

FROM THE ORIGINS UP TO TODAY:

THE CARMEL AND THE ECUMENICAL PASSION

CITeS

UNIVERSITAD DE LA MÍSTICA (AVILA, SPAGNA)

CEI

CARMELO ECUMENICO INTERRELIGIOSO

CEM

CARMELO ECUMENICO MONASTICO

In the thirteenth century, some Crusaders, who moved by the Holy Spirit to meet on the summit of Mount Carmel, became the symbolic ancestors of the Order of Carmel. In the same experience of Elijah:

They sought the Living One before whose Face Elijah stood. For these hermits Mount Carmel was a mystical space which drew them away from established patterns and into God¹.

Why did Ruach, the Spirit, choose Mount Carmel?

On Mount Carmel, in the experience of Elijah, one can read in the watermark the same universal experience of the Burning Bush, rectius the experience of Moses finds that of Elijah, despite the different phenomenological expression: the Name struggles against idols, YHWH reveals Himself and Elijah, like Moses, takes the side of the Name. Not in terms of power, but in terms of who, really, between the Baals and Yahweh, is God. The monotheistic faith remains strong and he “represents the *davar acher*, (other interpretation) of *mattan toratenu* that is of the gift of the Torah at Sinai²

The ancient tree of the Carmel Order, born in the Diocese of Jerusalem, continues to flourish:

- In the sixteenth century it was Teresa of Jesus who gave life to what is called the Discalced Carmel, more properly Teresian Carmel;
- In 1631 the Spanish Carmelite Prospero of the Holy Spirit-since 1620 missionary in Persia- succeeded in his plan to bring the Carmelite Order on the summit of Mount forcibly abandoned in 1291. After the occupation of Haifa by the Mamluks, the monasteries on Mount Carmel have been destructed. Prospero obtained by the Emir Ahmed Turabay part of the property of the Mount and permission to build. He

¹ K. WAAIJMAN, *The Mystical Space of Carmel. A Commentary on the Carmelite Rule*, Leuven 1999, p. 2-3.

² P. DE BENEDETTI, *Elia e il suo Dio*, in *Elia o il Mosè del silenzio*, BIBLIA, Atti del Seminario invernale, Trevi, 22-25 gennaio 1998, p. 165.

managed to find the original convent and the symbolic places of the symbolic fathers.

- In the twentieth century the *Ruach* continues to amaze with the flowering of CITES, the CEI and the CEM.

Some theological questions

The biblical *topos* of Mount Carmel brings together the three monotheistic religions:

- Israel: with the prophet Elijah who proclaims the ONE GOD on its summit;
- the Christians: with the Carmelite hermits who have chosen it as their home and then became the symbolic ancestors for all their descendants over the centuries;
- Islam: that worships Elijah el Khader, the green prophet. in the grotto at the foot of Mount.

Then some theological ecumenical questions arise:

- What is the significance for the entire CITES, CEI and CEM of the holy city of Jerusalem?
- How does the original source of Mount Carmel pulse as life in the Spirit of CITES, CEI and CEM?
- Is the spirituality of CITES, CEI and CEM structured by the realization of this ecumenical legacy so radical and significant?

At present for us Christians in general, and for us Carmelites in particular, the Ecumenical feeling is quite different from that of Teresa of Jesus, linked to the mentality of her time, immersed in the wave of Luther that spread to Europe and shook the Catholic Church. However, the Teresian doctrine, anchored to the symbolic ancestors, the hermits of Mount Carmel and to the Rule which they received from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Albert, remains the fertile womb with its original charisma which is alive and who wants to give an answer today for humanity and for the Church.

We all Carmelites in fact inhabit Mount Carmel, we all belong to the diocese of Jerusalem.

The cradle of the Order still conserves the priceless traces of the first settlement and the history of the Carmelites amply demonstrates the attachment to the Holy Land.

The Passion for Israel and Islam

After the Vatican Council II one can fit into a precise historical theological framework in which the identity of the Carmelite, born in the Diocese of Jerusalem and always dwelling on the Mount Carmel - almost a treasure chest of the three monotheistic religions that is waiting to be hatched: Israel, Christianity, Islam - demonstrate how it becomes our own and we bring this sign of the times to historical reality.

Our historical and spiritual roots speak to us day and infuse our impulse. Challenge and turning point to which the Order of Carmel must answer. How is it giving it?

The prayerful listening to the Word and power of intercessory prayer emanating from the Rule, which has left a deep imprint on the history of Jewish-Christian and Christian-Muslim relations? So it is well paved, with living stones, among the many roads that are climbing to Jerushalaim, our road, the Carmelite road. Some faces are carved with force in the history of the mankind and the Church and fulfill, in God's plan of salvation, a dual function: they witness the past and are the womb of another contemporary ring in *shalsholet*, in the chain of transmission, which involves together tradition and innovation, conservation and change.

The transition, therefore, from the theological elaboration to the life of faith, hope and charity, attests to the vitality of the research and the experience of those who have vibrated in the tension of the ecumenical passion.

The steps of some predecessors of CITES, CEI and CEM are well detectable and otherwise engaged in the humus of Carmelite life, at any latitude or longitude is lived, assuming the particular face of the Passion for Israel and for the Unity:

Historic theological nods

Ours is the time of the so-called Third Quest, the Third Research, next to three other research periods, but born after the brutal human tragedy of the Shoah:

- Old Quest, Old Search: the period of investigation on the historical Jesus (1774-1778), opened by the publication by Lessing of posthumously discovered fragments of Reimarus and of the all controversy of the liberal school;
- No Quest, No search: it connotes three decades of the twentieth century between the twenties and the beginning of the fifties, with the domain of *Formgeschichte*, the History of Forms;
- New Quests, New Research: Käsemann in 1953 reopened the discussion on the historical Jesus.

For Christians, then for the Carmelites, we need to grasp the central and focal point, "recognizing, at last fully, because in itself it would be obvious: Jesus was a Galilean Jew of the first century of our era."

As a witness of the Risen One, the Carmelite does not refuse the challenge and can assume as its own the Jewish-Christian dialogue by living his Rule and living with a "listening heart", לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ, as in the past Solomon has prayed (I Kings 3.9) always open to listening to the Word. The central precept of *Vitae formula* says: "*die ac nocte in Lege Domini meditantes*".

This discourse is not only verbal or theoretical, it touches and imposes itself on the experience of history in the Spirit and animated by the Spirit, with the seal of Mount Carmel and of the spirituality that, over the centuries, was born and developed.

The Carmelite consciousness must be shaken and then built in its passion for Israel, which for us is configured in Mount Carmel and in the city of Jerusalem, following the 6 points indicated by the card. Walter Kasper in the foreword of the book with the essays by scholars of the International Group which met in Rome since 2005.

As Carmelites, did we make this call our own, and we know, dwelling in the *wadi es-Siah*, to suffer the 'original schism'? The Word of the Gospel that goes through the

world and humanity, and in touching every one transforms itself, without erasing its Jewish roots, without falling into the theology of the Supersessionism?

Varied but precise is Carmel's response to the challenge that opens to the Trialogue with some different participants

- The four Carmelite Teresian convents - Mount Carmel, Jerushalaim, Nazareth, Bethlehem;
- The Haifa Stella Maris monastery, all living immersed in the ever emerging challenge;
- The scientific initiatives of the Universidad Mística (CITES) in Avila with its three institutions:

- *Cátedra "Monte Carmelo" para el diálogo judeo-cristiano*: by listening to its roots and around the Vatican II, the Carmel feels itself called to give its spiritual, theological answer to the life of faith, hope and charity within the Jewish-Christian Dialogue, to donate itself as a fermenting leaven in the Church, to promote initiatives and to collect publications and existential testimonies.

- *Cátedra Islamocristiana "Ibn Arabi"*: with the aim of pooling the spiritual contents of Islam and Christianity, the research and the dissemination of Islamo-Christian values that favor the encounter and interreligious dialogue between the two religions;

- *Premio Interreligioso Teresa de Jesus*: The first Award focused on Teresa of Jesus in dialogue with other religious traditions, and was held within the context of the 5th Centenary of her birth and the "Teresa of Jesus, heritage of humanity" World Congress.

The Ecumenical and Interreligious Carmel

Everything comes from Clara Caro.

After a first insight in June 1996 which focused on the verse John 17, 21:

they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Clara had a strong inner experience:

It was as if the room where belonged to another dimension; And I was inside like a new "landscape" ... It was like a light of harmony, an essential essence, as if the room had taken on a new and different life, and it simply fell before me all that had hitherto been hidden ... Then, of all my being, came out, joyously and without words, the exclamation: It is the UNITY! That's what was missing! ... And then, in a word springing from the viscera as a source: "Father, may they all be one." It was that. Not only the Risen Christ, but the TOTAL CHRIST, Cosmic and Universal Christ that makes ONE of all. "

In her mind resurfaced the memory of a video which talked about the Jewish ancestry of Teresa of Jesus and the Moorish ancestry of John of the Cross, together

with the warning of the same Teresa in the *Way of Perfection* 1,2: “do the little that I could. “

The orientation was traced: the Teresian Carmel with the glance to Israel and Islam. For Clara there were years of discernment with the prioress of the Monastery of Madrid, Sagrario of SS. Trinity, with the provincial Francisco Brändle and other theologians.

The meeting with the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, Camilo Maccise, took place on December 8 1996 and outlined the purpose of Clara engaged in the generous spirit of Teresa of Jesus and that configured as the CEI’s response in engagement:

As a charism of prayer, work and the unceasing sowing of zeal for Dialogue, encounters and the Unity of all sincere seekers of truth. We believe that in this common search we are all equal and equally necessary. We believe that the real differences, far from being obstacles, are the sign of the wisdom of God, which thus manifests Himself to us; and the richness of nuances of His creative work so that we turn to Him. Each local group of the Ecumenical Interreligious Carmel has this unique call in reality: to help to overcome the incalculable evils, which for centuries produced in the world the separation of Christians and the lack of coherence among believers in the one God. And this help will be made by the CEI only from the simple reality of small fraternal groups, centered in prayer, which enters and reaches the bottom of the soul, lived as the first requirement together with the prayer of Jesus; and encouraged with all who declare and show themselves as true seekers of only God. We are called to be a small seed of Unity, which will only grow and bear fruit from prayer, which makes us brothers and equal servants in the vineyard of the one Father.

In the spirit that animates the world of our day, opened to the third millennium, as members of ever new humanity, and in the tradition of the great mystics, we seek to open paths of dialogue and communion among all men from the most genuine of their consciousness, which we are accustomed to call mystical consciousness. We understand that such hope is founded on these principles:

-In origin, all men are called to be part of the “new humanity”, constituting a unique and one people, which must extend to the whole world and at all times, to shape this way ... the mystery of man ...

-This unique people is present in all the races of the earth, its peoples communicate with each other in the Spirit ...

“The salvation that everyone longs for is universal, encompassing Christians, Muslim, Jews, and whoever seeks it, since all receive from the same source of Life this call.

-In this quest and realization are woven the threads of a story, which in the background is “history of salvation” ...

-This is only possible if man opens himself to the original project and allows himself/herself to be reached by the Spirit, who in love transforms us

and unites us with all men, creating a society of solidarity and justice, open to the arrival of salvation.

Clara wrote on September 11 2003:

With deep joy I can finally share that on the 16th of July, the feast of Our Lady of Carmen, the Carmelite Ecumenical of Cantabria was born.

And she followed:

And on July 31 2003 with the same joy and amazement before the “carambolas” of God, I also share the birth of the Ecumenical Carmelite of Finland. It is initiated by Hannele Kivinen de Fau of the Lutheran Church.

In fact Hannele Kivinen de Fau began Ecumenical Monastic Carmel-CEM-on the secluded island of Vartiosaari, fully listening to Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross and the evangelical call to Unity. The first general meeting (laity, consecrated, religious/and priests) of the CEI was held from 17 to 19 June 2005. On September 23 2008 the diocese of Santander approved the statute, and CEI and CEM were supported by the Province of the Discalced Carmelites of Castile. Currently the members are 100; in 2011 five of the faithful of Finland Lutheran church consecrated in the CEI. Viva is the focus of the CEI and of the CEM to Judaism, to Lutheran and Orthodox world. On March 28 2009 Luis Aróstegui, Superior General OCD, joined the Ecumenical and Interreligious Carmel:

to the Teresian Carmelite Family, who in its loving contemplation embraces as its own, respecting differences, all people ... We earnestly desire that the spiritual treasure of Carmel, which above all is the experience of God-Communion and the Human-God, may be for all a source of blessing and grace.

The starting point is the heart of the *formula vitae*, whose structure is absolutely biblical and recognizes Jerushalaim as an unifying architecture.

Jerushalaim and not Jerusalem to stress with the termination ‘*ayim* the Holy City, earthly and heavenly, and life posture that results in its two dimensions precisely historical and heavenly.

Jerushalaim by Carlo Maria Martini is considered the biblical place of Excess:

[...] Jerusalem is the city of excess. And precisely in Jerusalem the love of God for man has been revealed unpredictably and almost intolerably, that is, above all measure. Without some measure. This not only in the Revelation of God, through the prophets and all the Old Testament, but especially in the death of Jesus. [...] Jerusalem manifests itself as a place of excess of love, charity and prayer. Therefore I invite you to read Jerusalem not only as a place of excess of the conflict, which certainly is felt along its streets. Jerushalaim attracts, requires a dynamic that demands to be incarnated in order to say prophetic. Albert of Jerusalem, recognizing the irruption of YHWH on the symbolic ancestors put a special seal on all those who would follow them living on Mount Carmel, having been born in Eretz Israel.

If one listens, as taught by André Neher, Eretz Israel becomes a subject who speaks and expands as the horizon of the whole story. The Carmelite monastic life is a symbol, not abstract but real flesh, of the long-continued wandering in the Holy Land, of the *alyah* to the Holy City, in the Presence, in the dwelling in the Word. From the Rule of Albert, rooted in the *Tanakh* and in the Christian Bible, shines an icon, that of the menorah, which shapes the face of every Carmelite, with its seven openings, just as seven are the arms of the menorah. It gives off light:

- Received by Israel but poured out as a gift to the same Israel;
- Who owns the journey (Acts 9, 2);
- To those who are submissive and it is *Muslim*.

Together with the *lev*, the purified heart, and turned in one direction, towards the face of Yahweh Himself. Presence of light that radiates from Jerushalaim, and makes the Carmelites and who dwell on Mount Carmel, for their 'logic existence', a *living menorah*, epiphany of salvation for all, in full communion:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love! (Jn 15, 9).

Carmelites and guardians of the *Ner Tamid*, the eternal light, that "offered to the people witness that the Divine Presence dwelled on Israel" (b Shabbat 22b), the sabbatical light which, in the diaspora, symbolized the everlasting fire that was burning on the altar of the Temple (Lev 6).

Moreover, we ourselves *Ner Tamid*, *menorah* that always burns and announces the visible presence of the God of Israel.

Jerushalaim, theophanic city, our diocese, because you were born, that illuminates history to walk in the Light of YHWH.

The Carmel, in watchful waiting, is the yeast that ferments and produces new realities which, today are the CITES, the Ecumenical and Interreligious Carmel Ecumenical Monastic Carmel.

In the deep *sentire cum Ecclesia*, mindful of Sunday, June 8, 2014, when Pope Francis and the presidents of Israel and Palestine, Simon Peres and Abbas have invoked the One God and planted in the Vatican gardens the Shalom olive and indicated the utopia of Jerushalaim because it is the holy City to all three religions descended from Abraham.