

CCA * THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION



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If we define theological reflection as the reflection on personal and social experience in light of the Gospel, theology and our traditions, with a view toward decision making, we can see that, formally or informally, it has always been at the core of who we are as an association. Even before that first foundational meeting at Marriotsville, MD, in 1970, where the goal of the association was articulated as “to deepen and develop the Teresian contemplative life in the contemporary Church and world”, our communities had begun to grapple with Vatican II’s mandate to renew and to adapt, to return to the sources and to modify outdated expressions or customs. *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* were as much inspiration for our consideration as was *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Throughout CCA’s history, one can trace in general a sort of trajectory of concern, moving from attention to the authenticity of our own lives to, in later years, a broader attention to contemporary developments in world view and theology. This movement also includes in itself a kind of dialectic in which reflection and evaluation on how we live inspired development which inspired further reflection and evaluation.

Theological reflection together blossomed in earnest at our second meeting, Richfield I (OH), where the stated topic was the Teresian charism. 105 nuns from about 24 Carmels, with 5 friars, listened to papers by the member communities. These covered many aspects of our life: why review and concentrate on the Teresian charism, the Teresian charism and experience of God, the contemplative’s relation to the world, education for prayer, penance, prayer forms, prayer as personal relationship with the Trinity and the effects on community, the place of friendship in the Teresian community, the apostolic dimension of friendship with the Lord and its efficacy in the world, silence: a theological approach, and silence: its contemporary understanding and expression, solitude, communication, presence to the world.

In 1974, the “Roots” committee was formed and set about finding, translating and making available to us various documents having to do with our history, the “roots” of our Carmelite life. *Ancient Carmelite Texts*, a translation of *Les Plus Vieux Textes*, was a notable one of these.

At the 1975 meeting in Holyoke, MA, research into the history and traditions of Carmel provided more grounding for our reflections, and the desire to give expression to a renewed understanding of our way of life surfaced. Thus was born the Charter of Life project, and a 4 year exchange between the task force responsible for it and the communities. A tool for intracommunity study and dialogue was offered, the famous workbook and its circle with “prayer in solitude” as its center and concentric rings and spokes attempting to show the various aspects of our life and their interrelation. The communities’ commitment and responses to the task force were extraordinary. This included participation from Carmels now in the Mary, Queen of Carmel Association, which had not yet been founded. The Charter was the focus of our meeting in 1977, and went into 4 drafts before being published on August 24, 1979. That it truly represented our lived experience is attested by the fact that, now 30 years later, we still find it a meaningful expression.

Over the years, the themes of many of our meetings have involved theological reflection, including reviewing our ongoing experience. In 1978 we focused on Christology, in 1979, the theology of contemplative life, and in 1983 on a contemporary interpretation of Teresa and John. The 1981 meeting included reflections by our sisters on the fruits of renewal. The 1989 celebration of the bicentennial of Carmel in America involved numerous speakers and responders on every aspect of Carmel. It also featured papers by our own sisters assessing the almost 25 years of renewal. Subjects included liturgy, use of technology, initial and ongoing formation, enclosure, and relationships. In 1991, we were invited to see the situations of our communities – aging, fewer vocations – in the light of a dark night experience – in fact, to do theological reflection on our current situation.

In 1999 we moved beyond reflection on our own lives and charism to look at postmodernism and what Carmel might have to bring to today’s culture. That meeting also included presentations by 7 communities on their recent experience: prayer as ministry, present interpretation of enclosure, relations with others, an incorporation experience, an experience of merger (union), a model of leadership, involvement in a theological learning experience. Meetings since then have focused on transformation in the quest for God (Scripture: tracing change in Israel’s God image thru their history), the call to be prophetic, the role of the imagination in transformation, and this year, Christology in light of our new understandings of evolution and the emerging universe.

Drawn from the wellsprings of our contemplation on the Scriptures, Carmelite texts and our theological study, the prayer and Eucharistic celebrations at our meetings have mirrored the fruit of our theological reflection. The joy of music, musical instruments, choral singing, poetry, dance and preaching have combined in creativity and given us inspiration for our life together. The sharing of diverse gifts in the context of prayer has truly been a foretaste of the heavenly home.

We are now at a new moment in CCA’s life, invited again by circumstances to do theological reflection on our lives and the future of our communities. In a time of diminishment, rising median ages with concomitant health concerns, fewer vocations, we need to re-imagine what

creative fidelity means, to come even, as Fr. Camilo says, to a new experience of God. Our history gives great hope that we can do this. To quote the Charter, “We are women of our time...we believe that the God whose Face we seek comes to meet us in each unfolding moment of the human story.”

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