

**REPORT BY FR. A.M. ZACHARY IGIRUKWAYO O.C.D.
AFRICA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN
TO THE EXTRAORDINARY DEFINITORY, CHILE**

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To speak about the presence of the Order in Africa and the Islands of the Indian Ocean, first of all I would like to refer to the figures that show us that this area of the planet is a missionary one for Carmel, then I would like to share with you a few thoughts on some challenges that we face.

Africa and Indian Ocean: Missionary territory for Carmel

Present in 20 countries

In the 53 countries and islands that make up Africa, besides the two countries where our presence is linked in one way or another with the Middle East (Egypt) and Spain (Morocco), we are present in twenty of them, which is less than 40% of the total. The twenty countries where we are present are: South Africa, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Cameroon, the Republic of Central Africa, Brazzaville Congo, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, the Dem. Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Reunion Island.

The missionary involvement of 10 Provinces

Providence has desired that, despite the general decline today in vocations in most of the traditionally missionary Provinces, besides in the two situations that are directly under the Definitory (the Commissariat of Madagascar and Indian Ocean and the General Delegation of the Congo), more than a third of the provinces and circumscriptions of the Order, precisely 10, are still directly involved in the Order taking root in Africa: the Anglo-Irish Province, Aragon and Valencia, Avignon-Aquitaine, California-Arizona, Krakow, Liguria, Karnataka Goa, Lombardy, Navarre and Washington. The whole Order owes them a dept of gratitude for the sacrifices they make to maintain their missionary presence in both the number of personnel and the quality of their presence.

The need to strengthen present foundations and to be open to others

In spite of the Order's presence in 20 countries and the involvement of ten provinces, there is still a need to expand in this part of the globe.

1. According to the statistics available in 2004, Africa and Madagascar have 321 religious out of a worldwide total of 4,035. At the same time, the population of Africa represents about 14% of the world's population, 1% more than Europe and only about 10% less than North and South America. Therefore, Carmel is proportionately represented (in Africa & Madagascar), by a little less than 8%; a shortfall of about 6%. According to these statistics there ought to be a total of 547 religious. From a numerical point of view, seeing the number of vocations growing in the countries where the Order is rooted, Africa and Madagascar constitute more a place of hope than an actual, effective reality of our Carmelite presence.

2. Furthermore, even in the 20 countries where Carmel is present, either our friars or our sisters are not yet represented together, which is something Our Mother St. Teresa would have wanted. In two countries out of the 20, there are no Carmelite nuns: Burundi and the Republic of Central Africa. And in two out of the 20 again, the nuns are present but the friars have still not arrived: Ghana and Equatorial Guinea.

3. Elsewhere, local Churches ardently desire a strengthening of our Carmelite presence whether it be by establishing new foundations, by more local vocations, or by a more significant presence of our charism through different aspects of teaching and spirituality. For example, and I will only mention five requests for which we are not yet ready to give a favourable response: on the African mainland, there is Togo, Ghana and Equatorial Guinea for the friars; while for the sisters there is Mali; in the Indian Ocean region, there is Seychelles.

4. While local vocations still need to be nurtured during initial formation the number of missionaries present is getting fewer and fewer. This phenomenon is understandable, there is no longer an abundance of vocations in the northern hemisphere from where, traditionally, the missionaries came and then, Provinces need to maintain their own communities and apostolates as much as they can, then there are the every more pressing requests for the Order to expand into Eastern Europe and the Far East. And yet, our missionary awareness, which has a specifically Teresian stamp, must be part of the formation of our young African Carmelites and those from the Islands of the Indian Ocean.

A question arises therefore: **in view of Carmel's situation in today's world and considering our missionary duty to pursue the expansion of the Order in Africa, what strategy should be adopted to respond to this ecclesial need?**

Major challenges

At the same time that Africa is still a missionary land, it offers particular challenges that should be faced. I would like to mention four: the first two are related to fraternal life in community and formation (2003 Chapter Doc. Nos. 69-70§1, 82), the other two to finance and culture.

1. First of all, with **relation to the establishment of a charism in an area without a long tradition of any charism.** It is a question of choice between territorial expansion on the one hand and the consolidation of the present communities on the other. The demands of our missions tend to draw us more and more into opening houses and to getting involved in even more apostolic works. With the perspective of the numbers of vocations increasing, it is so easy to be convinced of the urgent need to respond to this expansion, while the on-going development of our charism (in Africa and elsewhere) requires the building up of good prayerful and fraternal communities, which will openly witness to our Carmelite identity by the way they live and the way they accompany the young vocations as they mature.

2. Formation. For the Order to take root in what ever part of the world the first priority is formation. In Africa and Madagascar, in general, the first problem that we meet seems to be on the level of discernment of vocations, formation and accompaniment. In order to try and find a response to this challenge during this sexennium, a Congress was organized in the French Speaking Zone, in Yaoundé, Cameroon in 2004. Another similar meeting will be held soon in the English-Speaking Zone. We are trying to work out a global plan of formation from vocational discernment to initial formation, to the quality of formation communities and on-going formation.

In following this up, it is noticeable that in almost all our African missions, there is a formation programme already set up (postulancy, novitiate, formation of simply professed in colleges). When one becomes aware of the need for training young Carmelites in the heart of a province (locally) that is looking after all the facets of the Carmelite presence and takes care of them within the framework of an overall provincial project, this choice (to train young Carmelites in the heart of a province) is more than justified. But often, we do not make competent personnel available to keep all these formation programmes running smoothly.

From this arises an urgent question: ***more than the need to get to know each other and for inter- action between Carmelites in Africa, is the need to unite all our efforts to improve the quality of formation; could not the different circumscriptions be invited to think about a practical programme to collaborate together in the area of initial formation?***

This programme would principally consist of the well known structures, but also fully trained formators to accompany the same formation programme, plus the necessary material for formation such as books and lectures for example, again financial backing to make it possible; then two aspects of formation, accompaniment and evaluation, must both work together, (evaluation must be regularly carried out), and so must the formators, those responsible for accompanying and evaluating.

3. Financial challenge. The financial costs for the construction and maintenance of buildings by the original Provinces is slowly being transferred to the local religious, who have much more difficulty looking for funding outside the country. We should ask ourselves how has this stage been prepared for, or is now being prepared. First of all our apostolate (in Africa and elsewhere) does not bring in much money. Generally, the Christian faithful that consists of a large number of religious communities, are in fact poor, but also are not sufficiently educated to look after the priests, and are not able to support materially the apostolate of the members of mendicant Orders: an apostolate related to preaching and spirituality. Then, a similar formation to the one traditionally offered in the missionary institutes, which encourages the development of the necessary practical skills for the maintenance of a building is often lacking. Besides, we have perhaps left it a little late to think about introducing management skills for property and money and in the same way to think about a culture of creativity (being enterprising) in the domain of exploiting potential sources of revenue that are to be found locally. *Should we not be thinking, at the same time, about a local ratio on formation that would give much more space to the practical aspects of formation, to the concrete ways by which Provinces that are materially comfortable can support the developing OCD missions in poor African countries.*

4. Cultural challenge. There are challenges proper to Africa that cannot be ignored if we want to plant Carmel there. The accommodation of values in the African context always requires a discernment that is both anthropological and evangelical. It is within this context that certain questions always merit our particular attention in the development of different Carmelite projects: integration in belonging to one's natural family network (tribe) with, at the same time, belonging resolutely to a universal religious family; an understanding of the vow of poverty in the context of the poor that entails being close to them, (i.e., not being distant from the poor) an understanding of what work means (i.e., the importance of working manually and practically, not relying on others to do household tasks) and to be aware of one's society (not to avoid or forget the needs of one's society, now that one is living among friars, and seemingly in a different society): the importance of hospitality on the one hand and the need to safeguard times and places of privacy for the community on the other, etc.

In my talk I wanted only to touch upon a topic that can be gone into at greater length and opened up to other aspects that I have not dealt with here.

Thank you.

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