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Camminiamo insieme, Signore
Si dialoga per comprendere



MEETING OF THE DISCALCED
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**THE CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND
SPIRIT OF SAINT TERESA:
*The Rule, the Constitutions, the Way of
Perfection***

The monastery of St. Joseph of Ávila, inaugurated on August 24, 1562, was born as a house of experience, and it seems that three motives were at work: the Foundress' own experience as she identified with Christ and was determined "that the first thing was to follow the call to the religious life, which His Majesty had given me, by keeping my rule as perfectly as I could" (*Life* 32,9; *Constitutions of 1991*: 1,4); her sympathy with the contemporary movements of stricter observance in religious life in Spain (*Life* 32,10), involving spiritual persons like St. Peter of Alcantara (*Life* 30, 5-7); and her discomfort with respect to the style of life observed in her first monastery of the Incarnation, "that when I entered this monastery of St. Joseph I still didn't know how to live" (*Life* 37,9).

1. *The Carmelite Rule and the new style of life (Ávila, 1562-1567)*

The point of reference of all the contemporary reform movements at the time of St. Teresa was a return to the origins, to a so-called "Primitive Rule." In the case of St. Teresa, the first thing that stands out is that she made her discovery when the construction of the modest building of St. Joseph's was already underway in the Spring of 1562 when she was staying in the palace of Doña Luisa de la Cerda – and this discovery came about through the illiterate beata, María de Jesús Yepes, who was seven years younger than she. "She showed me the patent letters she brought from Rome, and during the fifteen days she stayed with me we arranged how we should go about founding these monasteries. Until I had spoken to her, it hadn't been brought to my notice that our Rule -- before it was mitigated -- ordered that we own nothing, nor had I been about to found the house without an income. My intention had been that we have no worries about our needs;

I hadn't considered the many cares ownership of property brings with it.” (*Life* 35,1-2).

The final chapters of the Book of Her Life reveal Teresa's inner struggle between her realistic vision and the Rule's approach to poverty. Three reasons made her hesitate:

- a) that the opposition of the city would not allow her to make a foundation without income, since Ávila already had a considerable number of nuns, with more than enough institutions and poor people than for the city to have to face the problem of another new monastery that would also consume the alms given by the usual benefactors of other monasteries;
- b) that her supporters of the foundation did not approve the inconvenience of so much poverty;
- c) that this poverty "would be the cause of some distraction since I observed certain poor monasteries in which there wasn't much recollection." (*Life* 35,2).

To clear up this series of doubts that she had, Teresa asked for the opinions of her confessors and other learned men. Fr. Pedro Ibáñez replied with “two pages with objections and theology written on both sides on why I shouldn't do it, and he told me he had studied the matter very carefully.” (*Life*, 35, 4) However, St. Pedro de Alcántara sent her a spirited letter in which he reproached her for putting into the hands of learned men what was not a matter of their competence and that if she wanted to follow the counsels of Christ with greater perfection, then “(she) should in no way decide to receive an income,” (*Life*, 35 ,4) In the end, Teresa decided to follow his advice.

The importance of the Rule for her new community of San José of Ávila is stated by her in detail: “We observe the rule of our Lady of Mt. Carmel and keep it without mitigation as ordained by the Friar Cardinal Hugo of Saint Sabina and given in 1248, in the fifth year of the pontificate of Pope Innocent IV” (*Life*, 36, 26), adding in the next line, after pointing out two other concrete details of its practice, that it is “the first Rule” (*Life*, 36, 27).

Not all the details are exact, nor was this even historically the primitive Rule, the first *formula vitae* given by St. Albert of Vercelli, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to the hermits of Mount Carmel. In saying “first” and “without mitigation,” Teresa was using a common terminology, since this was how the Rule was designated at that time in its legal “status” prior to the version then in force in the Order (that of the “mitigation” of Eugenius IV). This is how it was designated even at the official level, both in the pontifical documents that reached Teresa from Rome and in those written to her by the General of the Order, Fr. Rubeo. For him, there was no doubt that the Rule embraced by Mother Teresa and her nuns of St. Joseph’s of Ávila was “the first,” “the primitive,” the *prima Regula*, as he repeats in different patents that he issued.

There was one thing in which she was mistaken: in affirming that the version of the Rule she followed was “without mitigation.” In the canonical sense this was not true: the Rule approved by Pope Innocent IV “clarified, corrected, and mitigated” the “Albertine Rule.” Surely, this “Teresian error” was encouraged by the deficient Spanish translation that was used then, which bore the following title: “(they) follow the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Religious of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, of the Primitive Rule with any relaxation.”

All in all, the most important argument in her choice of the “Innocentian” text of the Rule is that, in order to start a new contemplative community, Teresa was interested in two things: solitude and community life, both needing to be well-constituted. When she recalls that the ideal in St. Joseph of Ávila is to live “alone with Him alone” (*Life*, 36, 29), “avoid(ing) being together and speaking to each other save at the designated hours” (*Way of Perfection*, 4, 9; *Primitive Constitutions*, 8), “(f)or the style of life we aim to follow is not just that of nuns but of hermits” (*Way* 13, 6), Teresa reaffirmed the primitive eremitical inspiration of the Rule. When she calls the community a “college of Christ” (*Way*, 27, 6), in which “all must be friends” (*Way* 4, 7), and “the holier they are, the more sociable they are with their Sisters” (*Way* 41, 7), she underlined the cenobitic aspect of the Rule. The integration of both dimensions was better formulated in the “Innocentian” Rule. This is why Teresa chose it.

The spirit, more than the letter, is what Teresa was looking for in her first Carmelite Rule. Therefore, to be faithful to it, to her contemplative ideal and to her ecclesial response, she had to go beyond the “letter,” and

also beyond the way the reform movements of her time used to interpret it: which was as an attraction of rigor, because, let us be clear here, rigor - and the more rigor, the better – was the most striking “identity characteristic” of those reform movements.

It is true that the reform about which Teresa was thinking contained, at its beginning, many elements that were inherited from others and that coincided in part with the primitive, eremitical, Carmelite charism, from which she never detached herself (cf. *Way*, 11,4; 13,6; *Primitive Constitutions*, 32; *Foundations* 14,4-5; *Interior Castle*, V, 1:2). However, rigorous poverty did not constitute an absolute value for her; rather, it was a means to achieve other ideals: freedom from “tyrannical” founders, the unconditionally egalitarian coexistence of her nuns (without differences enforced by the system of dowries), the manual work required from all the Sisters, a joyful lifestyle, and an atmosphere that favors the experience of prayer, which is so Teresian.

Hers was a “modern” reform that promoted humanism, not rigor, as she would say to some of her more “extreme” friars: “Understand, *padre*, that I am fond of strictness in the practice of virtue but not of austerity, as you see in our houses of nuns” (*Letter 161 to Fr. Ambrosio Mariano*, December 12, 1576, 8). From this statement there followed continuous warnings directed to her friars and nuns in order to make them understand the spirit of the Rule: “All that is in our Rule and Constitutions serves for nothing else than to be a means toward keeping these commandments (love of God and of neighbor) with greater perfection. Let's forget about indiscreet zeal; it can do us a lot of harm. (*Interior Castle*, I, 2:17); that “our rule doesn't bear up under rigorous people” (*Letter 150 to Fr. Jerónimo Gracián*, November 19, 1576, 2); that “one does not break the rule when a necessity is present; nor should one be strict in this matter” (*Letter 428 to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Soria*, December 28, 1581, 5); that “(s)ouls that are restrained cannot serve God well” (*Letter 376 to Fr. Jerónimo Gracián*, February 21, 1581, 3); and for that very reason “the prioress should strive to guide each nun along the way His Majesty is leading that one, provided that the nun is not failing in obedience or in the more essential matters of the Rule and Constitutions” (*Foundations*, 18, 9).

In contrast to other reform movements that appealed to the Rule to increase rigor, Mother Teresa appeals to the Rule precisely to moderate

this rigor, to recommend gentleness and prudence (as the Rule itself “asks” in its final paragraph): “I ... would want them to observe the rule, for with that there is plenty to do; and the rest should be done with gentleness” (*Foundations*, 18, 7); “(w)e don't keep some of the very ordinary things of the rule...(a)nd we seek to invent penances in our heads with the result that we can neither do the penances nor keep the observance” (*Way*, 10, 6; cf. *Interior Castle*, VI, 6: 7). Not everyone knew how to interpret the things of the Spirit as Teresa did, with “fulness and largesse” (cf. *Interior Castle*, I, 2:8), convinced as she was that “intelligence...is necessary to understand perfection and even the spirit of our rule” (*Foundations*, 18, 8), that holiness is also a question of capacity, and therefore with many people “much time will pass before they come to understand perfection and even the spirit of our Rule (and perhaps they will afterward be the holiest)” (*Foundations*, 18, 8).

2. Constitutions (Ávila, 1565-1567)

We do not know exactly when Teresa wrote her first norms; perhaps before writing the *Way of Perfection* (1566), and perhaps even before the *Life* (1565), for already in the latter book, in the line followed by the detailed quotation on the Rule, she added: “Now, although there is some austerity because meat is never eaten without necessity and there is an eight-month fast and other things, as are seen in the first Rule, this is still in many respects considered small by the Sisters; and *they have other observances which seemed to us necessary in order to observe the rule with greater perfection*” (*Life*, 36, 27). These “other observances” besides the Rule could well refer to some early form of Constitutions.

What we do know is that in the Spring of 1567, in his visit to the monastery of Sr. Joseph of Ávila, Fr. Rubeo approved the current Constitutions of that house and authorized then for new foundations both of nuns and of friars that were going to be made under obedience to him. It was an extremely brief text, a little more extensive than the Rule, and based upon it:

- 1) The manner of solitude and recollection in the cell is inspired by the Rule, evoking the solitary place of Mount Carmel where the hermits erected their cells around a common oratory: “All of that time not taken up with community life and duties should be spent by each Sister in the cell or hermitage designated by the

prioress...By withdrawing into solitude in this way, we fulfill what the rule commands: that each one should be alone" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 8; 32; *Way*, 4, 9).

- 2) Likewise, there is a simple, austere lifestyle, through the practices of fasting and abstinence: " Meat must never be eaten unless out of necessity ,as the rule prescribes " (*Primitive Constitutions*, 11).
- 3) The equal treatment among the nuns, without differences or privileges: "The Mother Prioress should be the first on the list for sweeping so that she might give good example to all....Those having these offices should do no more for the prioress and the older nuns than they do for all the rest, as the rule prescribes, but be attentive to needs and age, and more so to needs" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 22).
- 4) The sense of co-responsibility in work: "Each one should strive to work so that the others might have food to eat. They should take into careful account what the rule ordains (that whoever wants to eat must work) and what St. Paul did" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 24).
- 5) The office of the prioress as mother and teacher of the group: "It is the duty of the Mother Prioress to take great care in everything about the observance of the Rule and Constitutions ... and to see that both spiritual and temporal needs are provided for; and these things should be done with a mother's love" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 34; cf. *Foundations*, 18,6; *On Making the Visitation*, 22).

Here the Saint adds an important nuance, which is spiritual communication: "All the Sisters should give the prioress a monthly account of how they have done in prayer, of how the Lord is leading them, for His Majesty will give her light so that if they are not proceeding well, she might guide them. Doing this requires humility and mortification and is very beneficial" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 41). It should be remembered that, when she writes this, she herself is the prioress of the community and, therefore, this text above is a simple codification of what the community is practicing under her direction. Some years later, when revising the constitutional text, she would add: "But let it be understood that the

novices should give an account to the mistress, and the other nuns to the prioress, of their prayer and what good they draw from it, and this is to be done in a way that this is freely given, understanding the great spiritual benefit that they will receive from it, rather than because they are constrained to do it" (*Constitutions of 1581*, ch. 14, n. 4).

- 6) Charity in fraternal correction: "The chapter of serious faults is to be held once a week, where, according to the Rule, the faults of the sisters are to be corrected with charity" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 43).
- 7) And finally, as a general balance of what is contained in these Constitutions, she expressly indicates that "almost everything is set up in conformity with our Rule" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 31). This means that the Teresian Constitutions were like an extension or interpretation of the Rule for a new project of life. The text of the Rule itself is defined in this way: a *propositum*, a project, a resolution. To read the Rule as a project of life, a *vitae formula*, this undertaking could not remain a mere repetition of what had already been said, but an effort to make explicit what was implicit, to express what was not said.

Therefore, besides the contemplative-eremitical ideal of the Rule, Teresa in her Constitutions introduces a new element: spiritual communication/community recreation, something that did not exist in the monastery of the Incarnation and that she introduced twice a day (cf. *Primitive Constitutions*, 26-28) and for which she also did not hesitate to modify the Rule by mitigating the prescription of silence, such as in this instance: "The Mother Prioress may give permission should one Sister desire to speak with another so as to quicken the love each has for her Spouse or to be consoled in a time of some need or temptation. This rule of silence should not be understood to refer to a question and answer or to a few words, for such things can be spoken without permission" (*Primitive Constitutions*, 7).

This novelty must be understood, indeed, from that new style of contemplative community that Teresa wanted to establish in her monasteries, of praying and communicating, no longer simple prayerful recitation, but of an introduction to the experience of prayer: "Others already know that you are religious and that your business is prayer. Don't

think to yourself that you don't want them to consider you good, for what they see in you is to the benefit or harm of all. And it is a serious wrong for those who have so great an obligation to speak of God, as do nuns, to think that it is good for them to hide their feelings about God; although they may be allowed to do this sometimes for a greater good. God is your business and language. Whoever wants to speak to you must learn this language...If those who speak with you wish to learn your language, though it is not your business to teach anyone, you can tell about the riches that are gained in learning it since telling of this is beneficial to the other, and when he learns about the great gain that is to be had, he may go and seek out a master who will teach him. It would be no small favor from the Lord if you were to succeed in awakening some soul to this good" (*Way*, 20, 4, 6).

For Teresa, enclosure did not mean isolation. In fact, one has the impression that the speakroom of St. Joseph of Ávila was often frequented (cf. *Way*, 20, 3-6; 41, 7-8) and it is certain that she was well aware of what was happening outside of the enclosure in the kingdom of Spain and in the Church. It was this ecclesial sensitivity that determined the expansion of "the Teresian project," to the point that (as her first biographer wrote) "she raised her thoughts higher and added to the penance and poverty that she had previously instituted, and thus mapped out her plan in another way."

This style of life was the Teresa she wanted to instill in Fray John of the Cross, her young candidate, when he was still a student and was tempted to leave Carmel for the Carthusians, when she took him with her to Valladolid and introduced him to the life of the new Carmel at the time when there was no enclosure, since the house of the future monastery was being prepared. She was not so concerned that he should learn "virtues" – because in that "(h)e was so good that I, at least, could have learned much more from him than he from me" – but "so that he would have a clear understanding of everything, whether it concerned mortification or the style of both our community life and the recreation we have together. The recreation is taken with such moderation that it only serves to reveal the Sisters' faults and to provide a little relief so that the Rule may be kept in its strictness" (*Foundations*, 13, 5). Therefore, it was not the isolation of the Carthusian monastery that Fray John was looking for, but the Teresian style of sisterhood, recreation, and communication. The best document giving the "evaluation" of this candidate of hers after his months in Valladolid with such an exceptional teacher is a letter to Francisco de Salcedo at the end of September, 1568, where we also have a scene of two "angry" Saints,

quarreling between themselves: "I myself must have caused trouble at times by becoming annoyed with him -- we never saw an imperfection in him" (*Letter 13*).

Her expression "everything" refers, evidently, to "our way of life," to "the lifestyle of the Sisters," "the manner of life in these monasteries" (*Foundations*, 13, 5: 27, 6), that way of life with minimal structures and rapid learning: "for within fifteen days from the start our manner of life can be set up so that those who enter do not have to do anything more than what they see is done by the other nuns" (*Letter 79 to Don Teutonio de Braganza*, January 2, 1575. 8).

But besides complementing and enriching the text of the Rule with her Constitutions, Teresa went further:

she wanted them to be more than a juridical code, she wanted them to be resources of initiation to the contemplative experience, for which she added a third text: the *Way of Perfection*.

3. *Way of Perfection* (Ávila, 1566)

Initially, when Teresa began to write this book, it seems that she proposed to follow the Rule and Constitutions closely, as if she had to gloss what is contained in them: "Do not think, my friends and daughters, that I shall burden you with many things; please God, we shall do what our holy fathers established and observed...I shall enlarge on only three things, which are from our own constitutions" (*Way*, 4, 4). However, within the book this exposition of the topic happened absolutely independently of the juridical code and the author oriented her writing toward a true manual of formation for her nuns, in the light of which it would be necessary to read and to interpret the previous legislative texts.

- 1) The book begins by presenting the end proper to a "house of experience," the apostolic value of the contemplative life, the spiritual project of a group of prayerful women at the service of a Church that is so in need of their lives (*Way*, 1-3), a project for which the Rule has been its focus: "I would consider well worthwhile the trials I have suffered in order to found this little corner, where I have also sought that this Rule of our Lady and

Empress be observed with the perfection with which it was observed when it was initiated" (*Way*, 3, 5).

- 2) Teresa takes from the Rule the contemplative ideal of continuous prayer as the primary activity of the Carmelite (*Rule*, 8). For that reason, the prayer that she proposes to her nuns is not a practice of fixed schedule, but a way of living the Christian mystery: "Our primitive rule states that we must pray without ceasing. If we do this with all the care possible -- for unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the rule -- the fasts, the disciplines, and the silence the order commands will not be wanting. For you already know that if prayer is to be genuine, it must be helped by these other things; prayer and comfortable living are incompatible." (*Way*, 4,2).
- 3) This ideal of the Rule is later used by Teresa with fine irony in her polemic against the opponents of mental prayer: "Leave aside, as I said, your fears where there is no reason for fear. If someone should raise these fears to you, humbly explain the path to him. Tell him you have a Rule that commands you to pray unceasingly -- for that's what it commands us -- and that you have to keep it. If they tell you that the prayer should be vocal, ask, for the sake of more precision, if in vocal prayer the mind and heart must be attentive to what you say. If they answer "yes" -- for they cannot answer otherwise -- you will see how they admit that you are forced to practice mental prayer and even experience contemplation if God should give it to you by such a means." (*Way*, 21:10).
- 4) So for this very reason, for the exercise of this continuous prayer, Teresa recalls the importance of solitude and silence: "it is important that (they) avoid being together and speaking to each other save at the designated hours. This would be in conformity with the custom we now follow, which is that we are not to be together but each one alone in her own cell, as the rule commands. At St. Joseph's the nuns should be excused from having a common workroom, for although having one is a laudable custom, silence is better observed when each nun is by herself; and to get used to solitude is a great help for prayer. Since prayer must be the foundation of this house, it is necessary that

we strive to dedicate ourselves to what most helps us in prayer." (*Way*, 4,9).

The *Way of Perfection* is a book of spiritual formation, of theological life and of contemplative prayer, written initially for her nuns: "It is about prayer that you asked me to say something" (*Way*, 4, 3); "you asked me to mention something about the foundation for prayer. Even though God did not lead me by means of this foundation, for I still don't have these virtues, I know of no other" (*Way*, 16, 1); "(this) s perfect contemplation, that which you told me to write about" (*Way*, 32, 9). It was a matter, then, of continuing in writing the daily familiar dialogue, the oral teaching of the Foundress gave her nuns: "I have often told you, Sisters, and now I want to leave it in writing here so that you will not forget it" (*Way*, 13,1); "and although I teach you many times, and by the goodness of God you do it" (*Way - Escorial Manuscript* - 19,1). Hence its colloquial character: "do not think this is too much, for I am playing the game, as they say" (*Way - Escorial Manuscript* - 24,1); "this is mental prayer, my daughters, to understand these truths; do not be talking to God and thinking of other things" (*Way - Escorial Manuscript* - 38,2).

Of all the Teresian writings, the *Way of Perfection* is undoubtedly the most orderly and pedagogical, with a clear structure and a constant idea on all its pages: the contemplative experience, the magisterium of prayer and the configuration of a new ecclesial charism. And as such, it became "the bedside book" of Teresian communities, disseminated first through handwritten copies made by the improvised scribes of the different monasteries and patiently revised and corrected by the author herself. At present, two copies authenticated by her exist: one in the monastery of Salamanca and the other in that of Santa Ana in Madrid. But as the circle of readers grew, manuscript diffusion of this book was insufficient and it was then that Teresa herself launched the idea of publishing it (cf. *Letter 305 to Don Teutonio de Braganza*, July 22, 1579, 1). An edition was printed in Évora in 1583, which by the cruel fatality of a few months never reached her hands. The fact is that it is still the most widely published and disseminated book of her corpus.

In addition to her nuns, as the immediate and ideal recipients of this book, St. Teresa herself, who was flattered that her writing could be compared with the Sacred Scriptures, was clearly aware of its validity for other souls. Thus, she recommended it to her brother Don Lorenzo (cf.

Letter 172, January 2, 1577, 11; *Letter 182* of February 19, 1577, 7), or she regretted not having left a copy in Seville for the Carthusian prior, Fr. Hernando de Pantoja, or even for the confessor Garcíálvarez (cf. *Letter 190 to María de San José*, April 9, 1577, 5). Convinced, finally, that prayer is for everyone – “Behold, the Lord invites all” (*Way*, 19, 15) – the *Way of Perfection*, the book of her particular magisterium, is universal in its scope, breaks new ground, provides the outline of an experience that in itself has a virtue of attraction and can be the starting point for spiritual initiatives and an original personal journey. It is a living text for a living experience.

Salvador Ros García
Convento de San Juan de la Cruz
SEGOVIA

APPENDIX

Revitalization versus “routinization” of the charism

Sooner or later in its history, every charism is exposed to what Max Weber termed the phenomenon of “routinization,” or the loss of its prophetic capacity, to the extent of mimicry on the part of its disciples or followers – this is a phenomenon of decadence. Weber goes to far as to say that extinction usually occurs after the death of founders, when their charismatic authority is replaced by a more stable and institutionalized structure of authority.

Without being exactly scandalous, this must be seen as an inevitable distraction through which a charism has to pass – and does indeed go through. The charism of Mother Teresa, of course, was not going to be an exception. There is the well-known episode of the manipulation to which her reform was subjected according to the official guidelines imposed by that famous Genoese friar (with the fervor of a neophyte), Fr. Nicolás Doria. He took over the reins of government of the Discalced Carmelite friars and nuns without possibility of opposition and wrought that tragic division to which polemical opinions on the Teresian heritage also gave rise – and which other more recent historians, with evident anachronism here and coming from opposite directions, have tried to revive, unfortunately.

Now is not the time to return to these episodes, much less to enter into anachronistic polemics, but to propose a reading of what, according to St. Teresa, ought to be a permanent revitalization of the charism, the renewing dynamism to which she seems to allude in her writings with frequently-used terms such as “to begin,”

“to start,” “to determine.”

Fortunately, in addition to words, we have, above all, her very concrete attitudes and deeds. In her very rich epistolary, there are numerous and irrefutable examples that allow us to see her case as an exemplary realization and a very advanced fulfillment of the motto: *Ecclesia semper reformada*, applied to religious life. In order to be faithful to her charism and her mission in the Church, she did not hesitate to suggest and introduce striking changes in aspects of religious life that she had previously considered basic, in order to differentiate herself from the Calced

Carmelites in matters of poverty, income, habit, etc. The conserved fragment of a letter to Mother María Bautista, dated sometime between 1579-1581, is a complete “code” of the heights to which the thought and experience of the Foundress had reached, as well as a reflection of her interventions: “You should know that I am not the same when it comes to governing. Everything is done with love. I don't know whether this is because I have no reason for acting otherwise, or because I have come to understand that things are better dealt with in this way”(Letter 321).

However, it turns out that there is also a series of very instructive “anthological texts” written at different times, where Teresa insists that her daughters and sons – present and future – permanently renew the grace of their origins and consider themselves as the foundations of the building:

- In 1565, when she was writing the *Book of Her Life* in the peace of her first monastery, she concluded “the foundation chronicle” with these words that were addressed to Fr. García de Toledo, with her mind set on the future of her nuns: “I believe you will be annoyed by the long account I've given of this monastery, but it is very short in comparison with the many trials we suffered and the wonders the Lord has worked for it. There are many witnesses who are able to swear to these marvels, and so I beg you for the love of God that if you think you should tear up what else is written here you preserve whatever pertains to this monastery. And when I'm dead, give it to the Sisters who live here, that when those who are to come see the many things His Majesty arranged for its establishment by means of so wretched and dreadful a thing as myself they might be greatly encouraged to serve God and strive that what has been begun may not collapse but always flourish.

Since the Lord has desired so particularly to show His favor toward the establishment of this house, it seems to me that one would be doing a great wrong and would be punished by God were one to begin to mitigate the way of perfection that the Lord has initiated here and so favored that it can be borne with such great ease; it is very clearly seen to be bearable and can be carried out calmly. The main disposition required for always living in this calm is the desire to rejoice solely in Christ, one's Spouse” (*Life*, 36,29).

- Eight years later, in 1573, after seven more monasteries of nuns and several of friars had been founded, and in a time of crisis that interrupted the foundations and imposed confinement upon her, Teresa began writing the Book of Foundations, recalling past events and giving warnings for both present and future situations: “Well, as these little dove-cotes of the Virgin, our Lady, were beginning to be inhabited, the divine Majesty began to show His greatness in these weak little women, who were strong though in their desires and their detachment from every creature. When practiced with a pure conscience, such detachment must be what most joins the soul to God. There is no need to point this out because if the detachment is true, it seems to me impossible that one offends the Lord. Since in all their dealings and conversations these nuns are concerned with Him. His Majesty doesn't seem to want to leave them. This is what I see now and in truth can say. Let those fear who are to come and who will read this. And if they do not see what is now seen, let them not blame the times, for it is always a suitable time for God to grant great favors to the one who truly serves Him. And let them strive to discern whether there is some failure in this detachment and correct it.

“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” (*Foundations*, 4, 5-7).

- At the end of 1576, at the most tragic time for the Reform, in view of the circumstances and the persecution unleashed against it, Teresa believed that her work of founding and her Book of the Foundations were both finished. She closed the book with this warning: “May it please His Majesty to give us abundant grace, for with this, nothing will prevent us from advancing ever in His service. And may He protect and favor all of us so that this excellent beginning, which He was pleased to initiate in women as miserable as we, may not be lost through our weakness. In His name I beg you, my daughters and Sisters, that you always ask our Lord for this and that each one who enters in the future bear in mind that with her the observance of the primitive rule of the order of the Virgin, our Lady, begins again and that she must in no way consent to any mitigation. Consider that through very little things the door is opened to very big things, and that without your realizing it the world will start entering your lives. Remember the poverty and hardship that was undergone in obtaining what you now quietly enjoy. If you note carefully, you will see that in part these houses, most of them, have not been founded by men but by the powerful hand of God and that His Majesty is very fond of advancing the works He accomplishes provided we cooperate ... For if you always ask God to foster this way of life and you trust not at all in yourselves, He will not deny you His mercy. And if you have confidence in Him and have courageous spirits -- for His Majesty is very fond of these -- you need not fear that He will fail you in anything” (*Foundations*, 27, 11-12).
- Lastly, in 1580, having learned of the brief that was negotiated by King Philip II that would set up the Discalced friars and nuns as a separate province (soon to be an independent Order), Teresa warned with undisguised delight yet holy boldness: “Now we are

all at peace, calced and discalced; no one can hinder us from serving our Lord. Hence, my Brothers and Sisters, since His Majesty has heard your prayers so well, let us make haste to serve Him. Let those in the present who are eye-witnesses consider the favors He has granted us and the trials and disturbances from which He has delivered us. And those who are to come, when they find everything running smoothly, let them, for the love of our Lord, not neglect anything relating to perfection. May that which is said of some orders that praise their beginnings not be said of them. Now we are beginning and let them strive to advance always from good to better. Let them beware, for the devil through very small things drill holes through which very large things enter. May it not happen that those who are to come say: 'These things are not important; don't go to extremes.' Oh, my daughters, everything that helps us advance is important. For love of our Lord, I beg you to remember how soon everything comes to an end, to remember the favor our Lord has granted us in bringing us to this order and the great punishment that will befall anyone who might introduce some mitigation. Rather, fix your eyes always on the ancestry from which we come, those holy prophets. How many saints we have in heaven who have worn this habit! Let us adopt the holy presumption that with the Lord's help we will be like them" (*Foundations*, 29, 32-33)

From this relationship of texts and contexts, it is clear that as the institutional process is being defined, the greater became Teresa's urge to revitalize the grace of the origins, her insistence on the present to become the foundation of the building, of those who are to come – as if what is proper to the charism's grace, its vitality of growth, is to be always beginning with endless beginnings, a life never put "in parentheses."

In this essential attitude, charismatic authority differs precisely from mere legal authority. From this stems Teresa's written memorials and warnings to Fr. Gracián on the eve of the Chapter of Alcalá, when the Constitutions of the Discalced friars and nuns were being drawn up, so that he would not burden them with details that would give rise to scruples in the matter of confessors, the habit and footwear, of income and abstinence, but rather leave the religious with great freedom of spirit, because "souls that are restrained cannot serve God well, and the devil uses this restraint to tempt them. But when they have some freedom, they often pay no attention to it

and make no use of it" (*Letter 376 to Fr. Jerónimo Gracián*, February 21, 1581, 3). From this attitude also stems the frequently-repeated words to her nuns, on knowing how to discern the essential from the accessory in order not to relativize the absolute or to absolutize the relative: "Let us understand my daughters, that true perfection consists in love of God and neighbor; the more perfectly we keep these two commandments the more perfect we will be. All that is in our Rule and Constitutions serves for nothing else than to be a means toward keeping these commandments with greater perfection. Let's forget about indiscreet zeal; it can do us a lot of harm. Let each one look to herself. Because I have said enough about this elsewhere, I'll not enlarge on the matter" (*Interior Castle*, 1: 2, 17; cf. *Way*, ch. 4, 6, 7; *Life* 13, 8-10).

It is not necessary to go on any longer here, except to conclude with a farewell scene that well illustrates the meaning of what we have wanted to say here. It is the farewell scene of Teresa in Valladolid, on her last journey, when she was already near death, and even more wounded by the behavior of certain prioresses who were imposing their authority using methods that were very different from hers. The then-novice María de San José (Dantisco), the sister of Fr. Gracián, remembers this: "Unlike at other times, when she would not allow the nuns to come close to her and show their feelings (which she said was something that belonged to women), on that particular day, she gave way to everything, and with great tenderness she embraced and said goodbye to each one of the nuns. As she was going out the door, she said to all of us: 'I am amazed at what God has done in this Order. See that you do not fall away from it. Do not do things by habit alone, but by doing heroic acts of the greatest perfection. Give yourselves great desires, for even if you cannot put them into practice, you will profit much by them. I am very consoled by this house; by the poverty and the charity you have for one another. See that it remains like this.'"

Salvador Ros García
Convent of St. John of the Cross
SEGOVIA