limits itself to pointing out and denouncing a lack of observance regarding the written norm. As St. Teresa wrote to P. Ambrosio Mariano in December 1576: *“I am fond of strictness in the practice of the virtues but not of austerity.”* We must encounter anew the motives for what is written in the norm and rediscover its meaning, and if necessary, expressing it in a more adequate form for our time.

27. Also, this is not a matter of mitigating our Constitutions, reducing the ideal to the real. On the contrary, it is a matter of re-creating – where there is something weakened or lost – the tension between the path and the goal. It involves orientating our work toward a determined and shared purpose: *“This is why He has gathered you together here. This is your vocation. These must be the business matters you're engaged in: nothing other than to do His will.”* (C.1.5)

From The Chapter to the Communities, From the Communities to the Chapter: An Itinerary to Follow

28. All these premises have led the General Chapter to endorse the Order to undertake a rereading of our Constitutions in view of a possible modification in order to renew our life.

29. During these days, the brothers gathered in Avila took as a basis the proposals from the pre-Chapter Committee. We have reflected on our Constitutions attempting a first analysis of their content and outlining some observations that help to make their meaning more actual for today's reality.

30. Thus, we spent a long time examining what our laws say about our charismatic identity: the vows, evangelical self-denial, the person of Mary, the Mother of Carmel; prayer, community life, the apostolate, the missions, formation, vocational recruitment, on-going formation, and finally, the government of the Order. We hope that all this work will be put at the disposal of the brothers through study guides that the General Curia will send out. These can help in the personal and communal reading of the Constitutions.

31. Now it is the task of the communities, with the help of these study guides, to undertake their own reading and to contrast the contents of the Constitutions with their own lived experience. In light of the Teresian experience and the signs of the times, the communities must come to their own suggestions in such a way that they pave a path for us to follow these next years.

32. The process of rereading-revision of our Constitutions will take place in stages and begin in November of 2015 and culminate at the General Chapter of 2021. The General Definitory will form a commission that will prepare the study guides. The Extraordinary Definitory that will take place in September of 2018 will decide, in light of the community contributions, the concrete path to follow after this date and consider the possible options: a re-elaboration of the Constitutions, or a detailed revision and/or redacting a Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian life. Finally, the document chosen by the Extraordinary Definitory, elaborated by the commission and submitted again to the revision of the communities will be presented to the General Chapter of 2021.

33. The General Definitory, taking into account the suggestions of the Chapter, will concretize in its meeting next June the content and duration of the various stages. It will form the commission responsible for accompanying the reading and elaborating the necessary synthesis and documents.

A Companion On The Way

34. Let us listen to our Mother Teresa: *“I sometimes hear it said about the first members of religious orders that since they were the foundation the Lord granted them greater favors as He did to our holy forebears; and this is true. But we must always observe that they are the foundation for those who are to come. If we who live now had not fallen from where our forebears were, and those who come after us would live as they did, the edifice would always be firm. What does it profit me that our forebears had been so holy if I afterward am so wretched that I leave the edifice damaged through bad customs? For it is clear that those who come will not so much remember those who lived many years ago as those they see before them. It would be rather amusing were I to make the excuse that I am not one of the first members and at the same time fail to recognize the difference lying between my life and virtue and that of those to whom God granted such great favors.*

Oh, God help me! What twisted excuses and what obvious deceit! I regret, my God, to be so wretched and so useless in your service; but I know well that the fault lies within me that You do not grant me the favors You did to my forebears. I grieve over my life, Lord, when I compare it with theirs, and I cannot say this without tears. I see that I have lost what they have worked for and that I can in no way blame You. Nor is it in any way good for persons to complain if they see their order in some decline; rather, they should strive to be the kind of rock on which the edifice may again be raised, for the Lord will help toward that.” (F.4.6-7)

35. She tells us when she was facing the foundation of St. Joseph’s: *“One day after Communion, His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and He made great promises that it would be founded and that He would be highly served in it. He said it should be called St. Joseph and that this saint would keep watch over us at one door, and our Lady at the other.”* We also can undertake our journey confident in the intercession of our Father St. Joseph and Mary our Mother. They know the way. Mary of the Visitation! St. Joseph

obedient to the voice of the angel that led the Holy Family to Egypt! (Lk. 1:39-56; Mt. 2:13-15) Escorted by such powerful protectors the way is much easier.

36. Well, brothers! It is truly time to walk. At times the fear of the unknown and the unforeseen paralyzes us. The way is long and perhaps beyond our strength (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:7). Like our Mother Teresa, let us undertake the journey 'discalced' (barefoot). She assures us that we will not walk alone. The Jesus of Teresa will accompany us, and with the strength of his Spirit he will become our companion on the way, *as a good friend* (cf. V. 22.10) *with whom we can speak* (cf. V.8.5) *and whom we can contemplate, listening to His word, and fixing our eyes on his look* (cf. C.26.3-9) with humility and love. All that is necessary is to call him and he will come to us without delay. (Poem: *Soul, Seek Yourself in Me.*) As our Mother Teresa tells us, we know that Jesus is our guide and prize. Therefore, *Let us walk together, Lord!* (cf. C.26.4)

+Avila, May 23, 2015, Vigil of Pentecost

Laus Deo Virginiq̄ue Matri!