

THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT OF THE CARMELITE SECULAR ORDER

by Father Jerome Lantry, OCD

I. INTRODUCTION

When we look at the Carmelite Secular Order, it is easy to be confused about its identity. Many of its practices are about the same as those of other secular orders. What gives it identity is its fidelity to the charism of the parent Order. Since a charism comes from the very mystery of the Church, it remains, itself, a mystery but can be discerned by the effect it has on those called to live by it. The Carmelite charism reflects, in its own way, the inward and outward movements of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Carmelites are drawn inward to union with God, a movement that St. Teresa would have called recollection, that to St. John of the Cross would have meant detachment and that many of today's writers might describe as centering. This is a movement towards union with God. The more effective it becomes the more clearly does it show in the outward movement of the Holy Spirit. Union with God means union with His constant work for the salvation of all people. This evidence of union with God can be seen in St. Teresa in her longing to save souls. We talk of it here as the Missionary Spirit of Carmel. With this in mind, I would like to say something about the missionary spirit as seen in Sacred Scripture, about the Church as Mission and to conclude by saying how all this animates the Carmelite Secular Order.

II. THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT IN SCRIPTURE

I am sure that every missioner and indeed everyone engaged in the apostolate must frequently rely for encouragement on the words of Jesus in the Gospel according to John: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."¹ The word "mission" comes from the Latin verb "to send." We find Jesus sending out the Apostles to tell the Good News to all the world. You can find this at the end of each of the four Gospels and at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. We cannot hope for stronger emphasis. There are certain elements that can be seen in this commission when we read the various accounts:

- a. The Apostles are to make disciples of all people.
- b. They are not to go just yet but to wait until He sends the Holy Spirit on them.
- c. The mission He gives them is the mission He got from the Father.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

With all this in mind, we go back to the Bible and see what it has to say about this mission to all people. In order to get everything in perspective, it is well to note that the five accounts of the sending of the Apostles all belong to what we call the post-Resurrection narratives. To look for anything comparable to that in the Old Testament or even the pre-Resurrection narratives of the New Testament would be reading something into texts rather than taking them at their face value. Another matter to bear in mind is that the chosen people were drawn away from other peoples by their belief in One God and were exhorted to stay clear of other peoples in order to preserve that

¹John 20:21, New American Bible.

faith. So, the basic movement of the chosen people is not towards the nations but away from them.

We should not, then, think of the chosen people as a missionary people and yet, in their minds, their God is the God of all the earth, the ruler of all peoples. This is clear right from the beginning of the Bible in the story of creation. The message here is easy to read: that God created everything we can get to see in the heavens and the earth. Everything is the work of His Hands, be it mineral, vegetable, animal, human or angelic. So, right from the beginning we are dealing with a universal God. This is very clear in the account of creation, in the Wisdom literature, the Songs of the Suffering Servant and the Psalms, but it is basic to all the other writings as well. Two notions come out very clearly and they are dominion and salvation (liberation). We see the power of God over Pharaoh and the use of this power to save (free) His people.

While God is seen as the enemy of other peoples as He is protecting His chosen ones, it would be very wrong to think of the whole relationship in those very terms. For instance, Ezekiel says: “By origin and birth you are of the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.”² Right back in Genesis Yahweh says to Abraham: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”³ And in the book of Exodus, He said: “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites; you have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.”⁴ I think the point here need not be labored: Yahweh’s choosing one nation from all the peoples He had created is an act of mercy towards all the peoples He created. His care of the chosen people often meant that He thwarted the plans of the gentiles and punished their wrongdoing, but it did not mean that He hated them.

One may ask at this point, how much of God’s designs for all peoples was revealed to the chosen people? Our first reaction might be to say that there is very little if any evidence of such vision. There are, however, some indications to be found. In Psalm 87:

“I tell of Egypt and Babylon
among those that know the Lord;
of Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia;
‘This man was born there.’”⁵

In Psalm 89 we read of God’s dominion over all peoples. It is not just the power that represses them and saves the chosen people from them. While there is no existing “mission” to those people, there are occasional references to the time when they too will come to worship Yahweh and recognize Him as their only God. We all remember the story of how Elisha sent Naaman to wash in the Jordan, how he was cured of his leprosy and how he worshipped the God of Israel.

²Ezekiel 16:3, New American Bible.

³Genesis 12:2, New American Bible.

⁴Exodus 19:3-5, New American Bible.

⁵Psalm 87:4, New American Bible.

In the Old Testament, then, it would be wrong to say that the Jewish people saw the gentiles in the same light in which St. Paul saw them and yet, the Bible sees them as subject to the dominion of Yahweh and gives some glimpse of their future conversion. Let us turn now to the New Testament.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS

In the beginning of Luke's Gospel we have three canticles, which are very much in the Old Testament style; the Benedictus (Canticle of Zachary), the Magnificat (Canticle of Mary), and the Nunc Dimittis (Canticle of Simeon). These speak of the mercy of God, His care for the poor and the lowly, of a light to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and of a revealing light to the Gentiles. Of course, they also speak of the saving power of Yahweh. They give us some highlights from the past with an emphasis on things yet to come. I think they form some sort of link between past and future, between Old Testament and New Testament.

The first thing we should say about the New Testament is that Jesus gave His time and attention to the Jewish people. He was the fulfillment of the promises given to them. He was the perfection of revelation and so, much of His teaching is helping them to see the meaning of prior revelation in the light of what He is telling them. We must keep in mind the sharp distinction between the time that Jesus was living among the people and the time after Easter and Pentecost. So let us look briefly at His life and teachings. One of the first things we see is that He speaks out very clearly about the coming of the Kingdom of God. He says the Kingdom of God is at hand. This message goes right through the Gospel, and the parables and other teachings are constantly calling for a conversion in order to respond to the rule of God. Also, the emphasis on the mercy of God is very clear. The sick are healed, the possessed delivered from their evil spirits, sinners forgiven, dead brought to life. He goes out to the poor, the sinners, the outcasts. Nor does He confine His ministry to the chosen people alone. He goes north into Tyre and Sidon, goes across the lake into the territory of the Gerasene and spends a couple of days in Samaria. He told the story of the good Samaritan, the unjust steward, the people entrusted with the care of the vineyard and betraying that trust. He seemed to be deliberately rattling the cages of the masters in Israel. Their vision was narrowing at a time when universal vision was at hand. It is easy for us today to say that Jesus is the One Who, as the invisible head of the Church, sends all missionaries on their way, but it is clear that in His lifetime, He was announcing the coming of the Kingdom to the people of Israel. He came unto His own. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He set about making the rough ways smooth and the crooked ways straight and He gave glory to the Father from the heart of His chosen people. Here a struggle had to be won before He launched His mission to the whole world. His success came out of the apparent triumph of His opposition in the form of new life coming from the tomb and reaching out to the end of the earth and the end of time. There is a mysterious sense of "time" in the Gospels. We have reference to the fullness of time and we find Jesus speaking in mysterious ways about His time. Scholars today who search the Scriptures for a new light are talking more about the sudden emergence of a spirit of universal mission after the Resurrection, a spirit that became so very evident when He sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is a vision so vast and new that many of the early Christians, and even some of the Apostles, seemed to have problems in coping with it at first. We recall that it was the Risen Christ Who said: "As my Father sent me, so I send You." It seems correct to say

that the life-giving source of all mission is the Risen Christ, He Who has won salvation for all and is sending His Spirit-filled Apostles to make disciples of all.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

I would like now to take a very brief look at the New Testament writings. You know the story of the conversion of St. Paul and how he was told by Jesus that Paul was persecuting Him when Paul thought he was after some people just ahead in Damascus. This mystery of Christ identifying Himself with His followers is central to Paul's thinking. He builds on this. In the letters to the Colossians we are told of Christ's dominion over all created things and in the letter to the Ephesians we hear a good deal about reconciliation and we see the Church of Christ as a force for the reconciliation of all peoples. These three things: Christ being united to His followers, His power over all contrary forces, and His universal purpose of reconciliation are the main forces that carry Paul in and out of many dangers and finally bring him to his death. Each of the four Evangelists has his own approach to the mystery of Jesus. While they tell many things that Jesus did and said, they cannot be said to be writing a history of His life and times. What they are really trying to convey is the message of God's greatest intervention in the history of the human race. It is also interesting to note that, while each Evangelist is always aware of the people he is writing for, he does not lose that basic mission pattern that we spoke of in the life of Christ, some excursions into the land of the Gentiles and the outreach to the poor, the sick and the sinners. At the end we find the commission of the Apostles to preach to all peoples. We find that there is the same basic pattern in St. Matthew even though it is evident that he was writing for a community that had serious misgivings about preaching the good news to the Gentiles. St. Luke has given us a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He is considered to be the most mission-minded of the Apostles. In him we can see clearly the prophetic ministry of Jesus as a model for the future, and the anointing ministry of Jesus is duplicated in the expanding ministry of the post-Pentecost Church. The Acts, of course, just refers to the death and Resurrection, gives an account of the Ascension, of the group waiting in the upper room, the selection of Matthias, and gets right on to the account of Pentecost and the work of preaching the Good News. St. John's Gospel is a very different kind of book in the style of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament with their cosmic awareness of the deeper significance of things. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the pre-existent Son; He reveals the saving intent of the Father and lays down His Life for that purpose; He rises again and returns in triumph to the Father and sends the Paraclete upon the community and the Paraclete enables the community to continue Jesus' own mission to the world.

It is time to say something in summary:

- a. Old Testament and New Testament make clear the sovereignty of God and His Will to save all people. This power becomes incarnate in Christ and is given by Him to the Apostles, to the Church. In Jesus' acts of teaching and healing, we see the revelation of a saving God. And He is the model for all mission.
- b. History shows the influence of God in all creation. This is very clear in what we call salvation history: God using the good and bad leaders in Israel for His own purposes and leaders that did not belong to the chosen people; like Cyrus, Augustus, Pilate.

III. THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES

I want to look briefly at the Church of the Apostles in its missionary activity:

- a. First, they preach the Good News, telling the story of Jesus: He is risen, He is Lord.
- b. Second, they have to confront errors and talk out in the face of opposition.
- c. The third point concerns witness, because the Gospel is to be brought to all people, not just by preaching and teaching, but by the way that those who believe in it change their manner of life because of it. There are many aspects of this but the chief one is the bond of unity and love that is to characterize the life of the Christian community. It is clear in St. Paul that the establishment of this kind of community is the goal of his missionary work. In First Corinthians 6 we see that he is embarrassed because members of the community took their differences into a civil court. In the same letter you can see that he knew that their liturgical celebrations could attract outsiders and should be sensitive to them. When Ephesians speaks of Christians maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace he is talking about the unity between Jews and Gentiles and sees it as a sign of the reconciliation of all peoples.
- d. The fourth thing encouraged among the early Christians is good conduct or what we might call good citizenship. To be obedient to legitimate civil authority.
- e. Number five is apostolic suffering. It is an accepted rule that those who proclaim the Gospel would share in some degree in the fate of their Master, in persecution and sometimes death. This is not just a striking witness to one's faith and conviction but, in some mysterious way, it lets the sufferer participate in the redemptive pain of Christ. The weakness and hardships Paul endures means the death of Christ at work in him. This is very, very important not only in Paul's ministry but in the history of the Church since then.
- f. A sixth point to note is healing. We saw that in the Gospel, and it is evident too in Acts. We recall the curing of the cripple, who went into the temple jumping like an Olympic champion, and also the man who fell asleep during Paul's sermon and then fell out of the window.

IV. THE CHURCH TODAY AS MISSION

Now we take a look at some of the things that the Vatican II Documents have to say. The word Apostolate and the word Mission come from words meaning "to send." But we use the word Apostolate today for any active ministry such as various ministries done in a parish. We use the word Mission for the spreading of the Gospel among those who have not previously known about Christ. The distinction is worth noting. The Apostles started with what we would call Mission work, but as communities of believers were established there was the added concern of caring for the faith of those who were believers. Scripture scholars distinguish the missionary type of bishop from the local bishop. Paul and Timothy are good examples. The call to be a missionary, whether it comes to bishop, priest, religious or lay person, is a distinct call and makes a person a success in that work when he or she might be floundering in other positions.

With that in mind we look at Vatican II. In *Lumen Gentium* there is a statement that is worth repeating: "Christ, having been lifted up from the earth, is drawing all men to Himself. Rising from the dead, He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through this Spirit has

established His body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation.”⁶ The document on Missions picks up this final phrase and goes on to say: “The present historical situation is leading humanity into a new stage. As the salt of the earth and light of the world, the Church is summoned with special urgency to save and renew every creature. In this way all things can be restored in Christ, and in Him mankind can compose one family and one people.”⁷ The document then speaks of the noble energy of the whole Church and of marshaling the forces of all the people. The point is that the whole Church is on mission, not just those whom we properly call missionaries. The Holy Spirit, Who animates the Church and her institutions, is Christ’s principle missionary and He brings to every believer something of the basic missionary spirit of the Church. This is a duty that rests on the whole Church and principally on the Vicar of Christ. It is carried out by preaching the Gospels and the establishment of the local churches. Where preaching is not permitted, other works go on: working for the poor, the sick, the persecuted, the uneducated. And witness is given through generous caring and suffering persecution.

The document is also similar to the Old and New Testaments in that it draws inspiration from the vision of the future. Since all of this is God’s doing and God’s Will we can look forward with confidence to its final perfection. The document says: “And so the plan of the Creator, who formed man to His own image and likeness, will be realized at last when all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and beholding together the glory of God, will be able to say ‘Our Father’.”⁸

But it also has in mind the civilizing benefits of the Gospel here and now: “Missionary activity is closely bound up too with human nature itself and its aspirations. By manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to men the real truth about their condition and their total vocation. For Christ is the source and model of that renewed humanity, penetrated with brotherly love, sincerity, and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire. Christ and the Church, which bears witness to Him by preaching the Gospel, transcend every particularity of race or nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody.”⁹

Much of the document is about the practical Church organizations of Mission work, but the main thing I find in the doctrinal side of it is that mission impulse is rooted in Christ and is brought from Him into the lives of all members of the Church so that the whole Church is missionary. For some it means the special vocation to go on the Missions; for all others it means a living support for them through prayer, through witness, through sacrifice, through apostolic work at hand in every situation.

V. THE ANIMATION OF THE SECULAR ORDER

This is the point at which I want to look into the rule and life of the Secular Carmelite in relation to the Missions of the Church, Carmelite or not.

⁶*Lumen Gentium* 48.

⁷*Ad Gentes*, Preface.

⁸*Ad Gentes*, 7.

⁹*Ad Gentes*, 8.

The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites has a clear system of government for its local communities, but when you ask where does the authority come from to the local group you find that it comes from the Reverend Father General of the Discalced Carmelite Order. Since, then, it is governed by a Religious Order, its contact with the Holy See has to be through the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. You can see this in the beginning of the Rule book. The Decree of Approval of the Rule of Life is from that congregation. This decree gives the history of the updating of the Rule of Life, the petition of Father General for it to be approved, and the statement of approval. Then it says: “May God and His Virgin Mother Mary enable all those who in secular life share the spirit of the Discalced Carmelites to be filled with that spirit and, while living in the world, to follow more perfectly the Gospel path. May each one according to this vocation try to reach that secret union with God which gives new life to the apostolic service of the Church.”¹⁰ You can hear the echo of that statement of St. John of the Cross that one act of pure love is of more help to the Church than all the work we could ever do. In the Foreword we are told that all people are called to holiness, that holiness comes through the following of Christ whose graces are many, among them that of religious vocation: “Thus the religious vocation is given only to those whom God has especially marked out, but the gift which they have received, becomes the common heritage of the People of God.”¹¹ This is the principle which explains the establishment of secular orders in conjunction with religious orders. So, if membership in a religious order is a grace that, once received, becomes the common heritage of the Church, then why not say the same for the grace that makes one a member of the Secular Order itself? The Foreword says that the Secular Order members find in the Order to which they are affiliated “effective inspiration and sustenance both for their interior life and also for their apostolic endeavors.”¹² This living bond between the interior life and the apostolate is not just a Carmelite thing; it is basic to Christian living, but the way in which it comes out in the Carmelite life is in accordance with the Order’s particular charism. This same charism forms both the religious and secular Carmelite. The Foreword says it in this way: “The main obligation which the Secular Order imposes on its members is one of fidelity to the charism of their respective parent Orders; in fact, the Secular members share in full the Order’s ideals, its grace and spiritual heritage, but at the same time enjoy a sufficiency of autonomy from every style of life proper to religious together with full appreciation of their secular state of life.”¹³ That statement shows a clear sharing in the spiritual heritage of the parent Order while remaining clearly apart from the religious state. The call to sanctity is not diminished by the fact they are not religious nor is their value to the Church. Theirs is “a living spiritual communion which respects the secular character of the institution.”¹⁴ According to Article 1 of the Rule, the Secular Order members share with the parent Order its same vocation of holiness and its mission in the Church. This bond between union with God and the work of redemption must always be kept in mind. To try to separate these two concepts in speaking about the Church or any religious charism is bound to lead to misunderstanding.

¹⁰*Rule of Life*, Decree.

¹¹*Rule of Life*, Foreword.

¹²*Rule of Life*, Foreword.

¹³*Rule of Life*, Foreword.

¹⁴*Rule of Life*, Foreword.

One of the basic tenets of Carmelite doctrine is that contemplation is itself an Apostolate. This is readily seen in the prayer of Jesus Himself and most readily in the Our Father. The moving power behind all apostolic endeavor is the love of God for those He has created and redeemed. When this love is returned, when individuals or groups give a response to it in love, its effectiveness for the salvation of all is increased. Prayer is a very personal form of this response and from its very nature is an effective way of channeling God's redemptive love into human lives. But it is a noticeable fact that as prayer deepens it brings an increasing awareness of the need for apostolic (missionary) effort. The look we had at the Bible is interesting here. In the beginning the chosen people were directed by God to stay clear of the non-believers because there was a real danger that they would give up their faith in the One God and begin to worship the gods of the pagans. In fact, the whole story of Elijah shows how that did happen and how he had to battle against that. This was not the only incident. It would seem that before the fullness of time came, revelation was incomplete and faith was weaker. Weak faith had to be protected and strengthened before being exposed to the opposition that would kill it. In the New Testament, we can see how that spirit of protection and isolation was keeping that faith weak at a time when it should be growing strong. I see a pattern here that can be applied to the life of Secular Order members and to other people who practice prayer. In the beginning there is a great concentration on the practice of prayer and this brings with it a certain pulling away from the ways of those who are not interested in prayer. This separation or detachment is very helpful and indeed necessary in so far as it draws us away from ways that impede our growing bond with God our Father. This is a healthy change in line with the teaching that we cannot serve two masters or that two opposites cannot co-exist in the same subject. But this process of detachment or separation can also take an unhealthy turn and become a denial of the value of created things or even of the value of the humanity in which God has made us. So even in those earlier stages, in the times of ascetical striving to give ourselves more freely and fully to the love of God it is good to keep in mind the needs of the Church and to remember that a healthy growth in the life of prayer will gradually turn our thoughts and interest outward from our own growth and concentrate them more on the needs of others and leave our own perfecting to God. Not that this trend is to be so anticipated that it leaves us without the practice of self-discipline and self-denial, which is a basic element in Christian and Carmelite spirituality. If we look at St. Teresa's autobiography we see that her first move towards a new style of community came from the desire to be closer to God and less impeded from giving herself to prayer. But then stories about the spiritual distress of peoples in other countries provided another impelling motive. These two motives combined to inspire the Reform. The lesson that I draw from this is that while the desire for prayer and for time to be alone with God is very basic to Carmelite spirituality, it is not complete and will not grow to maturity without the desire to be part of the whole work of salvation. The God that is revealed to us from Genesis to Revelation is the Savior of the world and to make our will one with His is to join in His longing for the salvation of all. Perhaps this will help in understanding what is one of the finest paragraphs in the Rule: "The Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites sets before its members ideals, based upon the charisms and teachings of the Order's Saintly Founders, which constitute their particular way in Christian holiness. These are: a deep sense of faith in God's love; fidelity to contemplative prayer with the spirit of detachment it entails; and generosity in the practice of fraternal charity and the apostolate. They will place themselves under our Lady's

protection, and endeavor to live out these ideals in her presence.”¹⁵ We can easily see in that the journey inward to response to God’s love and the journey out to all His children. And under the ever-present influence of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Church.

This is the ideal. The reality is a constant struggle with this ideal. It calls for fidelity to prayer in the face of dryness, lack of achievement and the growing awareness of how little we have to offer. Learning to trust in God and not in ourselves is a slow, painful process that brings us through the ups and downs of being human in our efforts to pray and in our efforts to accept human life as we find it. The whole experience of living is a reflection of the death and resurrection of Jesus and unites us with Him in the entire work of Redemption. The contemplative is never totally engulfed in single projects or apostolic deadlines, but retains the awareness of his or her entire existence, that full present moment of human life, in union with the ever-present dying and rising Redeemer. The contemplative knows that God is not in some static condition but is totally and perfectly alive at all times. To be aware of Christ now, unrelenting in the work of salvation, is to join in the Marian awareness of the Church.

The spiritual exercises that the Rule offers to the Secular Carmelite contribute in their own way to this deep mission awareness that we find so evident in Thérèse. The exercise of silent prayer tends to bring us to an awareness of the vastness of God and to the cosmic needs of His people. The Mass unites our life to that of Christ, in His death, in His Resurrection, in the cause of reconciliation. We can trace this path through every practice recommended in the Rule. These are powerful influences, but we are slow to respond. However, if we maintain fidelity to the overall spirit of the Rule and do what we can in our situation to keep up the practices recommended in it, their influence will have in time a formative effect that will bring us closer to Christ and more and more concerned for the success of His universal mission. We join our whole life, not just our prayer times, with the life and intercession of Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, that through the work of the Holy Spirit all peoples may respond to the saving love of Christ.

VI. SUMMARY

We have seen that revelation has been given gradually. In the Old Testament it was a faith to be protected by a certain isolation. In the time of Christ we see that this isolation prevented people from seeing the trend to universality. And from Pentecost on we see a new people of God joining in His Mission to all. In the Carmelite way of living out the Christian life, this means receiving God’s love and responding to it in detachment from anything that keeps us from it. This interior life comes to a personal love of Jesus that makes His work and His Glory our primary concern. And so we follow Christ, while directed by Mary who is always our model. The charism which animates us comes from the mystery of the Church. Like the gift of Mary’s Motherhood, it is given for the service of Jesus Christ and His Church.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The OCDS *Rule of Life*, Decree, Foreword and Article 2.

¹⁵*Rule of Life*, Article 2.

2. *New American Bible*.
3. Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*.
4. *In the Fullness of Faith*, by Hans von Balthasar.

ADDENDUM

THE APOSTOLATE OF BEING

by Father Pascal Pierini, OCD

I. INTRODUCTION

The point I should like to make in this Addendum, entitled mysteriously, *The Apostate of Being*, is a relatively simple one, but in order to make that point with any validity or effectiveness, we must first lay the groundwork for its motivation.

Recall, please, these famous words of St. John of the Cross in his commentary on the twenty-eighth stanza of his poem, *The Spiritual Canticle*:

. . . a very little of this pure love is more precious in the sight of God and the soul, and of greater profit to the Church, even though the soul appear to be doing nothing, than all these other works together.

and:

Let those, then, that are great actives, that think to girdle the world with their outward works and their preachings, take note here that they would bring far more profit to the Church and be far more pleasing to God (apart from the good example they would give themselves) if they spent only half as much time in abiding with God in prayer, even though they had not reached such a height as this.

II. THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

St. John of the Cross is urging a priority in Christian living, as well as describing an advanced state of the development of that living. It is the same priority that Jesus urged when he was asked, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" He responded as you remember, "You shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind," and he added, "This is the first and the greatest commandment."¹⁶ **This is very emphatic language.** It impresses us that this is first and foremost what God wants. It is also the very same commandment that God gave when He entered into covenant with His people, as we read in the 6th chapter of Deuteronomy. It is what God has always asked. But strange to say it is the Commandment most frequently put second, the vague excuse, more felt than said, that if we get

¹⁶Matthew 22:37-38.

busy in service, or works, somehow it will all come out as the love of God. The fact is: it doesn't. Without the proper orientation of priorities, what should be the generous expression of love of God toward all our brothers and sisters becomes winning friends and influencing people, or at best humanitarianism and sociological involvement. These latter, of course, have their importance, and for those without God, they are the only awakening to brotherhood available. And sad to relate, they often outdo Christians in dedication and generosity. Still, what distinguishes religion and its works is its covenant with God, its priority of loving God first. Perhaps, what has made the priority of love of God so difficult to grasp and so frustrating to pursue is that we may not understand why it is a priority in God's mind.

Do we realize that God loves each of us? And the reason we can believe this is that it is **because** He is so good? That He doesn't begin loving us when we are good; because God is unchangeable and doesn't begin or leave off anything He does - unlike our experience of frail human love. That whatever God does He must do with all He is, and therefore His love for each of us is as infinite as it is for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints? That God loves each of us individually; we are not in competition with anyone for His love, no more than children of a family who are each loved wholeheartedly by their parents, yet individually, so that each one is irreplaceable? It is false humility, a dangerous travesty of virtue, an insult to the nature and quality of God's love, for anyone of us to say or think: Well, I'm a sinner, I'm no good; God can't love me; I'm not up to making myself worthy of His attention. God already loves, loves you each individually, infinitely, and forever, and that is the precise reason why in covenant, or religion, God places as a first priority of exchange that you love Him in return. The saints realized this, and that is their basic difference from us. They realized how much God loved them; their priority was to love Him in return. As a result their works had the very power of God in their effectiveness. Whatever station of life to which they were called, an active apostolate, a contemplative, cloistered life, the home, or the market place, whatever station of life to which they were called was illumined and transformed with God's love. You see, essentially, it is not how much we do, but how we do it. It is not multiplying prayers, nor business in works of service, that makes the difference with God; it is our love for Him that opens to Him the freedom to manifest His love in our lives and the activities proper to our station in life.

III. BEING: WHAT YOU ARE

Now we may concern ourselves with The Apostolate of Being. It simply means, in my interpretation, **what you are and what you can become**. What has attracted you to the Order of Carmel? Its spirituality. The heritage of its rule, its saints, its emphasis on prayer. You have become Carmelites because you felt drawn to its spirit, and its spirit is par excellence a contemplative one, in the broadest sense, i.e. not simply as a way of prayer. A contemplative spirit which means this orientation toward God, this pledge and commitment to the priority of the Love of God, so that the pursuit of that love will elevate and develop your lives in whatever station you find yourselves. Nothing better could fulfill this second commandment, which is like the first, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." A woman once said to St. Catherine of Siena, obviously admiring her contemplative spirit as well as important activities for the Church, "I should like to be spiritual but there are so many temporal things that prevent it." St. Catherine wasted no time addressing this cop-out: "My dear, it is you who make them temporal." St. Teresa

of Avila, in her Way of Perfection, speaking of the effects of a life whose priority is the Love of God, wrote, “it is as if one rises from play.” St. John of the Cross calls it “Transforming union,” not only in its highest sense of perfect love, but in its effective development of that love.

IV. BEING AND DOING

The Apostolate of Being is opposed to the Apostolate of Doing, not that Being does not do, but that it does so from the fullness of **what the person is and is becoming**.

I am sure that the majority of you belong to other religious organizations in addition to the Secular Order of Carmel. According to one’s abilities, time, and interest, one joins these organizations, with their specific goals and activities, to build up the Church, to help its membership, to be open in Christ like love to all people of all religious and ethnical persuasions. This is good; this is a Christian imperative. And those who may not be able, for whatever reason, to belong to other organizations beside the Secular Order can and should accompany these Christian works with their prayers and encouragement. The important distinction to grasp is that the Secular Order has no Apostolate of works to be done. **It is exclusively oriented to the Apostolate of Being, to the development of your life with God**, to the priority of the first and greatest commandment. Let it be so. Never turn the Secular Order into a program of activities. God loves each one of you infinitely, individually, forever: should there not be one organization in your program of Christian living and endeavor where you will attend to the priority of loving Him with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength? As we were reminded by St. John of the Cross, in words quoted at the outset of our theme:

. . . a very little of this pure love is more precious in the sight of God and the soul, and of greater profit to the Church, even though the soul appear to be doing nothing, than are all these other works together.

