

THE *RATIO* IN AN AFRICAN SITUATION

Outline: 1. Introduction: What the *Ratio* is - 2. The Vision of the *Ratio* - 3. Way of Appropriating the *Ratio* (Internalisation) - 4. Formation on the African Scene - 5. African Values and Hopes - 6. The African Candidate: Who he is, Where he is coming from, What he seeks - 7. African and Carmelite Values in Dialogue - 8. Using the *Ratio* in an African Situation

1. INTRODUCTION - WHAT THE *RATIO INSTITUTIONIS VITAE CARMELITANAE* IS

*In the Ratio we propose a journey of personal, communitarian and structural conversion which is faithful to the call of the Spirit, to the problems of today's world and to the founding experience of the Carmelite Order.*¹

The *Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitanae* is a document that “describes the purpose of our Carmelite life”.² The *Ratio* is therefore an instrument:

- to help the Formation programs in the various Provinces in their assimilation and encouragement of the fundamental values that are so essential in a formation process;³
- to prepare better our candidates and all Carmelites to be of service to the people of God all over the world;⁴
- to help us rediscover the beauty of our vocation and spur us to open ourselves ever more to God's transforming action on our journey to the summit of the mountain;⁵

¹ GENERAL CURIA OF THE CARMELITE ORDER, *Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitanae, Forming Prophetic Brotherhood: The Carmelite Guide to Formation*, Rome 1988, art. 5, pp. 16-17.

² JOSEPH CHALMERS, Prior General, *Letter of Commending the Ratio to the Order*, in GENERAL CURIA OF THE CARMELITE ORDER, *Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitanae, Carmelite Formation: A Journey of Transformation*, Rome 2000, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ CARLO CICONETTI, *Development of the R.I.V.C.*, in *RIVC* (1988), p. 10.

⁵ ALEXANDER VELLA, *Preface*, in *RIVC* (2000), p. 9.

- of on-going formation for all of us who are still on our way towards an ideal which is never fully achieved.⁶

One can say that the *Ratio* is a visionary and programmatic document of the Order as it seeks to hand on what it has received from our spiritual ancestors and propose to mould the next generation of Carmelites into authentic disciples of Christ according to the Carmelite Charism. We can therefore say that the *Ratio* is a document that lays down the guidelines for Carmelite formation not only for those in initial formation but is equally targeted for ongoing formation. Because it is an instrument, it will be as effective as it will be put to use. This is why the Prior General, Joseph Chalmers, in commending *RIVC 2000* to the Order wrote:

The *Ratio* is not intended only to be for initial formation but for ongoing formation also. Therefore I strongly encourage each friar to read this *Ratio* frequently because, along with our Rule and Constitutions, it describes the purpose of our Carmelite life.⁷

2. THE VISION OF THE *RATIO VITAE INSTITUTIONIS CARMELITANAE*

Before we analyse the vision of the *RIVC 2000*, it is important to look briefly at its history. In the history of the Order, there have been only two *RIVCs*, the first one being *RIVC (1988)*. Documents of this nature have a long gestation period from the moment of their proposition to the time that the texts see the light of day. The *RIVC 1988* was first mooted before the 1983 General Chapter and was presented to the Order on 3 March 1988. Similarly, the *RIVC 2000* took a long time from the period after the 1995 General Chapter to 25 March 2000 when it was presented to the Order on the feast of the Annunciation.

Already, the seeds of the *RIVC 2000* lay within the provisions of the *RIVC 1988*, which foresaw the need for revision.⁸ Furthermore, the 1995 Constitutions prescribed this revision: "The Prior General and his Council shall convene a meeting of all the formators in the Order, at least once every six years, to revise and update the *RIVC*".⁹ Thus the

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁷ JOSEPH CHALMERS, *op. cit.*

⁸ *RIVC (1988)*, art. 133.

⁹ *Constitutions (1995)*, art.129. See also *CIC*, 659 §2 & 650§1.

immediate factors which precipitated the need for the revision of RIVC 1988 were

- the *need to update* the *Ratio* due to publication of several papal documents on the consecrated life;
- the need to have the *Ratio* fall in line with *concerns and insights* of 1995 Constitutions.

Following the 1995 General Chapter, the General Council constituted an International Formation Commission drawn from all geographical areas of the Order. The Commission was tasked to revise the RIVC 1988, but the product was much more than a revision; it amounted to an overhaul but still within the framework of the Rule and Constitutions. The Commission initiated a process of consultation involving formators and provincials. Various meetings were held at various *fora* - regional and international. A draft of the new RIVC was presented at the General Congregation held in Bamberg, Germany, from 24th August to 3rd September 1999. An international congress of formators called at San Felice del Benaco, Brescia, Italy in October 1999 deliberated on and made useful suggestions, comments and changes to the draft text. Thereafter, the subcommission for the redaction of the text met for the last time in December 1999 and prepared the definitive text which was presented to the Prior General and Council resulting in its approval and presentation to the Order.

In their revision of the 1988 text, the Commission used five criteria:

1. Following *developments within the Church and the Order* from 1988 to the present;
2. Attending to the *experience and sharing among formators* especially during the regional meetings and the international congress;
3. Framing the anthropological and psychological principles of RIVC 1988 in a better *theological-spiritual style*;
4. Use of pedagogically *sensitive style and language*;
5. Maintaining a certain *balance between various sensibilities* within the Order¹⁰ (italics: mine).

¹⁰ *Preface* of RIVC 2000, p. 8.

The Prior General noted that *RIVC* 1988 had been the “fundamental document for formation throughout the Order”¹¹ issued in the post Vatican II era. Its whole project was the general Vatican II programme of *aggiornamento*, up-to-date renewal. One of the great merits *RIVC* 1988 was that it heralded a break-through in the understanding and presentation of our charism characterised by the three elements of contemplation, fraternity and service.¹²

A significant improvement in *RIVC* 2000 is its very clear statement on the Carmelite charism and self identity on the one hand and the adoption of a Programme of Carmelite Studies in order to promote a deeper and more life-giving knowledge of the charism and tradition of the Order.

This is a most favourable time (*kairos*) for us to enter into dialogue with the text. We need to grow into loving familiarity with the text, the contents of *RIVC* 2000. But we may ask, what is the vision of *RIVC* 2000?

The vision of Carmel presented in *RIVC* 2000 took long to arrive at. It is a vision that was being brewed from Vatican II through all the reflection, deliberation and discernment at both the ecclesial and congregational level down through the decades to the present. In the intervening years between 1965 to 2000, the Order was growing in maturity in its self-understanding. *Ratio* 1988 was a kind of summary of the insights that had emerged in the Congregation since Vatican II. Thus *Ratio* 1988’s vision of Carmel was expressed thus:

As Carmelites we undertake the radical following of Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsels in a total self-emptying, symbolised in our tradition by the desert. In this unconditional commitment to the Lord, we seek to be guided by the Spirit of God, and we focus on the following fundamental values:

- a) living constantly in the presence of God (contemplation);
- b) building the fraternity proposed by Jesus Christ;
- c) living in the midst of the people and at their service.

We walk this path following the example of Mary and Elijah.¹³

¹¹ JOSEPH CHALMERS, *op. cit.*

¹² A.VELLA, *Preface*, in *RIVC* 2000, pp. 8-9.

¹³ *Ratio* 1988, art. 1.

Ratio 1988's catch phrase was "a journey of conversion to Christ". Thus the *Ratio* noted that

The process of formation is a concrete expression of the continual conversion to which we are all called. It is this continual conversion which enables us to be citizens of the Kingdom. In the *Ratio* we propose a journey of personal, communitarian and structural conversion which is faithful to the call of the Spirit, to the problems of today's world and to the founding experience of the Carmelite Order...¹⁴

Furthermore,

Carmelite formation can be seen as a *process or journey of conversion* which is the starting point for spirituality.

Conversion is, above all, a *firm decision or fundamental option to walk «in the footsteps of Jesus Christ»* and to choose the means necessary for this. It involves a deep, radical change by which we begin to think, judge and re-order our lives inspired by the holiness and goodness of God as it has been shown to us and given to us abundantly in his Son...

Conversion, therefore, is a never ending journey or growth which continues throughout the whole of life as the way of following Christ.

*Conversion means not only a breaking away from sin, from a selfish life closed in on oneself and from personal idols; it also means growing through fullness of life in the Spirit to full adult maturity in Christ.*¹⁵

Already, *Ratio* 1988 spoke of the process of Carmelite formation as a journey of conversion to Christ.¹⁶ *Ratio* 2000 deepens our appreciation of that Carmelite vision in its very title - *Carmelite Formation: A Journey of Transformation*. The motif of journey is a constant in Christian tradition in general and in our spiritual tradition in particular. The theme of journey fascinates the Carmelite imagination. This is no coincidence because the very origins of the Order are rooted in a time when pilgrimages were a favourite form of asceticism for those who wished to live a more intense spiritual life. The first Carmelites were pilgrims who left, like Father Abraham (*Gn* 12), familiar surroundings to go and live in the Holy Land. The pilgrims sought to live out in a concrete way the Christian concept of *being strangers in this world while journeying toward our heavenly home*. Later, groups of hermits settled on Mount Carmel keen to live

¹⁴ *Ratio* 1988, art. 5.

¹⁵ *Ratio* 1988, art. 60.

¹⁶ *Ratio* 1988, pp. 32-52, or art. 35-75.

in allegiance to Jesus Christ and waging a spiritual battle while others had waged a military battle to free the land of Christ from Muslims.

The symbol of journey describes the spiritual life. In Jewish and Christian scriptures and other faiths pilgrimages are seen as symbols of the human journey toward God. For example, the journey of the Hebrews from Egypt to the Promised Land became a paradigm of every spiritual journey in all its phases: from enslavement to freedom, passing through the desert. We can also notice that Jesus presented himself as the Way (*Jn* 14:6) and invited his disciples to follow him. Indeed in Acts of the Apostles Christians were first known as “followers of the Way” (*Acts* 9:2).

Within Carmelite tradition the *Institution of the First Monks* presents the spiritual life as a four-step journey by which we “ascend to the peak of prophetic perfection”.¹⁷ The *Institution of the First Monks* sees the whole spiritual journey encapsulated in God’s address to Elijah:

Depart from here and go towards the east, and hide yourself in the wadi Carith, which is over against the Jordan, and there you will drink of the torrent, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there (*1 Kgs* 17:2-4).

Elijah himself is one of the greatest models of Carmelite life whose journey aims at offering “God a heart that is holy and pure from all actual stain of sin”. Thus the four-step journey proposed by the *Institution of the First Monks* are:

- the renunciation of earthly things;
- the renunciation of sin and self-will;
- solitude, silence and celibacy and;
- growth in love.

The theme of journey is also notable in the writings of Carmelite saints. St Teresa of Jesus (of Avila)’s works, *The Interior Castle*, *The Way of Perfection* and the *Life* use the imagery of the journey. For her, the way of perfection is a royal road where the person who truly loves God walks safely. John Welch says that, for Teresa, the journey to and with God is the movement from the periphery of the circle to its centre.¹⁸ The way to God is a journey made in companionship with Jesus. Thus

¹⁷ *Institution of the First Monks*, 1.2.

¹⁸ JOHN WELCH, *The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today’s Pilgrim*, Gracewing, Herefordshire 1996, p. 64.

she could counsel: "The farther a soul progresses the closer becomes its companionship with this good Jesus".¹⁹ For Teresa, walking in the company of Jesus is almost synonymous with 'the journey of prayer' on which souls have to guard against illusion and discouragement through humility and a strong determination not to abandon the journey.

The theme of journey is implied in St John of the Cross' *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. John conceives the spiritual life as an ascent of a mountain. At the summit of that mountain the soul is united with God in love. The ascent is a journey of transformation in God. Journeying implies movement and this is very clear in John's writings, for example, *The Spiritual Canticle*, *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame*. There is a lot of movement in the poetry of John of the Cross, for example:

Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag after wounding me;
I *went out* calling you, but you were gone (SC, Stanza 1).

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace! -
I *went out* unseen, my house being now all stilled (DN, Stanza 1).

John stresses that God is the principal agent in the spiritual journey for he places a person on the path of the mountain²⁰ and it is by his grace that one makes progress along the way leading to him. God is the Bridegroom who goes in search of his bride.²¹

In the modern era, the theme of journeying emerged at the 12th Council of Provinces meeting held at Salamanca, Spain, which produced the document, *Carmelite Charism: Journey into God, Following the Word*.²² This Council of Provinces meeting was influenced by the centenary of St John of the Cross. It stressed two themes: the mystical dimension of Carmelite life and *lectio divina*.

The 134th General Chapter of 1995 had for its theme: *Carmel: A Place and a Journey into the Third Millennium - Our Mission Today -*

¹⁹ ST THERESE OF AVILA, *Interior Castle, Spiritual Masters*, Sheed & Ward, London 1944, 1974, Book 6.8.1.

²⁰ *Ascent, Prologue*, 9.

²¹ *Spiritual Canticle*, 22.1.

²² 12TH COUNCIL OF PROVINCES, *Carmelite Charism: Journey into God, Following the Word*, Salamanca, 1991, Carmelite Communications, Melbourne 1991.

'Get Up and Eat, Lest the Journey be too long' (1 Kg 19:7).²³ The importance of this General Chapter document is evident in that an extract from it prefaces the *RIVC 2000*:

The biblical concept of journey reminds us of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem (*peregrinatio hierosolymitana*) of the first Carmelites, and then their forced return to Europe. It also reminds us of the inner journey which requires us to seek God undergoing the purification of the desert and the dark night. With all those who journey alongside us, we discern the way ahead. Moreover the notion of journey demands that we work out and put into action a plan of how we can best serve the Church. This implies a commitment to the work of justice and peace and to solidarity with all people of good will, and especially with those who are searching for community and striving to meet the demands of love.²⁴

The theme of journey also featured in the topic of the 2001 General Chapter, *Carmel: Journey Continues*.²⁵ To facilitate our journeying the Final Message of the General Chapter 2001 states:

In recent years we have produced documents that are our lifeblood, but we must reflect on them in greater depth in personal prayer and together with our brothers and sisters.²⁶

In the Letter of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, to the Prior General on the occasion of the General Chapter 2001, the Pope impressed on Carmelites the need to get encouragement from the Prophet Elijah and from the Blessed Virgin Mary for our journey:

The theme of the Chapter is *The Journey Continues*. This reference to human experience is typical of Carmelite spirituality. Ever since the first hermits settled on Mount Carmel as pilgrims in the land of the Lord Jesus, life has been represented as an ascent to the holy mountain who is Jesus Christ our Lord (cf. *Roman Missal*, Collect for the Mass in Honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 16th July). Two biblical figures who are dear to the Carmelite tradition give direction to this interior pilgrimage: the prophet Elijah and the Virgin Mary.²⁷

²³ 134TH GENERAL CHAPTER, *Carmel: A Place and a Journey into the Third Millennium - Our Mission Today: 'Get up and eat, lest the journey be too long' (1 Kg 19:7)*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.5.

²⁵ GENERAL CURIA OF THE CARMELITES, *Carmel: The Journey Continues, A Letter to the Carmelite Family from the Members of the General Chapter*, Rome 2001.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁷ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Letter of His Holiness*, in «Carmel in the World», vol. XL, n. 3 (2001), p. 163.

The theme of journey captures for the Carmelite tradition the experience of Carmelites “as pilgrims on this earth, having deep hungers, and haunted by a call”.²⁸ John Welch highlights the movement of “journey” in the Carmelite spiritual life when he writes: “Carmelites tell many stories, but the story of the lover restlessly awaiting the approach of the Beloved emerges as a common theme”.²⁹ Welch goes on to identify five movements of the heart which he calls “seasons”:

1. a longing heart (our desire for God);
2. an enslaved heart (the worship of false gods);
3. a listening heart (contemplative prayer);
4. a troubled heart (the tragic in life);
5. a pure heart (the transformation of desire).

Welch says that the Carmelite tradition names the hunger, gives words to the desire and says that the journey ends in God.³⁰

After this review of the motif of journey we can go back to address the question of the vision of the *RIVC* 2000. But before we address that question it is important to note that the image of journey pervades *RIVC* 2000's whole content. The topic *Carmelite Formation: A Journey of Transformation* sets the tone of movement. The subtitle, *A Journey of Transformation*, is a double emphasis. We have already looked at the motif of journey. Transformation is also a key word in spirituality.³¹ Transformation is more transition than established forms (e.g., Rule, models, structures, patterns, lifestyle, timetable). Thus, the *RIVC* sees Carmelite formation as a journey of transformation (*trans-form-ation*). The component of “-ation” draws our attention to who the subject or agent of transformation is. Within spirituality generally and in the *RIVC* 2000 in particular, God is the actor and the acting person. Hence the *RIVC* 2000 says of contemplation:

Contemplation is the inner journey of Carmelites, arising out of the free initiative of God, who touches and transforms us, leading us towards

²⁸ J. WELCH, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁹ J. WELCH, *Seasons of the Heart: The Spiritual Dynamic of the Carmelite Life, Carmelite Spiritual Directory Project*, Horizons 4, Carmelite Communications, Melbourne 2001, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³¹ For a more extended treatment of ‘transformation’ see KEES WAAIJMAN, *Transformation: A Key Word in Spirituality*, in «Studies in Spirituality», vol. 8, Peeters, Leuven 1998.

unity in love with him, raising us up so that we may enjoy his gratuitous love and live in his loving presence...³²

Through this gradual and continuous transformation in Christ, which is accomplished within us by the Spirit, God draws us to himself on an inner journey which takes us from the dispersive fringes of life to the inner core of our being, where he dwells and where he unites us with himself.³³

Having made this assessment we may be in a better position to pronounce what the *Ratio* 2000 envisions for Carmelites. *Ratio* 2000's vision of Carmelites is that

Carmelites receive and share a common charism to live *a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ, in a contemplative attitude which fashions and supports our life of prayer, fraternity and service.*³⁴

In expounding this vision, the *Ratio* is drawing us to the guidance of the Rule and Constitutions. The Rule, that foundational document we have received from St Albert, calls us to *Christoformation, that is, formation into Christ*. The Constitutions (1995) actually provide the *Ratio* with the vocabulary in the spelling out of this vision when they point out that the heart of Carmelite spirituality lie in "*an intense search for God, in total adherence to Christ, finding expression in fraternal life and apostolic zeal*".³⁵ The whole of Chapter II of the *Constitutions* addresses the theme of Charism of the Order. Here the *Constitutions* state:

Carmelites live their life of allegiance to Christ through a commitment to seek the face of the living God (the contemplative dimension of life), through fraternity, and through service (diakonia) in the midst of the people.³⁶

Following this summary statement, the three essential elements of the charism are then spelt out: *the contemplative dimension* (16-18), *fraternity* (19-20) and *service in the midst of the people* (21-24). These elements are not to be treated in isolation; rather they ought to be

³² *RIVC* 2000, nn. 23 §1; 124 §3. See also 1995 *Constitutions*, n. 17.

³³ *RIVC* 2000, n. 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 4.

³⁵ *Constitutions* 1995, nn. 3, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 14.

integrated into the life of the Carmelite. *Ratio* 2000 therefore envisions the Carmelite life as a

*contemplative fraternity in the midst of the people.*³⁷

The *Ratio* 2000 has developed these thoughts further and states:

The contemplative dimension is not merely one of the elements of our charism (prayer, fraternity and service): it is the dynamic element which unifies them all.³⁸

The *Ratio*, like the *Rule* and *Constitutions*, envisions the Carmelite as a human being engaged in a process of transformation, being conformed to Christ, becoming a new creation in Jesus Christ, taking on the mind of Christ so that he or she begins to hear the voice of God in all sounds and attentively seek to recognise the hidden signs of God's presence and of his work in the world and in himself. Indeed, the invitation to contemplation is as the Prior General, Joseph Chalmers, has said that we be "slowly transformed so that we can look upon the world as if with the eyes of God and love it as if with God's heart".³⁹

The vision of RIVC 2000 for the Carmelite is conformation to Christ. We need to hand on this heritage because Christ is Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). The *Ratio* itself spells it out clearly:

The Father - who, through the action of the Holy Spirit, calls us to a spiritual experience of deep attraction to and love for Jesus Christ the chaste, poor and obedient One - is the source and goal of religious life, and therefore of Carmelite life. Through the Holy Spirit, the Father consecrates us, transforms us and conforms us to the image of Christ, guiding us to communion with himself and with our brothers and sisters.

As individuals and as communities, we in turn choose Jesus as the one Lord and Saviour of our lives. We commit ourselves to a journey of gradual and progressive conversion encompassing every aspect of life, allowing ourselves to be conformed to Jesus by the action of the Spirit and to come to union with God.

The commitment to follow Jesus Christ with all one's being and to serve him 'faithfully with a pure heart and total dedication' is a commitment

³⁷ *Ratio* 2000, n. 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 23.

³⁹ JOSEPH CHALMERS, Prior General, *Letter of Presentation of RIVC* 2000, p. 5.

to live in him, allowing him to guide our thoughts, our feelings, our words, our deeds, our fraternal relations and the use we make of things, so that everything may come from his Word and be done in his Word... The commitment to live a deep relationship with Christ and to conform to him is therefore the very core of our formation.⁴⁰

Questions for personal and group reflection

- What is your vision of Carmelite formation?
- How do you introduce candidates to Carmel and what do you stress in their journey of formation?
- What are we forming candidates for?

3. WAYS OF APPROPRIATING THE *RATIO*

One way of beginning to appreciate *Ratio* 2000 is to appreciate its structure and content. *Ratio* 2000 comprises an *introduction, three parts and an appendix*. The introduction gives a description of our charism and spirituality and situates our formation discourse within the world in which we live. While our context influences us it is to it that we are sent as evangelisers. The introduction also points out that the ‘common charism to a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ, in a contemplative attitude which fashions and supports our life of prayer, fraternity and service’ ought to find expression and be *incarnated in various cultures, times and places*.⁴¹ Hopefully our meeting here will stir in us the desire to want to *incarnate and inculturate* the Carmelite charism on the African continent

The lay out of the *RIVC* 2000 is as follows:

Introduction

Part One - The Process of Formation

- Called to Follow Christ - “In Obsequio Jesu Christi vivere”
- Called to the Carmelite Life - Contemplative fraternity in the midst of the people
- Agents and mediators of formation - Obedient to the *actio* of the Spirit

⁴⁰ *Ratio* 2000, nn. 5-6; see also *RIVC* 1988, nn. 49-50.

⁴¹ *RIVC* 2000, n. 4.

Part Two - The Stages of Formation

- The Vocations Ministry - Helping others to find their way
- The Pre-Novitiate - Preparing for the Journey
- The Novitiate - Setting out on the Journey
- The Period of Simple Profession - On the Journey
- Formation for Service - Journeying for others
- Ongoing formation - A Continuing Journey

Part Three - Programme of Carmelite Studies

It provides a frame of reference describing and situating the subjects and areas which must be covered to ensure a complete formation in the Carmelite life beginning with the pre-novitiate, through to specialisation.

Appendix

It sets the guidelines and criteria to help formators with their periodic evaluation of candidates covering the following dimensions: human, spiritual and Carmelite, intellectual, practical and service.

The *Ratio* as we have it is a labour of love. Those who conceived, drafted, deliberated on it, approved it used their energy in a painstaking way. The only way to do justice to it is that we read it, reflect upon it, discuss it, pray it, and creatively apply it in our various contexts and interpret it in the light of the Gospel, the Rule and the Constitutions of the Order.

In the Zimbabwean context, we have taken some significant strides in trying to own the *Ratio*. We held an all-Commissariat workshop on the *Ratio* from 9-10 April 2002. For some of the brothers who are not in the formation ministry, it was their first time to see the document. Our aim was to introduce the members of the Commissariat to the *Ratio* and to have them familiarise themselves to it. Furthermore, the Provincial has gone an extra mile to make the text of the *Ratio* available to every friar. This is commendable.

In the Students' House (Mount Carmel), soon after its publication and circulation, we begun familiarising ourselves with the text of the *Ratio* through *lectio divina* in three groups. I like the way Dom Columba Marmion OSB has described *Lectio divina*:

We read	<i>lectio</i>
Under the eye of God	<i>meditatio</i>
Until the heart is touched	<i>oratio</i>
And leaps to flame	<i>contemplatio.</i>

Lectio divina with the *Ratio* 2000 has proved for us to be the best way for us to internalise its content. *The dynamic of lectio divina means that it is both a personal and communal appropriation of this fundamental document of the Order.* Our experience has been that a good preparation for *lectio divina* with the text of *Ratio*, that is, reading the text the night before, will help on both the individual and communal level. When it is read in the context of the community, words that may not have touched one may begin to make a new impression on oneself. The quiet and slow reading of the text individually and listening to it being read with reverence by another brother helps to make the words sink into one's consciousness. Without noticing it, the text becomes part of the reader.

As the process continues, we have noticed that the period of reflection on the text brings up a myriad of words, events and messages. We then rest with these aware of the presence of God. When it comes to sharing, it has always been like a new revelation. Our experience has been that *the experiences, insights and sharing of our brothers have enriched us and given us new ways of appreciating the words of the text.*

When it comes to prayer, we have noticed that the text and message of the *Ratio* has enriched our prayer vocabulary. Our personal and communal prayer has been enriched and deepened by *lectio divina* with the *Ratio*. It has facilitated us to appreciate our common vocation and spurred us onto care for each other more deeply.

4. THE AFRICAN CANDIDATE IN FORMATION

There is a crisis of vocations throughout the world. It appears that the crisis of vocations to the priestly and religious life is most acute in Europe where Africa has depended heavily for a supply of priests and religious for a long time. Many religious Orders did not engage in the work of promoting African vocations when first they arrived on the African continent. In the context of Zimbabwe, European missionaries were very suspicious of promoting local vocations because, some of them thought that *the African could not live a celibate commitment.* Others *did not think it was urgent at all* since there was a steady supply of new religious from Europe. Others did not want to promote local vocations because of *deepseated religious 'apartheid', racism or superiority complex.* Many Congregations began promoting vocations at the height of the wars of independence from colonial occupation or in the post independence era. There are other

Congregations that did not promote indigenous vocations to the religious life because they said they wanted *to promote vocations to the priestly life in particular dioceses*.

Whatever, the reasons for the slowness in promoting local vocations, it means that African religious are young and few. Even when the indigenisation process began to take root, *the formation was very much a transliteration of the European model on the African with the result that many early African vocations to the religious life were to convert not merely to Christ but to European ways of thinking and doing things. Formation as Europeanisation⁴² of the African* (that is, the African religious developing European tastes and idiosyncracies) *has created a gap between the African religious and his people and sometimes created identity crises for many African religious. Many felt and continue to feel a sense of alienation which compounded their sense of loneliness which ultimately leads to disorientation and disgruntlement with the religious vocation*. It is in the light of this that we need to look at the African candidate in formation visa-viz the *Ratio*.

Our candidates are coming to us through an active vocations promotion exercise. The Vocations Director goes to primary, secondary and high schools and parish Churches meeting Catholic students and

⁴² FRANCES M. MORAN points out that in the three stages of recent Church history: (i) pre-Vatican II; (ii) Vatican II and (iii) turn of the century, there have been three styles of thought that have tended to dominate and operate in the respective historical stages: (i) the theological; (ii) the dialogical and (iii) the individualistic styles of thought. These thought patterns affected the understanding of formation. Characteristics of these styles of thought are as follows: (i) Theological style of thought: institutional church seen as harbinger of theological truth; mind-set ensured absolute certainty. Religious identity expressed by concepts of the three vows, notion of communal life and idea of a specific shared mission; secure identity supports: religious believed that the dedication of their lives would bring about the salvation of souls for themselves and others; lifestyle portrayed as sacrosanct; religious life - the way to be par excellence; change of name symbolised a radical approach to the formative processes. (ii) Dialogical style of thought: change in church's dealings with the world; dialogue - church: both speaker and listener; world seen as a partner; notions of absolute gradually replaced with the idea of relativity; sense of freedom prevailed with the result of some turmoil and turbulence; old notions of authority were challenged; religious no longer understood in terms of a sacrifice, a giving up of the world but in terms of a living fully within the world yet not of the world; change in understanding of vows ultimately leading to confused and confusing religious identity; (iii) individualistic style of thought: dominance of Western cultural influence; sidelining of institutional church worsened by sex scandals, hypocrisy; notions that Church is irrelevant in considering contemporary issues; dominant philosophy: each person seeks to look after self, to satisfy self, to develop self: subjectivism and individualism. Cf. his article, *To Be a Religious: Identity and History*, in «Religious Life Review», vol. 43 (September/October 2004), pp. 301-302.

telling them about the Carmelite religious vocation. In places where Carmelites are working, young men have been attracted by *our lifestyle of prayer, community living and particularly their service in the midst of the people*. So we can say our candidates come to us chiefly through vocation promotion exercises and the witness of Carmelites in ministry. Although the Vocations Director has from time to time put advertisements in Catholic newspapers, the response from these has been small.

Many of those who have been joining us have been coming to us after secondary and high school. Their average age upon entering the initial formation experience in the pre-novitiate is about 20. I am sure this is different from Europe where Roderick Strange says:

Those interested in the possibility of being ordained these days will generally be older. They will have been to university or received some form of professional training. They will usually have been employed. They will often bring with them some experience of intimate and loving relationships, relationships which they may have decided to sacrifice because of their vocation, or relationships which have, whether prosaically or painfully, broken down. Some will have been widowed. Some of them may also have had a real sense of conversion...⁴³

Our situation is quite different from Europe. Why are the candidates coming to us? Some are genuinely seeking to deepen their spirituality and to prepare themselves for ministry in the vineyard of the Lord. However, there are others who seem to come to us seeking merely an education and a safe haven from the social-political and economic problems of the country. There is a very high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe (some estimate it to be around 60%). Some of the candidates look at religious life as a comfortable way of life without too many challenges compared to the majority of people who have to eke out a living in trying circumstances. It appears that the religious' lifestyle is closer to or slightly above the middle class lifestyle. In other words religious are looked upon as rich. This is an enduring effect of the Europeanisation of religious lifestyle.

Furthermore, the candidates coming to us are coming from both rural and urban backgrounds. The majority of those who come from urban centres still maintain some close contacts with their rural childhood homes. A very distressing observation is that some of our

⁴³ RODERICK STRANGE, *Formation, change and commitment*, in «Priests and People: Pastoral Theology for the Modern World», June 2004, pp. 213-218, at 213.

candidates have come from broken childhood homes due to divorce, separation of parents and death of one or both parents. Some of our students are orphaned, having lost both parents to the AIDS pandemic. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe is such that there has been no family that has not been affected. So it is quite clear that our candidates are coming to us from very challenging circumstances.

Considering the challenges that our candidates are emerging from, the *Ratio* offers tremendous hope in its view of formation through the motif of 'journey of transformation'. In reality, our students are journeying. They are engaged in a journey of transformation towards 'commitment to follow Jesus Christ with all one's being and to serve him "faithfully with a pure heart and total dedication". It is «*a commitment to live in him, allowing him to guide our thoughts, our feelings, our words, our deeds, our fraternal relations and the use we make of things, so that everything may come from his Word and be done in his Word*».⁴⁴

Our hope in formation is that *the candidate who comes to us will be fascinated with the person of Christ that they will want to continue to follow him within the context of the Carmelite Order*. In the initial formation phase, *the candidate has to be steeped in the reality of his circumstances - both personal and communal - so that in their response to these circumstances, they may do so in the light of the Gospel*. During the long break students are appointed to Carmelite communities for an immersion experience. This exercise has been largely positive. Students look forward to this time of formation in the midst of the people. At the end of the immersion experience students are expected to write a *theologico-pastoral reflection paper*. My analysis is that students have had to engage in a lot of reflection and discernment *as they encountered human brokenness, trauma, suffering, bereavement, corruption and the heights of expression of faith, hope and love*.

Through the immersion experience students are expected to be steeped in an active Carmelite ethos and values. During such experiences students have noted that the expression of the Carmelite charism as a contemplative fraternity in the midst of the people is not merely a theoretically neat expression but that Carmelites actively seek to put this self understanding in practice.

Noticing that the taking of local candidates into the formation programme took place just over two decades ago, we should be grateful to the Lord and the generosity of the candidates and those

⁴⁴ RIVC 2000, n. 6.

who have persevered over the years in the work of formation. In the 21 years since the start of the formation programme in 1983, there are twelve men working in Carmelite communities and parishes run by Carmelites. At present there are twenty students studying for philosophy and theology. In the spirit of the *Ratio* there is need to accelerate the rate of indigenisation of the formation programme so that the charism may be expressed and incarnated concretely in the local culture. This will take time and a lot of prayer, reflection and discernment. But it is imperative that this indigenisation takes place.

Our aim in the initial formation period is the raising up of **MATURE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN CARMELITE PERSONS**. We wish our candidates to be:

- Contemplative
- Communal /fraternal
- Servants
- Committed to the gospel
- Collaborative
- Far-seeing / Discerning
- Real prophets
- Sensitive (compassionate)

This can be done because these qualities are prized not only in the Christian and Carmelite heritage but also in traditional Africa. Our candidates ought to grow into mature people of character, courage and conscience if they are to evangelise their brothers and sisters.

Questions for personal and group reflection

- Who is the African candidate in formation?
- What are the candidates looking for from Carmel?
- How does our formation programme respond to the reality of the situation on the ground in Africa (i.e., conflict ridden, unstable family life, poverty in the midst of material affluence, fast changing society, permissive society)?
- How is Carmel responding to the needs of Africans generally?
 - Now?
 - In the future?
 - In the formation programme?

5. AFRICAN AND CARMELITE VALUES IN DIALOGUE

There is a lot in common between traditional African and Carmelite values. Both traditions focus on the person (anthropocentric). In Christian Carmelite heritage we learn that God created human beings in his own image and likeness (*Gn* 1:27). Furthermore, after the fall, God continued to pursue human beings into a relationship that would nurture the best in them and restore them to communion with their Creator. That relationship had its highs and lows and culminated in the mystery of incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. So much did God love humanity. Quite a number of verses in the Bible point out with poignancy this great love of God for each individual person:

- The Word became flesh, he lived among us (*Jn* 1:14).
- For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (*Jn* 3:16).
- I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full (*Jn* 10:10).
- So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (*2 Cor* 5:17-19).
- You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty (*2 Cor* 7:9).
- As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, 'Abba, Father'; and so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir, by God's own act (*Gal* 4:6-7).
- Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love, marking us out for himself beforehand, to be adopted sons, through Jesus Christ (*Eph* 1:4-5).
- But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross (*Phil* 2:7-8).

- To do this is right, and acceptable to God our Saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all (*1 Tim 2:3-6*).
- We have recognised for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him (*1Jn 4:16*).

Christianity celebrates a God of life. This God is love. God is Triune, a communion of love - love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. God loves his creation so much as to want to have his creatures participate in his life. God's passion is to have human beings live in communion with himself. God has a preferential option for the sinner to whom he shows loving-kindness, *hesed* (cf. *Lk 5:31; Lk 15*).

The Carmelite values derive from the basic vocation of every Christian expressed in the *Rule*:

Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ - how, pure in heart and stout in conscience, he must be unswerving in the service of his Master.⁴⁵

Basically what the *Rule* is saying is that as Carmelites our fundamental option is to live a life of allegiance to Jesus. This allegiance is to be manifested in our service of Jesus Christ. In other words we have to prioritise our love for the Triune God and our neighbour. How this is designed is expressed in the Carmelite charism. The gift of Carmel to the Church and the world is to be a contemplative fraternity in the midst of the people. Already the charism expresses the values in Carmel:

- prayer,
- contemplation,
- obedience,
- silence,
- fraternity or brotherhood or community, and
- service of the people or solidarity with the people.
- sensitivity.

⁴⁵ BRUCE BAKER - GREGORY L. KLEIN (eds.), *The Carmelite Rule*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New Jersey 2000, ch. 2.

These are the same values that were prized in traditional African societies. Among the Bantu speaking peoples of Southern Africa, and in particular the Shona, life is directed by the values of social justice, obligation and responsibility. In other words Africans prize *ukama*, brotherhood or community and community wellbeing. All these values are summed up in one word, *unhu* or *ubuntu*. Archbishop Desmond Tutu tries to unpack the meaning of *ubuntu* in a way that characteristically present it as the *summum bonum* of the African:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, “*Yu, u nobuntu*”; “Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*”. This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. The share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “a person is a person through other people”. It is not “I think, therefore I am”. It says rather: “I am human because I belong”. I participate, I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* - the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.⁴⁶

We notice that in both African and Christian traditions the following are fundamental values: life, harmony in relationships, community spirit (sense of belonging and participation), spirit of discernment, service, loving-kindness etc. These values are contradicted by the *secular spirit of Westernisation which seeks above all individual achievement, success and gratification, materialism and indulgence of the lower appetites of human beings.*

⁴⁶ DESMOND TUTU, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Rider, London - Johannesburg 1999, pp. 34-35.

In our formation programmes, we therefore need to build on the best traditions of Africa and creatively fuse them with the rich heritage of Christian and Carmelite values. Our formation has to be holistic - touching the following key aspects: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral.⁴⁷

Formation into Christian and Carmelite values should not strip a person of his Africanness. Rather it should enhance it. This is why the *Ratio* says that the responsibilities of the formators are to

- discern,
- accompany,
- nourish and
- evaluate.⁴⁸

The role of the formator(s) is really to foster in candidates the desire to deepen viable relationships with Jesus so much that whatever they do, whether they persevere in the religious vocation or not, they may be persons of integrity who are of service to others and themselves.

Questions for personal and group reflection

- How do Christian Carmelite values relate to Traditional African values?
- What values are threatening both Christian Carmelite values and traditional African values in the contemporary world?
- What do we wish our candidates to be?

6. USING RATIO IN AN AFRICAN SITUATION

As we have observed that African and Christian Carmelite values intersect, we may then say that one way to use the *Ratio* in an African situation is *to read, reflect, ponder and pray with it so that it helps us in finding pathways towards integration*. As we have seen, the aim of the formation programme is Christof ormation, that is, the formation of candidates who are transformed in Christ - both mind and heart -

⁴⁷ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 43.

⁴⁸ *RIVC* 2000, n. 58.

in the context of their cultures. Inculturation is the surest way to judge the effectiveness with which that integration takes place. We notice that the contemporary world has been predominantly influenced by Western cultural thought that is individualistic. This individualistic style of thought seems to be pervading all cultures at a fast pace. The flowering of this approach to life has generally tended to see the Church as irrelevant mainly due to the fact that the Church is perceived with resentment for the times it held sway with its absolutist and authoritarian approach as well as its slowness to dialogue with the world so much so that when the Church began opening its windows, the world was past the point of dialogue leading to the present malaise. Thus because of sexual abuse scandals which are indicative of the hypocrisy of some of its members and the perceived cover up by local ordinaries, many people are slow to listen to the Church and do not wish to enter into dialogue with it. It is within this context that the individualistic style of thought which says as Frances Moran has observed: "each person seeks to look after *self*, to satisfy self, to develop self"⁴⁹ thrives unchecked. Moran goes on to say that the characteristics of this approach to life is its exaltation of the subjective and individualism. Furthermore, there is an increasing disregard for the objective or relative truth; its understanding is that truth is subjective and (yet) non-negotiable and people do things for what they get out of it.⁵⁰

The *Ratio* appears to be mindful of this kind of scenario brought about by the post-modern mentality. This is why it proposes to critique the pervasive contemporary spirit because it cultivates a culture of emptiness and deprives life of meaningfulness. Both Traditional African cultures and the Christian Carmelite heritage give evidence of a quest for peace, harmony and service of God and human beings through prayer, fraternal relations and service. It is therefore in the same context that the *Ratio* should be used, that is, the context of prayer, community and service as it becomes the foundation upon which a new awareness of being African, Christian and Carmelite can emerge.

We therefore need to read, reflect, discuss, dialogue with the text of the *Ratio* personally, in community and to interpret it in creative ways so that it becomes the springboard of our continuing and

⁴⁹ FRANCES M. MORAN, *To Be a Religious: Identity and History*, in «Religious Life Review», vol. 43 (September/October 2004), pp. 301-312 at p. 309.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

ongoing dialogue with our varied contexts. In my formation community the way we have used it is through private and communal reading of the *Ratio* in the context of *lectio divina*. This way, all members of the community become aware of it, notice its relevance and become keen to incarnate its principles in their own lives.

One of the pleasures of the *Ratio* is that it has been written not only through the light of the Gospels, the teaching of the Church but also in line with the *Rule, Constitutions* of the Order and in openness and dialogue with the signs of the times. It is a timely document to help us imbibe the spirit of the Gospel and of Carmel.

The *Ratio* is clearly a gift and challenge for every member of the Order. Here in Africa as elsewhere we need to recognise that the methods of appropriating the *Ratio* are five-fold:

1. Read: personally and communally.
2. Reflect: personally and communally.
3. Pray: personally and communally.
4. *Lectio divina*: in communities.
5. Discuss: in local communities, deaneries or provincial or commissariat group.

The *Ratio* acts as an instruction manual. It is a guide, a tool that provides a broad scope of formation as “a journey of personal, communitarian and structural conversion which is faithful to the call of the Spirit to the problems of today’s world and to the founding experience of the Carmelite Order”.⁵¹

The significance of the *Ratio* becomes clear:

- *it pronounces in a clear way the Carmelite charism;*
- *it guides us along the path of transformation in Christ;*
- *it integrates and synthesises the vision of the Church and the Carmelite documents as it proposes these for each Carmelite.*

We, in Africa, need to do justice to this labour of love that is the *Ratio*. It is incumbent upon all formators and major superiors to see that the *Ratio* is

- breathed.
- implemented,
- lived,
- inculturated in our varied contexts.

⁵¹ *Ratio* 1988, n. 5.

When we are formed by the spirit of the *Ratio*, we will live in accordance with the Gospel and the best traditions in Carmel's long history in its quest for peace and tranquility in God alone.

The *Ratio* envisages ongoing formation until old age. No one is ever to act as if he is fully formed in Christ. The *Ratio*, at the end of its prose section, in Part Two says:

The contemplative journey of transformation will have brought the Carmelite to be configured to Christ in the paschal mystery, making him ready to go in hope into the embrace of the Father, to the goal of transformative union with God towards which he once set out.⁵²

Questions for personal and group reflection

- How may we use the *Ratio* in an African situation?
- What is the significance of the *Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitanae*?
- What in your opinion are the strengths of the *Ratio*?
- What in your opinion are the limitations of the *Ratio*?

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⁵² *Ratio* 2000, n. 124.