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INDEX

- The sanctuary of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in China is still standing
- The vicissitudes of the basilica to St Teresa in Alba de Tormes
- Insecurity in the area of Kivu, Congo
- Regional Vicariate of the Carribean
- Christmas greetings

The sanctuary of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in China is still standing

There is more news on the sanctuary of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in China, which the political authorities had decided to dynamite (cfr. COMMUNICATIONES Nº 85). Through international pressure and the reaction of the Chinese Catholics against the provincial and national governments, the church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in Tianjiating (Henan), (diocese of Anyang) is still standing, for the moment. Even so, the authorities still uphold the prohibition of pilgrimages, which normally amount each year to more than 40,000 people. The local Catholics are still authorised to frequent the sanctuary. However, liturgical celebrations are forbidden.

The scholar, Fan Xuede, has risen in defense of preserving the sanctuary. He is the notorious ex-member of the Communist party who was converted to Christianity in the 1990s. At the moment he is exiled in the United States of America. In an article dated 21st June he wrote, "You won't manage to destroy completely what even the Japanese failed to pulverize. There were many errors made by the Red Brigade. Don't commit the same errors . . ."

The vicissitudes of the basilica to St Teresa in Alba de Tormes

With feelings of admiration and envy we look on the basilica of St Therese of the Child Jesus in Lisieux. At the time of the "hurricane of glory" it was possible to finish this grandiose and costly building in record time. The same has not happened with the basilica Spain wanted to raise in honour of St Teresa of Jesus in Alba de Tormes, the ducal village where the Holy Mother finally met her Spouse. The basilica is a few metres from the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns, who retain the body, the heart and an arm of the Saint. The basilica, begun in 1898 at the initiative of the Bishop of Salamanca and public subscription, still remains exposed to the heavens. Repullés, the architect, conceived a grandiose project that very soon became paralyzed. On every Teresian centenary it was decided to continue the building.

In 1982, for the IV centenary of the death of the Holy Mother, the whole project was redesigned. From something sumptuous it was reduced to what was more practical and modest. The Teresian celebrations having passed, the work once again came to a halt. Recently, on the 8th November, the Bishop of Salamanca signed a contract with the architect Ricardo Pérez and the firm of Jesús Yáñez. They are going to roof the church, thus beginning the work that should be concluded within 25 years. "It is my desire," said Mons. Carlos López Hernández, "to continue on with the building until it is finished, to the best of my ability. At the moment, the chapels and side isles are finished; it is up to us to begin finishing off the central nave and the transept."

The roofing will be in exposed laminated wood (since it is a very durable material), brick joinings (used often in churches) and copper sheeting. If finances permit, we will continue on with added services: a retreat house for pilgrims and a guest house. The original plan attempted to reproduce the interior castle in its architecture. Now we are trying to pay homage to St Teresa of Jesus. The symbolism that best does this will be the light that inundates the basilica from the stained glass windows that crown the church. They will center on St Teresa and her foundations, complemented by others evoking other important saints in the firmament

of spirituality, such as St Therese, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, St Maravillas, St Catherine of Siena, . . .

The idea of finishing the Teresian basilica seems opportune in light of the coming Teresian centenaries: 2014 — the 4th centenary of the beatification of Mother Teresa of Jesus; 2015 — the 5th centenary of the birth of Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada. All donations will be gladly received.

Insecurity in the area of Kivu, Congo

The state of security in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo increasingly deteriorates. Since August 2004, the rebels of Laurent Nkundabatware, the dismissed general of the Congolese forces, have been attacking the government forces in the north of the Kivu province. Since last September, the Congolese government decided to put an end to this situation of insecurity in the province and are trying to get rid of the dismissed general's troops and positions. Because of the military clashes, thousands of inhabitants have fled from their houses. There are tens of thousands of the population in flight, wandering in the jungle without any form of assistance. There are thousands of other displaced people in the refugee camps at Mugunga and Bulengo, thirteen km from the city of Goma on the outskirts of the Carmelite parish of Goma-Katindo, where our priests Jean-Pierre Ngemanyi, Baudouin Mpanga, Pierre Thadée Bayi and Jérôme Paluku are working. They are young Carmelites from the General Delegation of the Congo. In the camps more than 43,000 refugees survive. The only thing this number ever does is to increase each day, in inhuman conditions.

The conditions in this situation effect the whole area: human lives become totally destroyed, the infrastructures ruined, ... People live in the uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring. On the 18th October this year, the parish of Nyakariba in the territory of the Masisi, was set on fire by unknown people. The parish priest was away at an outstation on pastoral duty. It is not only the rural areas that suffer from the general insecurity.

In the capital, Goma, the situation is the same. It was a miracle the Bishop escaped assassination last October. The insecurity is the same for individuals and religious communities. How long must we live in these conditions? Nobody knows! Observers say that the situation could deteriorate. All of us live surrounded by destruction, fearing to talk about the present.

The majority of priests from the interior, the mountainous areas, have taken refuge in Goma. There, just like here, systematic looting of parishes and religious communities is frequent and unforseen. Other priests have fled to unknown places. Various parishes are closed due to the tremendous and continuous insecurity. From the 22nd October the priests in Goma have taken refuge in the "Maria Mama" centre at Buhimba, next to the large philosophy seminary. From there they can observe if the situation is getting better. How long will they have to remain there? Nobody knows.

A Congolese songster sings in Lingala: "Na mokili tour à tour, lelo ya yo lobi ya moninga" — In this land everyone takes care of everything: today it's my turn, tomorrow it will be the turn of my brother". . . This is the refrain that orders daily life for the inhabitants of Goma, leading thousands of people to a traumatizing psychosis of desperation and discouragement.

Every day there are armed robberies with the disturbing knowledge that there is nothing that can be done about the situation. It is a sign of the daily degradation. This ongoing robbery or institutionalized plundering is a way of economic survival in the general chaos. There are thousands of victims of this barbarity. At nightfall, everyone asks themselves who will be the next victim. In this way the general traumatization increases.

On the night of 10th November, armed men in military uniform attacked the convent of the Ursuline sisters at Tildonk, in the barrio of Himbi, in the area of our Carmelite parish. They assaulted the Sisters, wounding one grievously in the eye. They took away the furniture, computers, mobile phones, money ... whatever they could find to hand. Which religious community will be the next victim? And what will happen if the thieves do not find anything to take in the houses they are trying to rob? This is our life in Goma. We can say without any form of drama: In the present situation the only thing that counts is to trust totally in Divine Providence and the protection of Our Lady of Mt Carmel.

Regional Vicariate of the Carribean

It is dependent on the Castile Province and comprises the houses in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Porto Rico with an appendage in Miami (USA). The Carmelite presence in this area of America began in 1880 with the foundations made by Spain in Cuba. Political changes reduced Carmel in Cuba to the present three houses: two in Havana and one in Matanzas, with six priests and one student. It is hard to forget Carmel in Havana. The situation in Cuba helped to consolidate our presence in the Dominican Republic, which now has 5 houses, 14 priests, 7 students in philosophy, 2 in theology and 5 novices, at present in Mexico. There is also a monastery of our nuns in the Dominican Republic at Baní. In Porto Rico there are two houses with 7 friars. At the moment 2 friars live in the residence in Miami.

The sum total of the Regional Vicariate of the Carribean consists of 31 friars in 11 houses which are subdivided into 9 parishes, 3 colleges, 2 spirituality centres and one spirituality institute. Worthy of mention is their three-monthly spirituality review "Espíritu y Vida" which began in 1993.

Christmas greetings

"Shining over his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, there were angels in splendour who brought the good news to the shepherds, but at the same time the lowliness of God in this world was all too palpable. . . ."

Benedict XVI,
Spe salvi, nº 50

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To all readers and communities, to all who look for or find communion with Carmel's family in *COMMUNICATIONES*, we wish the fulness of hope in our God amongst us, Emmanuel.

May the Lord grant you a **Merry Christmas** and a **prosperous New Year!**