

EXPLORING THE INCULTURATION
OF THE CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY IN AFRICA

FRANÇOIS HUBERT MANGA, O.CARM.

INTRODUCTION

An exploration of the African Carmelite Heritage may be relevant unless some acknowledgements are done. The first could be that word culture itself goes beyond the folkloric orientation of dances, exotic masks, and tourism, but on the contrary, *“the word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences, and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.”*¹ With regard to this, a huge number of questions, opinions, and orientations could be raised when talking of the inculturation of the Carmelite spirituality in Africa. Among the major ones is the variety of cultures available in the continent. Furthermore, the “Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, *“the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity”* and, on the other, *“the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”*² Nevertheless, an attempt is possible to read throughout the history and the reality, the aspects of the presence of the Carmelite spirituality in the African area where the Order is present.

¹ VATICAN II, Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World, *Gaudium Et Spes*, 53. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 4 September 2017.

² Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia In Africa*, 59. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html, 4 September 2017.

The opening point focusses on historical data, then gives an account of collective illustration and the possibilities in Africa. The following argument will be an extensive narration of the Carmel manifestations in Africa nowadays. Two specific dimensions will be presented namely the Prophet Elijah in the field of social justice in Zimbabwe, and the Scapular and its uses in the juridical affiliation to the Order in Cameroon. A description of the link between Our Lady of Mount Carmel and some African values will prepare a reflexion sustained by three figures, Theresa of Avila, Isidore Bakanja and Titus Brandsma, for an inspirational growing of the Carmelite spirituality in Africa.

1. HISTORICAL BLOOMING

The rising from the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages is a very active period in the history of the Carmelite tradition, although the earliest Carmelite spirit could be found in Africa since the times of Elijah the prophet when he came to the Horeb Mountain in Egypt-land.³ The presence of the Holy family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the same Egypt may be an additional historical witness of the Carmelite sign, in a sense, the Virgin Mary is one of the inspirational figures of the Carmelite Order.⁴ In the early Modern Times, the hint of the Carmelite presence in connection with Africa is to be noticed in the past. In fact, Theresa of Avila and her missionary spirit extended beyond the borders of the Spaniard counterpart. Therefore, she became very delighted that some volunteers Spanish Friars were to be sent to the African continent to spread the Carmelite tradition and to widen it. In the meantime, with the agreement, the encouragements and the whole practical planning of the Father Provincial, Jerome Gracian, the foundation of Lisboa in Portugal was set up. Due to some historical circumstances, the King of Spain became the Sovereign of the Kingdom of Portugal.⁵ Thus, the

³ "So Elijah got up. He ate and drank and felt secure. Then Elijah walked for 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God" (1Kings19:8)

⁴ "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! he said. "Take the Child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him." (Matthew 2:13)

⁵ HARRY S. ASHMORE et al., *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A New Survey of Universal Knowledge*, Volume 18, Chicago, London, Toronto, Encyclopaedia Britannica LTD, 1961, 276.

Carmelite of Spain could act in Portugal. This initial success of the first Carmelite missionary experience helped to extend to Africa.

On the ship called São Antonio, Father Anthony of the Mother of God and few Friars were sent from Lisboa to the Kongo Kingdom on 5th April 1582.⁶ This very first Carmelite missionary's journey will not reach the target because of an accident. About one year later, a second group of five Friars will leave from the same Lisboa harbour for the Congolese Kingdom, once more they will never come to the goal for they were caught by English pirates near the Capo Verde Islands. Finally, on 10th April 1584, a third attempt which departs from the same place, will be the good one. The friars arrived at São Tome on July and cruised on the Kongo river up to Luanda, and then, they joined the locality of Mbanza Kongo, by foot, in November of the same year. Unfortunately, they didn't dwell for a long time. But these pioneers, Father Diego of the Holy Sacrament, Father Diego of the Incarnation and Brother Francis of Jesus spread the seeds of the African Carmel in the Modern Times.

The Carmel had been re-founded in 1934 in Black Africa at Kabwé in the Kasai region, before being transferred to Kananga-Malole.⁷ Today, the Carmelite of the Ancient Observance (O.Carm.) is settled in seven countries in Africa, namely Zimbabwe since 1946, founded by the Irish Province, then in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1973 came under the Italian Province. The Province of Pernambuco started a foundation in Mozambique as from 1988, the same year for the Tanzania, while Burkina-Faso welcomed the Carmel through the Arago-Valence Province in 2000, Cameroon the next year that is 2001 with the support of the former Lower-German Province and the collaboration of Italy and Congo. Then came Kenya in 2002 as a General Delegation. In addition, it could be important to underline the presence of Carmelite Nuns at Machakos in Kenya, as well as at least four Institutes affiliated to the Order such as The Handmaids of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, founded by the late Bishop Donald R. Lamont in Zimbabwe; the Hermanas Carmelitas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Mozambique and Kenya; the Hermanas de la Virgen Maria del Monte Carmelo in Rwanda and Burundi; the Suore Carmelitane Missionarie di Santa Teresa del Bambino Gesù in

⁶ JOACHIM SMET, *De geschiedenis van de Karmel, Tweede deel, De Post-Tridentijnse Periode (1550-1600)*, Almelo, Provinciaal Nederlands Karmelieten, 1990, 173.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

Tanzania and the Donum Dei Family in Burkina-Faso, Kenya and Cameroon.⁸

An approach of people and their History

The arrival of the Carmelite Order in Africa could be seen as the historical beginning of an enhancing encounter. For the African cultural landscape could fetch incredible possibility to meet a broad range of people and traditions. With regard to that, it is worthy to quote the joyful happiness which characterises the continent. Since the Middle Ages, the Carmelite Order gets in touch with a poetical people as Léopold Sédar-Senghor certifies that “*it is not for nothing that the Breton takes its examples in Black Africa, where he stayed and worked for a couple of years, precisely among the Peuls of Fouledou, who remained close to their origins because, with poetry, they kept their civilisation.*”⁹ Therefore, the meeting point between Africa and the Carmelite Order is the contact with a communicating group. The culture of gathering for discussion, a culture of a rich and original oral and non-verbal style which involves body’s expressions, dances, sounds, colours and emotions. The place and importance of the consultation of the elder are additional enlightening aspects. The Carmelite Rule on a number of occasions talks about listening to or following the opinion of the wisest and the oldest. This approach could be one of the most appreciated and used in Africa, to show the importance of the aged people who are considered like libraries and sources of wisdom. So to say the culture of life, the culture of a broad and extensive family relationships is at the core level of the African vision and identity.

More precisely, reviewing the African identity implies to come through the particular history of most of its people and places in twofold ways, like a coin shows two different aspects. One, the sorrowful is made of sufferings caused by slavery, colonialism, lack of peace, social instability, poverty and a heavy historical negative stigmatisation.

About slavery, for more than 200 years, thousands of people, mainly Black African have been in awful inhuman conditions violated in their dignity, caught like wild animals, sold like household goods,

⁸ SEE CURIA GENERALIS, SECRETARIATUS GENERALIS, *Status Ordinis Fratrum B. Mariae Virginis de Monte Carmelo, Die 31 Julii 2014*, Romae, Edizioni Carmelitane, 2015.

⁹ LÉOPOLD SEDAR-SENGHOR, *La poésie de Sainte Thérèse d’Avila, in Carmelus*, vol 31, Roma, *Institutum Carmelitanum*, (1984), 24.

parked in dirty ships and forced to work like beasts in farms or other ways in Europa and mostly in the American continent. Thousands of them died of illness, neglected wounds, thirst, and hunger or thrown into the sea during demonstrations or fear of anti-slavery ships.¹⁰ Such a point in the history of people is an eternal moral suffering which is not manageable even with money because the human dignity is priceless and never on sold. This is forever engraved in the memories and the history of Black people all over the world.

The colonial organization that followed the slavery is another unfortunate issue in the history of Africa. Without any respect and using all kinds of lies, corruption and violence many European countries came to Africa. The official reason of civilizing is in itself a clear negation of the African cultural originality and difference. Since these times, Europe is presented itself as the centre, or the example, thus everything different is seen as wrong, evil, savage, folkloric and has to be destroyed or converted into the European model or standard. This covers African languages, foods, social organisation, the way of dressing and the educational system usually performed throughout initiations. Therefore, the African people in order to be “civilized” had to abandon their languages and adopt European languages mainly English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and Italian. Most of their social structures had been changed, and above all, the so-called civilizing mission carried out a massive exploitation system of the natural resources of Africa. Gold, diamonds, petroleum oil, timber, wood, many minerals are systematically robbed. In order to reach and maintain this goal, the meeting of in 1884-1885 at Berlin in Germany divided the African continent between Colonial Rulers notwithstanding the people’s settlements.¹¹ Then, the political power installed and supported by the metropolitan governments were always serving the interests of the masters. Although many people lost a lot of their leaders during the independence wars, the system of exploitation of people and goods continues its inhuman task under the name of neo-colonialism.

Among the consequences of this situation is a permanent political and social instability. The “perestroika” movement and its democracy face a lot of difficulties to change things because the heavy hands of European interests are still mentoring political leaders by promoting the best students and sending away or just killing those who want

¹⁰ H. ASHMORE, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 20, 779-780.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 338.

to restore justice. Thus, some methods to distract the International Community are creating and maintaining wars by providing weapons to the conflicting sides, corrupting the leaders by arranging them a better social standing life and power upon their peoples and eliminating by every means, the opponents to the system. That is how there is a general poverty context in potentially prosperous places like Sudan, Congo, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast and Mozambique for instance.¹²

The last and not the least dark point is on the intellectual field. Here, many Essays are committed in which African people are deprived of their positive past and their capacities. Several prominent scholars like Hegel described African as wild and unable to change. Others are negating the technological performances of African, its philosophical system, and religious constructions. Some just denied their humanity. The activity of persecution of African people is now ruining his image. On that level, the general stigmatizing process continues by spreading all over the very odd illustration of African. They are pictured as unable to govern themselves, with many addictions and poor morally as well as financially. Some Media actively contribute to that campaign by reducing the whole continent of 54 countries into one big poor and bizarre island in the world. They even remove from Africa some “developed places.” With regard to that, Africa becomes synonymous with black people, poverty, misery, wars, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, underdevelopment, violation of human rights, refugees, hunger, a place for Safari, drought and so on. The impact is real and quick. For example, African in the world are always seen as poor miserable people in need for some assistance, and unfortunately, this image is shared in many Institutions throughout flyers for funds raise campaigns. Evidently, the psychological, challenges are difficult to overcome but not impossible. Even though, this intellectual and general negative ambiance creates what is called by some as “*African self-doubt*,”¹³ there are many signs of hope shared by Christ in the Church.

Besides this iniquitous vision, there are nevertheless positive aspects which shaped the second side of the coin. Africa is a place to go and to better discover because of the vast ignorance of the reality and the history. The pyramids of Egypt will remain one unforgettable

¹² Ibid., Vol. 1, 304.

¹³ https://store.kobobooks.com/en-NL/ebook/a-history-of-catholic-moral-theology-in-the-twentieth-century?utm_campaign=TextQuotesIOS&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=App_Acq, note 54, from LaurentiMagesa, ‘Locating the Church among the Wretched of the Earth,’ CTEWC, 49-56, at 50, 3 September 2017.

technological height. The same with some famous Christian famous names like Saint Augustin of Hippo,¹⁴ Saint Cyprian of Cartage,¹⁵ whose influence in the theological development of the Catholic Church is rewarding. Again, in the same line are intellectual activities around the University of Timbuktu,¹⁶ the power and magnificence of Kingdoms like Congo, Mali, Monomotapa, Zulu, Songhai, Akan in the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Many of them at that time had diplomatic relations with other Kingdoms in Europe.¹⁸ The history of Africa today is an extensive full range of possibilities for business, for religious vocations, for hope at many levels. With a very young and dynamic population, Africa brights in the world and attracts new and positive energies for a real sustainable development in a full independence and mutual respect.

The Carmelite tradition in Africa in some sense can bring a lot of relevant and proficient human and spiritual expertise. With more than eight hundred years of experience, a solid tradition and open spaces for innovative ideas, the Carmelite Order which flows from the Church Tradition carries some beneficial elements to share. The spiritual richness focused on the personal encounter with God, the living-together experience¹⁹ with brothers and sisters and a life structured on awareness of God's presence,²⁰ work,²¹ worship,²² silence,²³ creativity²⁴ and some others are rooted in the Carmelite Rule.

¹⁴ Aurelius Augustinus (354-430), Bishop of Hippo in Algeria, see H. ASHMORE, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 2, 681.

¹⁵ Caecilius Cyprianus, (200-258), Bishop of Carthage in Algeria, see *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, 930.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 333.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 335.

¹⁸ See JEAN – PAUL MESSINA, *Culture, Christianisme et quête d'une identité africaine*, Coll. Eglises d'Afrique, Paris, Ed. L'Harmattan, 2007, 57.

¹⁹ "The first thing I lay down is that you shall have a prior, one of yourselves, chosen by the unanimous consent of all, or of the greater and more mature part. (...)" (Rule 4).

²⁰ "All are to remain in their cells or near them, meditating day and night on the law of the Lord and being vigilant in prayers, unless otherwise lawfully occupied." (Rule 10).

²¹ "You should do some work (...)" (Rule 20).

²² "Those who have learned to say the canonical hours with the clerics should do so according to the practice of the holy Fathers and the approved custom of the Church. Those who do not know the hours are to say the Our Father twenty-five times for the night office-except for Sunday and solemn feasts when this number is doubled so that the Our Father is said fifty times. It is to said seven times for the morning Lauds and for the other Hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times." (Rule 11).

²³ "(...) Silence, which is the promotion of justice, is to be diligently and carefully observed." (Rule 21).

²⁴ "If anyone does more the Lord himself when he comes again will repay him." (Rule 24).

The Carmelite tradition in the midst of the African cultural sphere.

The Carmelite Spirituality in Africa can be seen in various ways. The first is in the presence of the Carmelite in many African countries. The Ancient Observance is present in Cameroon, Burkina-Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. The Friars are involving in numerous activities like running parishes, schools, spiritual centres, and hospitals. Alongside with these social and spiritual commitments, they are taking care of their Convents and provide training to Novices and young religious. At that point, a significant effort is made to work together. For instance, the experience of a Pan African Novitiate is on the way since one decade in Cameroon. In fact, the Novitiate Saint Theresa of Lisieux at Ekali in Cameroon welcomes candidates from Burkina-Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. The same with the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Studies house at Yaounde which has Young Carmelites from Burkina-Faso and Cameroon.

Another important thing can be noticed about the inculturation of the Carmelite Spirituality in Africa is in the languages. The name of Our Lady of Mount Carmel itself is translated into local dialects for a better understanding. For example, in Mooré, Holy Mary Queen of Carmel is translated "*Mariam Songo Karmel*." In San, the dialect of the Samo in Burkina-Faso, Mary Mother of the Carmel is "*Carmel n Dan Maria*." In Dioula, a commercial language available in some West African countries (Burkina-Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Conakry Guinea, Liberia), Holy Mary Mother of Carmel is given by "*Maria Senu Carmel Ba*". In Bissa, the dialect of the Bissa tribe, Mary, Mother of Carmel is given by "*Mariam ninga Carmel Da*." This original and efficient way to come to God through the Virgin Mary is opened to everyone, to family and individual as well. Other names from local languages like "*Nna Maria ya Nkol Karmel*" in Ewondo Language of Cameroon; "*Bustani ya Karmeli*" in Nkoroi dialect of Kenya, and with hymns like "*toko bonde layo ee*", a litany from Congo can be noticed as expression of the inculturation of the Carmel in Africa.

Moreover, many projects of an in-depth taking over the Carmelite Tradition are carrying out like the translation of the Carmelite Rule in Ewondo language in Cameroon. Some relevant reflexions and comments are also available as inculturation of the handing over the Carmelite Rule, like the analysis of Insun Joanne Lee.²⁵ The Friars are

²⁵ INSUN JOANNE LEE, *Carmelite heritage speaks across the cultures*, in *Carmel in the World*, n. 1, Vol. XLVIII, Roma, Edizioni Carmelitane, 2009.

also working very hard to print out Carmelite names in the mind and history of people with patronages and actions like pilgrimages to Marian shrines, with conferences on Our lady and the dedication of many Houses, Monasteries, Convents, Novitiatehouses: and parishes: Paroisse Notre Dame du Mont Carmel at Koumou-Cameroon; Mount Carmel Parish Harare-Zimbabwe; Paroisse Notre Dame du Mont Carmel de Mukuna-Butembo-Democratic Republic of Congo or the Scholasticat Notre Dame du Mont Carmel de Nkolbisson-Cameroon. We can also quote the Elijah Priory, at Nyazura-Zimbabwe; the Comunidade Santa Tereza d'Avila in Maputo-Mozambique; the Noviciate Sainte Therese de Lisieux of Efulan-Cameroon; the Mount Carmel Community in Harare-Zimbabwe; the Saint-Simon Stock Priory of Rusape-Zimbabwe; the Scholasticat Bienheureux Isidore Bakanja in Kinshasa-DR Congo or the Centre de Spiritualité Titus Brandsma of Butembo Democratic Republic of Congo.

As said above, the Carmelite Spirituality came through Missionaries. But, following the appeal of the Pope Paul VI when he said, "*by now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves*,"²⁶ there are signs of responsibility and maturity in many places where things are entirely managed by African Carmelites themselves like in Burkina-Faso. Moreover, the Africa Continent has its own and African General Counsellor. The first was from DR Congo, the Very Reverend Father Desiré Unen Alimange and now it is the Very Reverend Father Conrad Mutizamhepo from Zimbabwe. Additionally, in the coming years, some African Carmelites Delegations could upgrade to Commissariates and why not to Provinces.

2. SOME CARMELITES FIGURES AND AFRICAN CHALLENGES OF TODAY

Elijah mentoring's example.

The Carmelite Order always sees in the Holy Prophet Elijah an inspirational figure of its Spirituality because the reference to the Well in Wadi-ain-en Siah, according to many scholars is about the Holy Man.²⁷

²⁶ PAUL VI, Homely during the eucharistic celebration at the conclusion of the symposium organized by the bishops of Africa, Kampala (Uganda), 31 July 1969, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19690731.html. 2 September 2017.

²⁷ See RICHARD COPSEY, (Ed), *The Ten Books on the Way of life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites*, Faversham, Roma, Saint Albert's Press and Edizioni Carmelitane, 2005, 45.

The Prophet Elijah, in fact, appears in the Bible as a great and genuine friend of God. In the name of God, he performed many wonderful things, and he is the herald of the monotheism. His name expresses his special character and function in biblical history: *Yahweh is God, Yahweh is my God*. He defends and preserves faith in one God within the people. His fierce struggle against all form of religious syncretism makes him the Prophet of Fire, whose word shines like a burning torch.²⁸

He experienced a serious confrontation with Jezebel and challenged the Baal prophets. On Mount Carmel, he made it clear to the people that there is only one true God.²⁹ Fed miraculously in the desert as he fled the furious Jezebel, he walked forty days and forty nights to the Horeb where he experienced the Presence of the living God in the silence and gentleness of a smooth breeze. From there he performed three great acts: he anointed Hazael as King of Damascus, Jehu as King of Israel and Elisha as a prophet.³⁰ His life ends as it had unfolded, that is, in a marvellous way, where God is omnipresent. He who closed the heaven three and a half years, who raised up the death son, who multiplied the flour and oil at Sarepta, Elijah, was taken up to heaven by a fire chariot leaving his cloak and shared the spirit to Elisha.³¹

With Moses, he is on the Tabor during the Transfiguration of Christ. Their presence in Tabor testifies in anticipation of Jesus' exaltation that the New Covenant is the crowning of the Old. Elijah is also presented by the Apostle Saint James in his Letter as the model of effective prayer.

Meanwhile, this knowledge of the life and the deeds of the Holy Prophet Elijah are not only celebrated in Africa. When reading the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* which stated

²⁸ "Then there arose the fiery prophet Elijah, whose words blazed like a torch." Sirach 48:1.

²⁹ "King Ahab told his wife Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how he had put all the prophets of Baal to death. She sent a message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me dead if by this time tomorrow I don't do the same thing to you that you did to the prophets." Elijah was afraid and fled for his life; he took his servant and went to Beersheba in Judah." 1Kings 19:1-3.

³⁰ "Elijah left and found Elisha plowing with a team of oxen; there were eleven teams ahead of him, and he was plowing with the last one. Elijah took off his cloak and put it on Elisha." 1Kings 19:19.

³¹ "There, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what you want me to do for you before I am taken away." "Let me receive the share of your power that will make me your successor," Elisha answered." 2Kings 2:9.

that *“The saints have been traditionally honoured in the Church and their authentic relics and images held in veneration. For the feasts of the saints proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in His servants, and display to the faithful fitting examples for their imitation,”*³² the Prophet Elijah is therefore to be imitated and used as a very inspirational standard for concrete actions. The example of the Carmel in Zimbabwe could then be mentioned.

With Elijah, fighting for Human Rights in Zimbabwe.

The exemplary attitude of Elijah brought the possibility to find in the Holy Scriptures a model in the denouncing bad and dangerous condition of human beings, and the engagement of fighting against the abuses of the Human Rights. *“Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession.”*³³ So, by defending the Rights of the poor and weak Naboth, Elijah gives a vivid model to Carmelites. That is why in a certain way, his spirit helps to fight against injustice towards people and Human Dignity in Africa.

With regard to that, the Carmelite Family in Zimbabwe provides a very friendly African inculturation method of defending Human Rights from the example of the Prophet Elijah. In fact, since many years, the Carmelite Family in association with other Non-Governmental Organizations is highlighting on critical concerns. Xenophobia, murders, intimidations, human traffic and extraordinary abuses against women and girls. Thus, they make these situations known to the United Nations System and provide some reliable solutions, in the document entitled *“Women’s Statement On Zimbabwe.”*³⁴ For instance, about the Human trafficking, the Carmelites agree that *“Zimbabwe is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Large scale migration of Zimbabweans to surrounding countries has increased – as they flee a progressively more desperate situation*

³² VATICAN II, *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 111. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, 2 September 2017.

³³ *“Then the Lord said to Elijah, the prophet from Tishbe, “Go to King Ahab of Samaria. You will find him in Naboth’s vineyard, about to take possession of it.”* 1Kings 21:17-18.

³⁴ Carmel NGO, http://carmelitengo.org/carm_special_issues/zimbabwe/zim.womens_statement.htm, 29 August 2017.

at home – and NGOs, international organizations, and governments in neighbouring countries report that some of these Zimbabweans face human trafficking.”³⁵ That is why Zimbabwean Carmelites engage themselves with victims and other volunteers to stop such an awful and shameful practice. They are more strengthened by spiritual means like a prayer they issued for Zimbabwe and its people:³⁶

Our Zimbabwe

This upheaval, this unrest, this time that has been sent to test, my faith, my love, my rational thought, if I let go, will sink to naught. So, Father, I ask by me you will stand, as I stand proud for my land. Let not race nor class nor colour decide, Let me stand in the gap of this divide. Help me to stand strong, when others fall, let me stand firm, let me stand tall. Let no man question my will, even when provoked, let me be still. Give me calm and peace of mind, uncover my eyes, and remove the blind. Father place your mighty hand, to cover the wounds of this broken land. Wash away the blood of war; Open the locked, closed door. Father stands by those who weep, and show us that colour is only skin deep. Let us stand for what is right, but not with anger nor with fight. Be with those brave enough to stand, for what they believe for this land. Be with those who fear, Show them your presence ever near. And even in our darkest hour, remind us of your ultimate power. Zimbabwe will be a shining light, not through power, nor through might, but with forgiveness, and without greed, Lord raise strong people to lead. A new Zimbabwe will rise again, without the anguish and the pain. And united, together we will stand, upon the ground of this our land. The will of God will not take you to where the grace of God will not protect you. Amen.

The Scapular as a juridical commitment in Cameroon.

Now it could be worthy to come to the Scapular which is still considered as one spiritual way to handle the Carmelite Spirituality. It is given at the beginning of the postulate in Cameroon for example, and to people who come to adopt this Spirituality in Carmelite Confraternities or other Christian Associations. The case of the Blessed Isidore Bakanja, the Martyr of the Brown Scapular, allows discovering of another typical African use of the Scapular, as a juridical connection with the Order, particularly because of the more sensitive tradition than an intellectual and abstract process.

³⁵ <http://gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Zimbabwe.htm>, 3 September 2017.

³⁶ http://carmelitengo.org/carm_special_issues/zimbabwe/zim.prayer.htm. 3 September 2017.

The Carmel bears the Marian history and fetches it a singular taste. The Carmelites actually are the only ones to be called "*Brothers of the Virgin Mary.*" They create a more intimate relationship between them and the Mother of God. That is why, as early as July 17, 1274, when the Second Council of Lyon confirmed the existence of the Carmelites, they began to celebrate each year that day the Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. The date of July 16 first appears in a Breviary in Venice in 1481.³⁷

Over the times, this celebration will carry various titles: Commemoration of Blessed Mary, Solemn Commemoration of Blessed Mary, Solemn Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and finally Solemn Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary among others. The Scapular which is also celebrated on that day is seen and used in Africa and particularly in Cameroon as a juridical sign of belonging to the Carmelite Family. This comes out of the words said by the priest during the imposition of the Scapular. In the Book of Blessings, one can read that

"Then the priest sprinkles the scapular with holy water and imposes it upon the person (or upon each person), saying:

Receive this blessed Scapular and ask the holiest Virgin that, by her merits, it may be worn with no stain of sin and may protect you from all harm and bring you into everlasting life.

After this the priest adds:

*By the power granted to me, I admit you to a share in all the spiritual works performed with the merciful help of Jesus Christ by the religious of Mount Carmel. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*³⁸

The Carmelites never felt alone, for in joy as well as in sorrows, she always showed them her presence, her participation, and her help. In the history of the Order, the Virgin Mary has always intervened in its favour, even at the highest level of the hierarchy. In a context of more oral tradition, the Scapular conveys very well the meaning of a proper commitment of someone to the Order. Thus, every 16th July or the nearest Saturday or Sunday, the Carmelites Friars, the Lay Carmelites and all the Church's Associations which share the

³⁷ See EMANUELE BOAGA, LUIGI BORRIELLO (Ed), *Dizionario Carmelitano*, Roma, Città Nuova, 2008, 541.

³⁸ CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/prayers/devotions/to-the-blessed-virgin-mary/blessing-and-imposition-with-the-scapular-of-our-lady-of-mount-carmel/>, 29 August 2017.

spirituality of the Carmel use to gather at a single chosen place to meet and to welcome new members through the imposition of the Scapular during a Mass. This comes after two or three years' instruction's period. Succeeding the reception of the Scapular, their names are kept in a particular Register. Usually, a big joyful feast follows with a lot of food, drinks, and dances.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel and some African values

Leopold Sédar-Senghor said about women that: "*and now in the heart of the summer and midday, I discover you, the promise land, from the top of a burned hill (...) Your voice of Alto is the spiritual song of the Beloved (...) I praise your beauty whose flowing shape I keep to the Everlasting.*"³⁹ With regard to this poetry piece, the place and the meaning of the woman and the mother in Africa are very relevant and even carry a spiritual sense. The figure of the Virgin Mary can be already seen in the Old Testament under various names and functions. Therefore, she is the Mother of the Redeemer;⁴⁰ The Virgin Mother of the Emmanuel;⁴¹ Mother of the Messiah;⁴² The Mother of the humble and the poor.⁴³ Additionally, in the New Testament, she is more intimately linked to the life of Christ in its three dimensions: private (hidden), public and the glorious.

In the hidden life of Jesus, she is his mother since the Annunciation.⁴⁴ She is seen going to Egypt, to save her child's life;⁴⁵ Mary

³⁹ LÉOPOLD SEDAR-SENGHOR, *Poèmes*, 16-17.

⁴⁰ "I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring's heel." Gn 3:15.

⁴¹ "Well then, the Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him 'Immanuel.' By the time he is old enough to make his own decisions, people will be drinking milk and eating honey. Even before that time comes, the lands of those two kings who terrify you will be deserted." Is 7:14-16.

⁴² "The Lord says, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times." So the Lord will abandon his people to their enemies until the woman who is to give birth has her son. Then those Israelites who are in exile will be reunited with their own people." Mi 5:2-3.

⁴³ "I will leave there a humble and lowly people, who will come to me for help." Zep 3:12.

⁴⁴ "The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!" Lk 1:28.

⁴⁵ "After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave." Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt." Mt 2:13-14.

seeks and finds her beloved Son in the Temple after three days of anguish.⁴⁶ In the public life, she is acted at Cana where Christ performs his first miracle and fulfilled her request.⁴⁷ The glorious life is about the militant Church⁴⁸ and in the triumphant one.⁴⁹

In the patristic tradition, some names of those who wrote most about her until the 8th century like Saint Ignatius, Saint Irenaeus, Origen (who would have used for the first time the name Theotokos, Mother of God), Saint Hippolyta of Rome, Tertullian, Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine of Hippo, gently quoted the Virgin Mary. In a broad Catholic doctrine, many aspects have emerged and proposed to the people likewise the Divine Motherhood;⁵⁰ The Virginité of Mary;⁵¹ The Immaculate Conception;⁵² The Assumption of the Virgin Mary.⁵³

According to the Carmelite spirituality, the Virgin Mary is one of the brightest figures. That is why, the devotion to the Apparitions of Fatima and the Rosary can more easily be joined to the Carmelite spirituality. Through her, in the Carmel, one can learn what is discipleship because Mary *“is the disciple who follows her Son, the Wisdom of the God.”*⁵⁴ And in the African Carmelite, she remains the eminent reference. Mary is very close to the Carmel, and she gives the particular spiritual color to those who intend to deal with the Carmelite spirituality. Concretely, Carmelite friars are promoting membership for Rosary Confraternities, special celebration on Saturdays are performed and in Cameroon for instance, the Hour of the Mother, a unique ritual which is celebrated only at noon, the Good Saturday. Until now in Africa, it is common in many parts of the Third Order for members to pray the Rosary on a daily basis, to wear the Brown Scapular and in some place the White Mantle.

⁴⁶ *“On the third day, they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions.”* Lk 2:46.

⁴⁷ *“Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine had given out, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They are out of wine.”* Jn 2:1-3.

⁴⁸ *“They gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.”* Acts 1:14.

⁴⁹ *“Then a great and mysterious sight appeared in the sky. There was a woman, whose dress was the sun and who had the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.”* Rev. 12:1.

⁵⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15, *Lumen Gentium*, 52.

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 57, 63, 69.

⁵² *Lumen Gentium*, 59.

⁵³ Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 46.

⁵⁴ JOHAN BERGSTRÖM – ALLEN (Ed), *Climbing the Mountain, The Carmelite Journey*, Faversham-Roma: Saint Albert Press and Edizioni Carmelitane, 2010, 86.

This is in the line of the Constitutions of 1995 where the Carmelite spirituality is “*the process of detachment which leads to union with God (...) in the expressions purity of heart and total availability to God.*”⁵⁵ When going more deeply, it could be noticed that the Virgin Mary, the Patroness, the Sister and the Queen of the Carmel fulfilled this perfectly and shared it with the Carmelite reality in Africa. That is why even in Africa, the “*Carmelites see in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God an archetype of the Church in perfect image of all that they want and hope to be.*”⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the devotional engagement doesn't push people far from the everyday concerns and does not “*consist of moral or ethical instructions that do not satisfy the hunger of human beings for spiritual food and that respect neither the maturity of believers nor their responsibility for their moral behavior.*”⁵⁷ But on the contrary, these elements guide on how the people can make their relationship with God a living one, how to pray and how they can live in the presence of God in everyday life. That's why in the Carmel, we consider that “*all that we desire and all that we wish to be today was fulfilled in the lives of the Prophet Elijah and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*”⁵⁸

3. THE CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY, A PROD FOR AFRICA

Theresa of Avila: a fruitful and solid friendship with God.

Teresa of Cepeda y Ahumada was born on 28 March 1515 in Avila in Spain. In 1536, she received the habit of the Order in the Monastery of the Incarnation of Avila under the name of Sister Teresa of Jesus. Then, in 1557 after a meeting with the Suffering Christ, she experienced the second conversion. Therefore, began for her an intense spiritual period with visions, mystical graces, trans-verberation. She then desires to practice the Rule with a greater perfection. In agreement with her superiors and some nuns of her Monastery of the Incarnation, she embarked to the foundation of a new Monastery where the so-called “primitive” Rule will be lived perfectly. Thus, on 24 August 1562 the Monastery of Saint Joseph is inaugurated. She will

⁵⁵ Carmelite Constitutions 15.

⁵⁶ Carmelite Constitutions 27.

⁵⁷ MICHAEL PLATTIG. *Practical Examples of the Meaning of Carmelite Spirituality for the Church*, in *The Sword*, Vol. 72, n° 1, 201, 102.

⁵⁸ Constitutions 25.

found nearly 16 other monasteries. The year 1582 will be very active and the first three Missionary Carmelites are sent to Kongo with her support. On October 4th, 1582, she died at Alba de Tormes. She was canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 and 1970 she was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.⁵⁹

We also are foundations.

"I have sometimes heard it said concerning the beginning of Religious Orders, that because they were beginnings, our Lord bestowed greater favours on those saints who preceded us. And so indeed it is: but we should consider that we also are foundations for those who come after us; and if we who are now living had not fallen away from the fervour of our predecessors, and if those who succeed us should not do the like, the building would always continue firm and immovable."⁶⁰

These words of the Church's Doctor Theresa of Jesus sounds like a permanent recall to all Carmelite and especially those in Africa. There is still a lot to do. But the most notable achievement is to make God presence among his people. Then, empowered by him, the hard work will create a place where there is social equality, justice, respect for Human Rights, no discriminations and the promotion of Human Dignity. A place where poverty will be a remote and passed souvenir. Baba Simon, an African Missionary nourished by Theresa's ideal, will argue that it is illogical to say to people *"let them drink dirty water, it is not Jesus Christ! Because when God created, the water was clean. If we drink dirty water, it comes at this time very bad! Now we have the intelligence so that we can purify our water ..."*⁶¹ So to say there is no friendship between God and social poverty and it is a fake worship of God where people are sick, illiterate, don't have drinkable water, no food, no peace and so on. African Carmelite is in a massive session of Foundation, not only the one of the additional devotions, but also the one of better living conditions.

Isidore Bakanja: The courage among us.

Bakanja was born between 1880 and 1890 at Ikengo-Bokendela in the former Belgian Congo, nowadays Democratic Republic of

⁵⁹ E. BOAGA - L. BORRIELLO (Ed.), *Dizionario Carmelitano*, 932-935.

⁶⁰ THERESA OF AVILA, *The book of Foundations*, Chap. IV, n. 6.
<https://archive.org/details/TheBookOfTheFoundations>, 29 August 2017.

⁶¹ <http://babasimon.com/Télévision-Farin.htm>, 29 August 2017.

Congo. He settled in Coquilhatville also called Mbandaka, where he got a job in a Belgian company. There, he joined the Catholic religion and received the baptism under the name of Isidore, on May 6th, 1906. He was clothed by the Scapular of Carmel on the same occasion. After that, Isidore was recruited as a servant to one of the bosses of the company and moved to Ikiki in 1909. There, he faced the hostility of an agnostic atmosphere promoted by Van Cauter who disliked the Church because according to him, it reduces the authority of the Europeans by emancipating the natives. So, Isidore refuses to deny his faith and to remove the Scapular, because, for him, such a request is an abuse of authority. Hence, he will be whipped to the blood with rusty nails, then imprisoned and bound with heavy chains. Fortunately, the Manager of the company is informed and immediately ordered the release of the young Isidore, took care of his wounds and convicted the wicked Regent. Seriously hurt, Isidore will bear for six months the atrocious pains of the general infection which undermined him. Thus, on 15th August 1909, he surrendered his life to God while forgiving his executioner. In recognition of Isidore Bakanja's no-fault conduct and his attachment to the love of Christ and Our Lady by the Scapular, Pope John Paul II beatified him on 24th April 1994, in Rome.⁶²

The spirituality of the work.

The experience of Isidore is helpful because it gave a meaningful place to the sense of work which is sometimes described as a punishment given by God to the human. The work is, on the contrary, the collaborative participation of the human to the creation that is to be done continuously. Moreover, not to celebrate a cult of work, the man achieves his life by doing something, by working.⁶³ The salary is indeed significant, but, additionally, there is a great pleasure for somebody when he is doing his work as an artist. This is the position of Isidore who sees his job like the one of the artist. He expressed it when he answered to Van Cauter, his boss that: "*I always do very well all that I have to do, and what lacks*"? According to him, the salary is not the only goal. Hence, his attitude is a serious message against the ideology of the money. When the financial mind seems to bring

⁶² E. BOAGA, *Celebrating the Saints of Carmel*, Roma, Edizioni Carmelitane, 2010, 141.

⁶³ "*You should do some work so that the devil will always find you occupied and he may not through your idleness find some entrance to your souls.*" (Rule, 20).

everybody in the field of benefits without any questions of morality and conviction, Isidore is not ready to sacrifice his faith for his job.⁶⁴

Isidore's spirituality of work could, therefore, be like feeding the human work with spiritual elements or opening the human activities to spirituality. This is breaking the wall between the spirituality and the work. Isidore allows to acknowledge the bridge between the motivation and the occupation. For, at the end of every realization, for a Christian, it's evident that the satisfaction should be the one of God: *Everything that he has done is right!*⁶⁵ Some social deviations like corruption could be fought at its roots with such ideas. The spirituality of work is also to imitate God by giving to oneself the time to rest. In many countries, authorities are encouraging people to work more to gain more. This become a modern way of slavery. Working more is good, but likewise God, it is good also to have somerest.⁶⁶ The human life is to be respected, to be handled with care of and to be loved.

Titus Brandsma: A call to Innovation.

Born on 23 February 1881 at Ugoklooster in the Netherlands, Anno Sjoerd Brandsma enters the Carmel in 1899 under the name of Titus. He is ordained priest in 1905 and made his philosophical studies at the Gregorian Pontifical University of Rome. Then, for fifteen years, he taught this subject to his young Confreres at Oss where he also developed a pastorship interest by managing a journal of Marian devotion; engaging himself as Chief-Editor of a local newspaper; opening a Catholic library; setting a monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in a public square, organizing numerous exhibitions and a missionary congress, and finally translating the works of Teresa of Avila into Dutch. In 1923, he was appointed Professor of Philosophy and History of Mysticism at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, where he will later act as Rector Magnificus for two years. Besides the scientific activities, Titus dedicates himself to the unity of the churches, the conversion of non-Catholics, the development of the Frisian language and culture, the worship of Mary, the interest to the local Saints and those of the Order. Also, he

⁶⁴ See REDEMPTUS MARIA VALABEK, *Profiles in Holiness I*, Roma, Edizioni Carmelitane, 2004.

⁶⁵ "God looked at everything he had made and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day." Gn 1:31.

⁶⁶ "On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken." Gn 2:2.

wrote a Dutch Catholic Encyclopaedia and was the chaplain of the Catholic journalists.⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the numerous tasks, he was always in a good mood. In every activity, he remained a man of ardent faith and deep spirituality. After the occupation of the Netherlands by Germany in 1940, he defended the Catholic schools and refused to hand over the Jewish pupils. In 1942, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Scheveningen. The same year, in 26th July, in the Concentration Camp of Dachau, he is killed by a lethal injection and his body cremated. On 3rd November 1985, Titus Brandsma was beatified in Rome by Pope John Paul II.⁶⁸

Towards an extensive vision.

Titus Brandsma can be a very prophetic model he shows that in order to actually manage the human conditions, it could be worthy to have more than one possibility. Therefore, the life and deeds of Titus Brandsma appear as a great and original inspiration for African Carmelites. The need for new and innovative methods of implementing and actualizing the Carmelite Tradition in Africa require bold initiatives and a wide range of training. Thus, it could be beneficial and relevant to diversify the specialization of African Carmelite according to the reality of every country. Consequently, for a new brand of Carmelites, why not having medical Doctors, Architects, IT technicians, Journalists, Climate and Environment Specialists, Lawyers and other good and fitting occupations and specialisations available and useful, while living concretely as the Brothers of Mount Carmel according to the Rule, and the rich mystical tradition of Carmel, which are of great importance to give shape to the contemplative dimension of the Order.

CONCLUSION

The above itinerary couldn't be the only one nor the outcome of the analysis, but it intends to be one vision among many, and one contribution among others which are to come and which have been done. That is why it wholeheartedly agrees that:

⁶⁷ See LEOPOLD GLUECKERT, *Titus Brandsma, Friar against fascism*, Darien, IL, Carmelite Press.

⁶⁸ E. BOAGA, *Celebrating the Saints of Carmel*, 127.

“Throughout centuries, the Christian Mysticism will always follow the biblical quest of God. Therefore, the prayer will sometimes be the dialogue of the Psalmist, sometimes the dark pilgrimage through the eternal silence of spaces and elements. The answer to the voice of the Canticle could be the voices of Therese, of Saint John of the Cross or Saint Ignatius. At the end, it is the same way that will inflame the Rhineland Archangelism of Tauler or Master Eckart. Moreover, the Flemish realism of the Imitation of Jesus Christ (if it is the work of A Kempis), or of Gerard Groote joins the fervour of the Fathers who painted the Madonna seated like the great bourgeois ladies of their country. All this was individual and traditional prayers, because God not even disdain the temperament of peoples. Brigitte and Catherine of Siena have enriched the Christian piety with the contributions of their character. In the Netherlands, the Beguine Hadewych delivers all his mystical experience through a seasonal lyricism obviously depended on the moist and damp climate of the Flanders counterpart. Thus, it is sure that a matured African Christianity, must address God in a language that is its own. And that language does exist.”⁶⁹

That language is the testimony of the African Carmelite today, and at the same time, it still has to come out through original forms.

⁶⁹ ENGELBERT MVENG, *L'art d'Afrique Noire, Liturgie cosmique et langage religieux*, Yaoundé, Editions CLE, 1974, 44.