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SUMMARY OF THE INQUIRY ON MARIAN LIFE

Introduction

On the 13th October 2024, we sent out to the three branches of the entire Order, including communities and circumscription councils, an inquiry into the state of Marian life. The inquiry covered the following aspects: charismatic, pastoral of spiritual life, mariological and devotional. We received replies up until 31st January 2025. In total, when grouping the responses from individuals, communities and councils, we received 1050 replies, including 589 from the Secular Order (86 from councils and 503 from communities or individuals); 290 replies from the Sisters (36 from councils and 254 from communities or individuals); and 171 coming from the Brothers (19 from councils and 152 from communities or individuals)¹. Attached you will find some graphs based on the most significant and quantifiable responses.

We have tried to summarize the replies of the sisters, the brothers and the seculars according to the levels of the questionnaire involved, taking note at each level of the current status and of the Order's proposals for renewal, based on the Marian life.

Charismatic level : current status

The Sisters, Brothers and Seculars of the Carmel are strongly conscious of Mary's central role in the awakening of vocations, in the stages of formation and in the life of our charism. They are inhabited by the conviction that "*Carmel is all Mary's*". Our religious consecration or the seculars' promises are confided to Mary, because she is 'the Mistress, the Mother and the Sister' of all those who put on her mantle. The Virgin who 'kept all those things in her heart' or she of the hidden life at Nazareth are references and sources of inspiration in the call to the contemplative life of every Carmelite. The Mother of Jesus appears in the life of Carmel as a model of community life and of the prayer life, as well as a source of inspiration for our apostolate. Our legislation and most recent documents of the Order are based on good Marian foundations, to which we must return.

Marian traditions are celebrated with great care and devotion, as it is there that our filial spirit for Mary is nourished. The general conviction is that the renewal of our love for Mary will help us to create a better balance between our prayer life, fraternal life and apostolate, according to the specificity and the complementarity of each branch of our Order.

In general, the Seculars wear the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the Brothers and Sisters their religious habit, as signs of belonging to Mary's family.

However, this strong awareness of Mary's presence in our charismatic identity is not lived out with the same intensity in the three branches of the Order, or in the different regions of the world. It is emphasized more in the area of devotion and worship and less in the area of experience. Throughout the Order there is an awareness of the importance of the Virgin Mary in our lives, but not a living and vital relationship with her, such as to constantly regulate the mode of living our charism. One notices a certain numbness in communities with regard to these experiential dimensions of the Marian life. A profound renewal is necessary, because in these latter years the Marian life of the Carmel has been relegated to second place after study and familiarization with our saints.

¹ Currently, the Order comprises 3,877 brothers divided among 651 communities; 8,320 sisters divided among 680 communities (1991 Const.); and 29,998 seculars divided among 1,128 communities.

Charismatic level: proposals

Everyone asked that greater attention be given to initial formation programmes of Carmelites (*Ratio* and other documents): these should clearly emphasize the strongly Marian nature of our Order, and consequently list the themes to be covered, accompanied by the best possible bibliography.

It has also been suggested that this Marian group should prepare a programme of formation and Marian experience for the entire Order in its different branches. This programme should include formation activities, retreats, pilgrimages and other experiences, in community, if possible. Themes covered could be the following : the Marian origins of our Order ; Mary and the saints of Carmel ; the relationship of Mary and the prayer-life ; consecration, the evangelical counsels, the Carmel and Fatima . . . This programme could be annual.

We should continue to take care of the Marian traditions of the Church and of our Order, in returning to them their most original meaning, with all the corresponding biblical, theological and charismatic foundations.

It would also be good to collect and renew the repertoire of Carmelite hymns, and to spread it throughout all the regions where the Order is present. Certain people have also asked that the Office of Marian readings of the Order be translated into several languages, as well as highlighting the rich musical, artistic and iconographic Marian heritage.

To stimulate the Marian life of communities, it has been suggested that we turn to the testimony of the most significant followers and saints in the Marian realm, offering retreats with a Marian theme and organizing pilgrimages to the large sanctuaries or the more modest chapels and hermitages.

Lastly, we take note of the request for the proclamation of a Marian year throughout the Order, culminating in the renewed consecration of the entire Carmelite family to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.

Pastoral level: current status

In the pastoral activity of our Order, especially of the brothers, particular attention is given to Mary in preaching, retreats, catechesis and other types of formation. The Virgin Mary is often connected with the following themes: prayer, contemplation, following Jesus, the virtues, the Church, community life . . .

Particular importance is also given to Marian celebrations registered in the liturgical calendar. Many of the faithful search out our churches and our pastoral proposals, due to their Marian nature.

Our convents and Secular family homes do much evangelizing by their witness of life, the presence of Marian images, Marian books and other external signs, such as habits of Marian prayer like the rosary, etc.

However, it has been clearly asked that we develop a more Marian apostolate, which would place more emphasis on the theme of Mary's virtues. There were requests that the forms of Marian prayer be adapted to each community and each nation, as well as to the natural rhythm of human and spiritual growth.

It was suggested that the social media and other means of communication be more broadly invested in, as they have their own particular evangelizing capacity.

Pastoral level: proposals

There is obviously a desire to renew our pastoral work, by giving it a more Marian touch in style and content. There is a Marian and Carmelite style of evangelization, characterized by simplicity, proximity, enculturation, interiority... that must mark the life of the Carmelite apostolate.

Our mission begins with the way we celebrate Mary's presence in our personal and community lives. Therefore, each Carmelite and her community must examine her own Marian life so that it can be communicated to the whole Church.

It is necessary to value all forms of art through which our love for Mary can be expressed, such as music, the beauty of our liturgical spaces, the Marian iconography...

The new digital and technological media encourage creativity in evangelization. With this in mind, we need to promote both online and on-site formations and retreats, and promote the Order's presence on social networks.

Several have asked that the Seculars and other laypersons in pastoral teams with the Brothers and sometimes with the Sisters, receive more formation and preparation for this specific style of evangelization that follows the example of Mary.

It would really be opportune to have a centre of specifically Marian pastoral material, where one could find printed documents like manuals, books, reviews, bulletins, booklets, texts, devotionals, anthologies of Marian texts drawn from works of saints of the Carmelite Order ; but also audiovisual material, such as videos, audios, podcasts and e-books, web-platforms, including internet sites of the Order, of Provinces and of Communities, of social networks or discussion forums ; thus creating a new evangelization dynamic.

Our pastoral for young people and for vocations should present the Virgin Mary more as a model for following Christ, as the Virgin of the Yes. It is important not to be afraid of proposing traditional Marian prayers to young people, like the Rosary and pilgrimages, as they are very open to those.

Mariological level: present status

The greatest lacuna that our survey revealed is to be found in the field of theological studies on the Virgin Mary. With a few exceptions, there are very few signs of interest among the members of our Carmelite family for the study of Mariology. The number of Carmelite Mariologists is about 14.

Studies completed focus principally on the analysis of Marian presence in official texts of the Order and on more detailed pastoral preoccupations. There is a certain interest in the study of Marian dogma, of the Marian magisterium and of the texts of the Council of Vatican II, based on the principal Mariologists of recent years, whether or not they belong to the Order.

The existence of books and magazines devoted to the Marian theology of our saints has been indicated, although one notes a certain lack of more consistent and updated studies.

Mariological level: proposals

The proposals underline the need to encourage members of our Order to study and, if possible, to specialize in Mariology in the best university centres of the Church. Proposals have also been put forward with the aim of reaching a larger number of members of the Carmel, such as organizing short-term courses in Mariology, congresses, colloquia, symposia, Marian study-days, a Marian year, both online and on-site, annually or periodically. These two levels of more specialized formation would certainly lead to new publications, such as books, reviews, digital platforms, etc.

All formations should include an online version, in order to involve the largest number of people, and especially to facilitate the participation of our Nuns. Particular care should be given to the production of content that can be adapted to different stages of the initial formation of candidates in the different branches of our Order.

The most requested themes are: studies on the Virgin Mary in the Bible and in Patristics ; Mary's relationship with Christ and the Church ; Mary as Mother of the Church ; Mary as Spouse of the Holy Spirit ; Mary as Mediatrix of grace ; Mary as model for virgins and consecrated persons ; Mary as 'eucharistic woman' ; Mary and the sacraments and sacramentals ; Mary and the sanctification of daily life . . . But more Carmelite themes were also suggested, such as: the historical Marian origins of our Order, beginning with all the symbolism of Mount Carmel; the Marian theology of the Carmelite saints and other more recent figures, such as the Venerable Father Marcel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and Sister Lucy of Jesus, as well as more contemporary themes, like the

relationship of Mary with women, ecology, social action, mission... We also need to open up to other great Marian spiritualities of the Church, such as Montfortian and Salesian spirituality. Studies have also been requested on the criteria for reading and interpreting Marian apparitions, particularly those of Fatima and Lourdes, so as to understand how these great Marian spiritualities can stimulate our own Marian life.

Also requested are the publication of sources and studies in Marian patristics, the compilation of a bibliography of Marian theology accompanied by study texts, the compilation of post-Vatican II documents of Marian theology and the updating of the Marian bibliography in community libraries.

Our study centres, as well as our spiritual and other centres, should adopt Marian themes with more actively. In this connection, it is also proposed to deepen relations with the large university centres beyond the Order, and with other centres diffusing Marian spirituality and Mariological studies.

Our lay members in particular have asked for themed texts on Carmel's Marian theology, relevant to the life and pastoral ministry of their communities, as well as to other groups close to Carmelite spirituality.

Devotional level: present status

The level of Marian piety is the most deeply rooted. However, it needs to be evangelized, to be upgraded with better biblical and theological foundations, and with a more contemporary style. The Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is, along with the Rosary, the most widespread devotion, not only in the Order, but also in the whole Church. This is why this tradition deserves all our affection and interest.

Celebration of Marian memorials and feast-days is also emphasized on a weekly basis, beyond the Saturday Mass ; following various practices, the Month of Mary and the Triduum are celebrated. The Novena and the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel are the celebrations most deeply rooted in the Marian life of the Carmelite family. . . Expressions of popular Marian piety, like processions and other public manifestations, are also continued in certain regions of the Order. Marian prayers most deeply rooted in the daily life of consecrated persons are the following: the Hail Mary, the *Angelus*, the *Regina Caeli*, the *Salve Regina*, the Litanies of the Virgin, the *Flos Carmeli* and, finally, the Rosary. Images of the Virgin Mary in our churches and convents are also particularly emphasized, especially that of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

In certain of our most ancient foundations, the confraternities still play an important role in promoting Marian devotions and traditions.

Devotional level: proposals

Analysis of the inquiry showed that it is necessary to continue offering the Scapular as a sign of Mary's special protection for all Christians, starting with young people, in our formation, preaching, retreats, catechism . . . and even in the context of confession and spiritual direction.

We are encouraged to promote formation and catechesis on the deepest and most authentic meaning of each devotion and prayer that form part of our tradition.

The existing Confraternities should be encouraged, and all movements and groups associated with the Order should be used to make the Scapular known, as well as the other typically Carmelite devotions, always accompanied by good catechesis.

The following are also suggested: to promote pilgrimages, processions, popular preaching and consecrations; to add Marian hymns at the end of our liturgical celebrations; to consider initiatives to renew the fraternal spirit between all those who have received the Scapular; to include in the ritual of imposition of the Scapular a prayer for renewal of that same imposition; to encourage devotion to Saint Joseph in direct connections with that of Mary; to organize the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in close connection with the brothers of the Order of Carmel (OCarm); to publish and widely distribute meditations on the mysteries of the Rosary, based on the Marian heritage of our tradition

and our saints; to assist our Seculars to have a true vision of the devotions, and to relate them to the liturgical prayer of the Church; to know and learn how to discern devotions appropriately using theological, pastoral and spiritual criteria; to learn how to adapt the devotions to the level and rhythm of development of each Christian and each member of the Carmel; to define guidelines for pilgrimages to specifically Marian places; to promote Marian vigils; to prepare a newsletter that publicizes the Marian life of our Order in all its aspects, emphasizing all that already exists in the world and stressing good practices of formation and experience; to promote music, song and other arts linked to the Marian life... and to relate all devotions and proposals to the Marian virtues, so that our Marian life may spring up anew in the concrete life of every Christian and of every member of the Carmel.

Conclusion

These are the central ideas that we gleaned from the inquiry into the Marian life at its various levels, after synthesizing the very varied responses from the branches of our Order. This work of collection and synthesis was carried out in collaboration with several volunteers engaged in this movement of Marian renewal. We are at your disposal, in open dialogue with our whole Carmelite family, which is honored to have the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel as Mother and Sister – to continue to make our contribution. That may come from the Generalate, from the Marian Centre *Domus Carmeli* of Fatima (Portugal), or from any other place where there exists a community, a Carmelite brother or sister, a secular brother or sister, or a consecrated person, any of whom may be ready to do anything that is needed to make Mary more loved and known, that through her we may more faithfully follow Jesus.

On behalf of the team for promotion of the Marian life in the Carmel,

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