

**REPORT TO THE EXTRAORDINARY DEFINITORY, SANITAGO, CHILE
BY FR. LUIGI GAETANO, 2nd DEFINITOR GENERAL**

Fr. **Luigi Gaetani**, OCD, 2nd General Definitor

How can I share with you my experience, which is no doubt similar to yours, without repeating what has already been said? And so as not to do this, my contribution will be based on what I have personally gathered in my visits, which have brought me to see such beauty in our midst. It is really true, our religious, our communities, our Provinces are not problematic, but a universe still to be discovered, people to be listened to, people who do not so much ask for a solution to their problems but rather understanding, fraternity and authentic relationships. This experience of my visits has been a great blessing for me; it has become a place of encounter, a true incarnation of the Order, companionship of the Church and a place of Mystery.

Starting from this positive viewpoint that, in different ways, also reflects the Discalced Carmelite Sisters and the Laity, I would like to speak about some areas, drawn from a much wider reflection, rather than a presentation of my travels. In this way, I hope to achieve something valuable, in helping us all to see not so much the effect of certain difficulties but rather their probable causes. I would like to make four points in my presentation: the task of animation in Europe, a relationship and relationships, responsible management, fraternal life as the nucleus of community and ministry.

1. The Task of animating in Europe

The task of animating the OCD Provinces that our Father General has entrusted to us (*the Provinces of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Croatia, not forgetting those countries like Romania, Albania and Bulgaria that are part of the Order's expansion, besides those territories that I must also speak about, because of their cultural affinity and territorial relationship such as France and Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other Circumscriptions from Eastern Europe, entrusted to the Definitors, Fr. Zdenko and Fr. Robert Paul*), this task would not make sense without a serious reflection on the inspiration of Christian hope. It is not possible to coordinate, at whatever level of ministry, if our ability to hope is in some way defective.

What is happening in Europe deserves our attention because, being an outpost of the Church and society, it could be helpful for many to study the situation in Europe that, who knows in the not too distant future, other Order's Circumscriptions may also have to experience. We need to look at the situation in a realistic way but also with the eyes of a child, the heart of a child, and so in this way not be discouraged, but rather entrust ourselves to the Risen Lord, the hope of all the world.

In today's cultural and theological-juridical situation, in this "night", as some have called it, Religious Life, is in a kind of anorexic phase, as it finds itself weakened in its being and prophetic voice. It is symptomatic of today's world, as Pope Paul VI pointed out, that we do not have enough witnesses, whereas there is an abundance of "men in charge", and while there is a scarcity of prophets there is no shortage of diplomats. Today everyone can see that the hope for the Kingdom is attacked by a modern way of thinking, by a culture that lives without hopes for the future, without past experience and focuses everything on what happens in the here and now. Our future has been stolen from us because we are less sure of making progress, because the relationship between times gone by and future hope seems unattainable. The very creativity has been killed off by normality, by managing to live lives without stress. It is not a fact of being a "minority", but only of being marginalized, cut off from our cultural and social roots where we think our future lies.

From this viewpoint, which can be easily criticized, we must recognize effective signs of solidarity and gaps in prophesy, feelings of reaction and wanting another kind of life and being, a hope that is open, windows of opportunity that call, awaken, summon and challenge. It is really when we clearly discern the signs of the times and places that we have to consider that in Europe Christianity is not the issue, nor Religious Life, but rather the very existence of humanity and its relationship to the Mystery. The problem is, first of all, anthropological, because in the present transformation of society and culture, we are crossing an anthropological frontier; we are passing through a situation from a post-industrial model to a technological one. In this passage fear often prevails and some believe that they want to tamper with life and spirituality. Faced with a transformation that is difficult to define, because we are truly dealing with important values that refer to the human person and his/her religious being, we need to give space to research, creativity and experience, because we need the courage to dare, to ford the river of history and the soul.

In this sense, what is happening in Europe, either within society as a whole or in the Church, cannot be considered a terminal illness, but something that represents a sign of a transformation that due to globalization will affect the planet. The same "notte" of Religious Life does not damage European for the fact that it European, but for the fact that we are living in the midst of a society whose culture is changing. To understand this process means being prepared to live through today's cultural changes, it means that we have to think again.

If we apply what was said above, as an example, to the choice that has brought and brings to the search for aid with vocations in countries beyond Europe, we will have surprising results. In fact, these aids cannot represent the solution to the problem of vocations in Europe, but will serve only to slow down the pace of the new. Neither can we be so naïve to talk about mission in the opposite sense, because we are dealing here with another kind of mission, we are going through a period change that can only be lived and accepted, in a process of purification and renewal, by those who know it and have gone through it, crossing all its phases of development and crisis. We are grateful to so many brothers and sisters in our midst, who have helped us to keep some important presences, but we do not confuse the problems.

Religious Life in Europe cannot allow us to abstain from this search for truth. If this were to happen religious life would drown in the pond of its pretension, which would bring it to give in to itself, to put up barriers, to be self referring, to be concerned only about survival in a modern age, while all along this is the time for courage, the time for religious life to seriously question itself, to accept the pruning so as to be, in the present world, a witness to life in the Spirit, "a theological place", "Kairos", an opportunity to be theologically relevant and religiously important, so that Christianity can look at Europe to see what could be its future.

2. Relationship and relationships

From the experience of my visits the first big area to emerge is the conflict within modern society regarding the human person and, in particular, his/her ability or not to relate. If it is true that among us religious there is an urgent need to relate, to have quality relationships then we cannot just ignore this theme.

Religious identity, which is a clear awareness of what it means to be a religious, grows above all in community, in relationship with others. It is important to begin from here in order to understand why, today, the quality of relationships, at a personal or community level, risk being over valued for the fact that we are able to communicate more. Not a few religious spend a lot of time on the phone, on the mobile phone, or the internet and have a full address book, but this does not in itself improve the quality of their relationships. In truth, the quality of relationships is not in proportion to their multiplication, but rather to their value in and for community and to their becoming more personalized to an ever greater human and spiritual depth. It is a particular experience of younger religious that they have a certain appreciation of and facility in

relationships, at least at first sight, but they also reveal a thirst for as many different experiences as possible. Perhaps in this consumerism of relationships are they not also hiding, besides the obvious positive reasons, their excessive fear of loneliness, even the subconscious difficulty of being alone with themselves, or of feeling unsure of who they are?

Relationships, in the light of our religious identity, are not restricted only to the horizontal level (interpersonal, community, pastoral and professional relationships); because a religious wants to be for others, he is called to be, first of all, for the Other. If he lacks this vertical openness, if the religious has not been educated to direct his existence to God, *living* "in ossequio" of Him, he runs the risk of separation. Therefore, this is not one of the possible relationships, but is the basic one, which gives sense to his own identity and defines all other relationships. In the school of this profound relationship, the community, true meeting place of relationships, becomes a theological space where these, marked by the evangelical counsels and a life focused on God, mature as witness, solidarity and apostolic service, and are open to "dialogue with everyone" (VC, 100-103) and apostolic collaboration in the Church.

In the end, religious identity can also be considered at the level of charisma. And here we can say that we are concerned about some signs of depression. I will only present one area: that of the promotion of vocations.

We see that discernment does not always appear as the guide to vocational ministry. Perhaps we are more concerned about survival and numbers rather than the nature of the calling of a possible candidate. In this way we create a "vocational crisis" that has more the flavour of "a crisis of religious-affectivity", when a candidate is frustrated by what he finds, which was not what he had hoped for; or he has a crisis of identity, of enculturation, of fulfillment. Already the Congregation for Religious, in a letter from 1995 to the Apostolic Nuncio in Spain, recommended care concerning the inherent dangers of recruiting young ladies as postulants from Latin American countries, Asia and Africa, for convents which would otherwise have to close. This is not something that can be limited to convents, it concerns us all.

2. Responsible management

Another theme that I believe it is important to face up to is that of responsible management. We all know that to fulfill our own Carmelite mission the communities engage in apostolates, work in different fields: pastoral, educational and editorial. For this we create Church Associations, associations, NGO's, Cooperatives that involve buildings, the person in charge of the work, legal representation, responsibility for expenses and advice. In the works there are salaried staff and volunteers and the community, often, no longer is responsible for everything.

I believe it would worthwhile to reflect on the fact that a ministry brings together a community of people, whom we can define as "a working community" that is different from a religious community, because it is another subject, is wider than religious communities, in that a religious community is part of it. The life of a religious community and the apostolate are not independent but interact, they influence and condition each other. This dependence requires us to be clear on the institutional relationships, so as not to separate the community from its apostolate, which would result in grave damage to the witness of communion and to the charism that governs the apostolate. In fact, while the relationship of the religious superior with his community is clear from the Constitutions and Norms, his relationship to the apostolate, whatever it be (centre of spirituality, parish, school, centre for editing, association...), is not always clear. This, therefore, gives rise to two possible risks:

- if the superior is responsible for the apostolate, the community risks being neglected, because the duties of the apostolate are excessive;
- if the superior is not responsible for the apostolate, he risks being marginalized, if not in conflict with those who are responsible for the apostolate.

That the above is an example of a quite wide-spread situation in our Provinces, a situation that reveals a permanent risk between a religious community and its apostolate. We should, however, be aware that most of our communities are not "communities of regular observance" but "apostolic communities". To continue running and encouraging them as if nothing has changed in the last forty years, means creating conflict, besides wasting resources and quashing enthusiasm.

4. Fraternal life, the centre animation of a community and its apostolate

A theme that is always relevant is that of community life. The recent reflections by the Church on religious life ("Religious life in community" 1994; "Vita Consecrata" 1996; "Beginning again in Christ" 2002), like the documents of the Order, place the accent on community awareness, that this: makes visible the charisma in its beauty, communicates its spirituality, witnesses to the following of Christ, is present in the world and interprets its challenges, is involved in the local Church, is motivated in on-going formation and teaches the laity co-responsibility.

The local communities are the places where we live, the places where vocations are fostered, where we are meant to be and where we work. It is in this important field that the Province must create conditions so that the community can function, guaranteeing pastoral support and animation, must also be able to propose possible projects and periodic checks. We have not forgotten, that the Province exists for the local community, therefore, in the present cultural transition, some choices will be considered opportune: criteria for the make up of a community, a new relationship between community and apostolate, more involvement with the local Church, transition from a life in common to a life of fraternal communion.

I would just like to share with you what I mean exactly by this last choice.

Common life is what we had been taught from our novitiate days: living together, fulfilling the same community acts where, as you can easily imagine, what was most important was being present. **Fraternal life in communion** has to do with welcoming the person, the quality of interpersonal and community relationships, friendship and being happy to be and work together.

I am aware of the difficulties but I want to suggest that we need to find a balance in our community lives. We know, in fact, that fraternal life does not come about only because of the common life, just as the opposite is true that without the common life we cannot create fraternity.

To encourage fraternal life in community we need to change the communities bearing in mind the above mentioned guidelines and consolidate its fraternal life. The nucleus of a community is a group of religious who: are identified with a common mission, share a spirituality and a charism, bind themselves singularly and collectively to the responsibility of drawing together, motivating and involving all those who are interested in an apostolate, forming with the laity an apostolic community and, together, completing a project of evangelization. All this means that the fraternal community is a fundamental element, which is closely connected to others such as: the participation of the laity in our mission, the training of an apostolic community, the drawing up of a local as well as a provincial project, the communication of our spirituality and the sharing of our charism. This model recalls that the activities and apostolate stand, today, only with the criteria of participation, real ways of ecclesiology of communion, openness and an appreciation of all the vocations of the People of God.

Rome, 18th September 2005

Fr. **Luigi Gaetani**, OCD, 2nd General Definitior