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What Happened to the Spanish Carmelite Convents in Belgium?

Bárbara Mujica
Georgetown University

Immediately after the death of Teresa de Ávila in 1582, requests for new Discalced Carmelite convents[1] burgeoned. The hunger for the kind of spirituality that Teresa promoted—a deeply personal relationship with God that encouraged interiority and mental prayer—was sweeping over Europe, particularly France, which had undergone years of religious conflict. Within the next few decades, Discalced Carmelite convents opened all over Europe—in Portugal, France, Italy, the Low Countries, Poland—and beyond.

Even earlier, Teutónio Bragança, Archbishop of Évora, had asked Teresa to found a convent in Portugal, but at the time, she was too involved with the conflicts within the Carmelite order to accept his invitation. However, in 1581, Teresa's collaborator Fray Ambrosio Mariano founded a friary in Lisbon, and in 1584, Teresa's friend María de San José founded a Carmel for women, also in Lisbon. Jean de Brétigny, a French aristocrat who was passionate about the Teresian spiritual reform, was instrumental in María's foundation, but his real desire was to bring the Discalced Carmelites to France. Because of the political animosity between Spain and certain elements of French society, Brétigny had to put his project on hold for several years, but finally, with the help of the influential cleric Pierre de Bérulle, in the late summer of 1604,[2] six nuns crossed the Pyrenees to found in Paris. Marie-Anne de Jésus, a twentieth-century biographer of Ana de Jesús, notes these women were risking their lives, "for the French [were] emerging from political and religious troubles and [had] no use for the Spaniards" (102). The Provincial of Castile was so certain the nuns would be murdered that he tried to prevent them from leaving. However, they made it across the border and all the way to Paris, where they founded France's first Discalced Carmelite convent.

The leader of the group was Ana de Jesús (Lobrera) (1545-1621), a close associate of Teresa's with experience as a foundress and a prioress. Among her traveling companions was Ana de San Bartolomé (García) (1549-1626), previously Teresa's nurse and amanuenses, whom Teresa often referred to as La Bartolomé. Ana de Jesús did not like La Bartolomé and had opposed her being included among those going to France, but Bérulle had overridden her. The animosity between the two women led to unpleasant conflicts, yet this was not the only reason that neither was happy in France and eventually accepted the invitation of Archduchess Isabel Clara Eugenia, co-sovereign of the Low Countries with Archduke Albert of Austria, to found in Belgium.

Soon after Ana de Jesús became prioress of the Paris Carmel, she found that her authority was limited by her lack of knowledge of French and the incompatibility of the French and Spanish cultural perspectives (Diefendorf 106). Bérulle's cousin, Barbe Acarie, was the central figure in a spiritual group known as *les dévots* and was a driving force behind the movement to bring the Discalced Carmelites to France. Because Ana had difficulty communicating with the French nuns, Acarie took over many of the responsibilities that should have belonged to the prioress, such as interviewing postulants. This left Ana feeling marginalized (Diefendorf 106ff). Furthermore, Ana clashed with Bérulle almost immediately. To begin with, Bérulle did not bring Discalced Carmelite friars from Italy to confess the nuns as he had promised. Carlos Ros argues that Bérulle never wanted Discalced Carmelite friars in France because he sought to control the nuns himself and imbue the French Discalced congregation with his own particular approach to spirituality (292). In addition, Bérulle determined to create a grandiose new convent building, which Ana found to be at odds with Teresa's ideals of simplicity and austerity (Diefendorf 107). A third issue was Bérulle's decision to elevate Ana de San Bartolomé from white-veiled to black-veiled nun so that she could found a convent in Pontoise and serve as its prioress. Black-veiled, or choir nuns, were from upper-class families and paid a dowry to enter a convent. They learned to read and write and were in charge of the administration of the house. Only black-veiled nuns could become prioresses. White-veiled nuns, usually from poor families, performed menial tasks such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, and caring for the infirm. On 8 June 1605, La Bartolomé wrote to the Provincial of Castile that she had no wish to take the black veil. Yet, as usual, Bérulle got his way.

La Bartolomé writes in her autobiography that although she liked the Pontoise nuns, she often felt overwhelmed by the demands of her office and inferior to the more cultured French women (*OC* 389ff). In her writings, she often mentions her Pontoise daughters with fondness and in fact stayed in contact with them long after she left the convent. However, her time in Pontoise was marred by conflict. One issue was her disagreement with Ana de Jesús over whether to admit nuns of Protestant background. Some Protestant women were converting back to Catholicism and wished to join Discalced Carmelite convents. La Bartolomé was willing to take them, but Ana de Jesús feared they would contaminate the other nuns with their heretical ideas, a position La Bartolomé viewed as uncharitable (*OC* 837). Of *converso* ancestry herself,[3] Teresa had foregone background checks for lineage in her convents. La Bartolomé may have wanted merely to follow Teresa's example, or, as Darcy Donahue suggests, she may have known about Teresa's family history and viewed converts more favorably than Ana de Jesús.

In this instance, Bérulle sided with La Bartolomé, which alienated her from much of the reform leadership.[4] Her letters from the period reveal that she was beginning to feel isolated and melancholic. The situation was aggravated by

Bérulle's decision to return her to Paris as prioress so that Ana de Jesús could found in Dijon. La Bartolomé, of peasant background, disliked Paris and felt out of place with the aristocratic Parisian nuns, who enjoyed a close relationship with Barbe Acarie.

Incensed at Bérulle's highhandedness and disillusioned with developments in France in general, Ana de Jesús accepted the invitation of Isabel Clara Eugenia to found in Brussels. The first Discalced Carmelite convent for women in Belgium was inaugurated in the park of the royal palace on 25 January 1607, and construction of the permanent convent building was begun two months later. Jerónimo Gracián, Teresa's close associate, describes the pomp and elegance of laying of the foundation stone in *Peregrinación de Anastasio* (405). Ana herself gives an account of the new Belgian foundation in *Crónica de la fundación de Bruselas (Escritos y documentos).*

In the meantime, Ana de San Bartolomé, who remained in France, was growing increasingly dissatisfied with her own situation. One issue on which she and Ana de Jesús agreed was the need for Discalced Carmelite confessors for the French convents. La Bartolomé frequently wrote to Tomás de Jesús, then superior of the Italian congregation, in an effort to bring friars from Italy. Although the nuns supported her efforts, Bérulle was incensed by her activism. If he had at first supported her inclusion in the group of nuns coming from Spain, argues Kiernan Kavanaugh, it was because he thought he could control her, for unlike the self-confident, aristocratic Ana de Jesús, she was of humble background (64). However, now that she was vigorously seeking to promote the establishment of Discalced Carmelite friaries in France, he turned against her. She avers in her autobiography that he told the French nuns not to trust her because she was a foreigner, was too strict, and harbored demonic spirits. He also warned the French religious hierarchy that she was getting too powerful (*OC* 393-406). While she had praised the French nuns in her early letters from Paris, now she complains that they are cold and superficial. Ana was feeling increasingly alienated and desperate.

In 1610, Paulo V finally agreed to a friary in Paris. Peter-Thomas Rohrbach notes that "The General wisely selected two Frenchmen for the foundation, Denis de la Mère de Dieu and Bernard de Saint-Joseph," thereby avoiding some of the problems the Spanish nuns had faced (250). The men arrived in Paris in the company of Tomás de Jesús and made the foundation on 21 My 1611. Bérulle was of course furious. Stéphane-Marie Morgain suggests that Bérulle, who had just founded the Congregation of the Oratory, may have wanted to merge the Oratory and Discalced congregations, with himself at the head, but the arrival of the friars from Italy ruined his plan (202).[5] The issue of confessors was still not resolved, however, because the Pope issued a bull placing the Order under the authority of French superiors.

To La Bartolomé's chagrin, Bérulle insisted that she continue to confess solely with him and that she put her spiritual experiences in writing. Ana was

indignant and wrote to Bérulle that she couldn't comply with the second demand. She had learned to write late in life and perhaps did not feel comfortable writing down her experiences. Furthermore, she did not speak French perfectly and preferred to confess in Spanish (*OC* 927, 929). Since Bérulle's Spanish was faulty, she needed to confess orally so she could clarify her words. By now, Ana was struggling to extricate herself from Bérulle's control and follow Ana de Jesús to Flanders.

Isabel Clara Eugenia had wanted La Bartolomé to accompany the other Ana north in 1607, but instead, in obedience to the prelates, she went to Tours to make a foundation. In her letters to Bérulle and Tomás de Jesús, she often mentioned the possibility of going to Belgium, but at age 61 and in poor health, she had qualms about traveling to a new country that was even colder and, she feared, less hospitable than France. It seems from her letters that she didn't really know what she should do. Anyhow, the decision didn't depend on her. Ana took her vow of obedience seriously, and without an order from Bérulle, she could not leave France. She wrote to Tomás de Jesús asking him to speak to Bérulle to resolve the issue, but Bérulle wouldn't give him a clear answer. Finally, Fray Tomás took the matter into his own hands and freed Ana to go. On 7 October 1611, she left for Mons and arrived the following month. After a short stay in Brussels, she continued on to Antwerp, where she founded the Discalced Carmelite convent where she spent the rest of her life.

The Spanish convents in the Low Countries faced many of the same challenges that had beleaguered those in France: disputes about confessors, cultural tensions, financial worries, and disagreements about postulants. In addition, the influx of English nuns from Protestant England caused serious rifts in the Order. Finally, the seemingly endless Eighty-Years War, in which Holland freed itself from Catholic Spain, led to destitution and ruin throughout the Low Countries. The war ended with the Peace of Vervins in 1598; the Treaty of London ended the Anglo-Spanish war in 1604. Isabel Clara Eugenia and her husband believed that convents could be a bulwark against encroaching Protestantism and for that reason sought to establish an independent Flemish Carmelite province. They undoubtedly hoped that a strong Catholic presence in Flanders would discourage Protestant aggression. However, after a period of peace known as the Twelve Years' Truce—during which Ana de San Bartolomé arrived in Antwerp—war raged on until mid-century, ravishing the country and sometimes sowing terror among the nuns.[6] Yet, in spite of these many obstacles, the Belgian convents thrived and grew. Even in the midst of war, the influx of postulants meant that new houses had to be established, and existing houses had to be expanded.

By the time the Peace of Westphalia finally brought the wars of religion to an end in 1648,[7] both Anas had been dead for more than two decades. The Thirty-Years War had cost some eight million people their lives. The treaties

of 1648 not only restored peace, but also established a new notion of political order that dictated that a sovereign state should not interfere in the internal affairs of another. However, this principle did not prevent future international interventions. In 1714, as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession, the government of the Catholic Netherlands came under Austrian rule. What followed was a new period of anguish and trails for the Discalced Carmelites of Belgium, as well as for all contemplative orders.

Joseph II of Austria (1741-1790), Holy Roman Emperor from 1765 and sole ruler of the Hapsburg Empire from November 1780 until his death ten years later, was deeply influenced by the philosophers of the French Enlightenment who sought to promote reason as the foundation of society and condemned the Church as an antiquated, unserviceable institution. The *philosophes* did recognize that religion had a role in maintaining moral and social order, but the Church was held to be a power-hungry and greedy institution, overly influential and dangerous. The reformers objected to the heavy-handed methods Church officials used in dealing with unorthodox groups such as the Jansenists early in the century and religious minorities such as Protestants and Jews. They also objected to the close bond between the Church and the monarchy.

Joseph II was a champion of "enlightened absolutism," a notion originating in the Enlightenment that proposed that rulers should govern as despots, not for their own gratification, but for their subjects' wellbeing. According to this concept, the enlightened despot was to focus on such areas as education, healthcare, housing, and infrastructure in order to improve the lives of his people. In Joseph's view, professional religious were mostly "a blight on society," who did nothing to better the lives of the citizens of the Empire (Smet, *Mirror* 531). Rather than eliminate the clergy altogether, Joseph's goal was to create a new social order in which the church would be under his authority.

Joseph actually saw himself as a protector of Catholicism, which he sought to cleanse of corruption. To that end, he strove to simplify religious practice and rid it from Roman influence by undermining papal power.[8] He began by limiting bishoprics, religious orders, and church properties to those within the confines of the territories of the Empire. He excluded all others from consideration, thereby simplifying questions of diocesan authority. He deprived the bishops of their authority and limited their communications with the Pope, making them subservient to himself. Direct communication between the bishops and Rome, and of religious orders with their generals in foreign countries, was forbidden. All ecclesiastical decrees, including those issued by the Pope, were to become dependent on the approval of the Emperor. Certain other decisions, such as those involving impediments to marriage, became the domain of the bishops, who, because they were now under the authority of the Emperor, were incapable of reaching conclusions independently. All papal titles and attendance at the German seminary in Rome were also forbidden, and a new German seminary

was established in Pavia to replace it. Joseph also deprived clergymen of the tithe and required them to study in seminaries under government control, reduced the number of holy days, limited the amount of ornamentation in churches (even dictating the number of candles that could be burned), and simplified religious celebration. Under Joseph's rule, the church became an arm of the state and church lands and funds were expropriated. While in Rome in 1783, Joseph threated to create an independent state-church, of which he would be the head.

As an example of his enlightened attitudes, in 1781, Joseph issued a *Tolerenzpatent,* a charter of religious toleration that granted religious freedom to Lutherans, Calvinists, and Serbian Orthodox. In 1782, the Edict of Tolerance extended religious freedom to the Jews of Galicia, an area between Central and Eastern Europe, now part of Poland, with a large Yiddish-speaking Jewish population. However, rather than grant Jews more control over their own communities, the new policy eliminated their internal autonomy and promoted their Germanization by encouraging them not to wear traditional Jewish clothing or follow Jewish customs. These measures of "tolerance" were met by protests from the Catholic hierarchy and contributed to unrest among the Catholic populations in the Empire.

Of all the religious orders, Joseph considered the contemplatives the most parasitical. On 13 March 1783, he suppressed all "'useless' convents, especially those of contemplatives" (Smet 533). The Edict on Idle Institutions, promulgated in 1780, was one of 10,000 ordinances Joseph issued on religious matters. It outlawed all contemplative monastic orders except those actively involved in teaching, healthcare, and other social services. Under Joseph's rule, the number of monks in the Holy Roman Empire was reduced from 65,000 to 27,000. As a result, many nuns, including those of the Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen houses were forced to leave their convents.

Influenced by the French Enlightenment and the American Revolution, Joseph sought to move the Empire out of what he saw as a medieval mentality dominated by blind submission to the Church and into the modern age. Although many applauded Joseph's "progressive attitudes," others protested against his repressive, autocratic ways. His new policies provoked outrage against his despotic interference in religious and community life, but at first, organized resistance was limited to the clergy. However, when, in 1787, the Emperor tried to abolish existing provincial councils and law courts and create new centralized governing and judicial bodies in Brussels, "It was a step too far" (Arblaster 169). The states of Brabant rebelled. News of the storming of the Bastille in Paris enflamed the passions of the insurgents. On 27 October 1789, the rebels dealt the Austrian army an astonishing defeat, launching the Brabant Revolution. On 31 October, the States of Brabant declared their independence, and soon, all the other provinces except Luxembourg had joined them. However, after Joseph II

died on 20 February 1790, his successor Leopold II put down the rebellion and reestablished Austrian rule.

For the Discalced Carmelite nuns in the Low Countries, Joseph's policies were disastrous. Joseph's anticlerical measures stoked rumors in the Low Countries that the contemplative orders would inevitably be suppressed, and the Discalced Carmelites feared they were at the top of the list. In this, they turned out to be right. Some in Joseph's Brussels council favored a gradual extinction—allowing the current residents to live out their lives in the cloister and then closing it definitively. However, others favored immediate closure, and their opinion prevailed (Proyart 222).

Forced to abandon their convents and emigrate, the nuns dispersed to France, England, or elsewhere in the Empire. The Toleration Act of 1689 did not grant complete equality to Roman Catholics in England, but religious houses were permitted. The English convent at Antwerp and others founded in Lierre in 1648 and at Hoogstraten in 1678 relocated to England in 1794. The Antwerp community founded by Ana de San Bartolomé went to Lanherne in Cornwall. The Lierre nuns settled in Darlington and the Hoogstraten group in Dorset (Rohrbach 302). The Brussels nuns migrated to Paris, but with tremendous difficulty, as recounted below. The order never ceased to function, explains Rohrbach, but "it was nevertheless brought to the brink of extinction as its once prosperous provinces were brought to tattered remnants of their former selves" (302).

The sisters from Belgian convents who made their way to France received considerable aid from Louise de France (1737-1787), daughter of King Louis XV. Known as Madame Louise, she entered the Carmelites at Saint-Denis in 1770 with the consent of the King and worked tirelessly to assist the nuns from contemplative orders escaping the Habsburg Empire. Two documents in the Georgetown University library attest to the difficulties contemplative nuns faced when forced to abandon their convents and emigrate: *Relation de la suppression des religieuses Carmelites de Bruxelles et de leur translation dans le monast*ère *de Saint-Denis* (1784), a manuscript, and an early printed edition entitled *Histoire de l'émigration des religieuses supprimées dans les Pays-Bas,* bound together and dated 1787. Another early document, *Vie de Madame Louise, Religieuse Carmélite, Fille de Louis XV* (1805, 1851), written by the Abbot Proyart, a friend and frequent correspondent of Louise de France, also provides important information. All of these documents convey the terrible personal tragedy the suppression of the monasteries represented for the nuns who experienced it and celebrate the agency of Louise de France in facilitating the escape of contemplative nuns from Habsburg territories.

Before the nuns set off for Paris, a great deal of correspondence—much of it reproduced in *Vie de Madame Louise*—passed between the prioress of the Brussels monastery, Thérèse de Sainte-Marie, and Madame Louise, identified

by her name in religion, Thérèse de Saint-Augustin, and between each of these women and officials of the government and the Order.

As the Habsburg soldiers began to ransack the convents, the Brussels nuns were beside themselves. Proyart provides a vivid description of their anguish: their hands raised to heaven, they begged day and night for the strength and grace they would need to endure this cruel happening (222).[9] Men carried off all their belongings—dishes, wooden spoons, all the simple accoutrements of everyday life. At first, the Brussels nuns thought that their special position as daughters of the convent founded by the Princess Isabel Clara Eugenia, whose special relationship with the Pope in the previous century was well known, would afford them some protection, but they were soon disabused of that illusion (Proyart 223). In view of these terrible developments, Madame Louise wrote to the prioress urging her to bring her nuns to Paris. In addition, she expressed her desire to receive the body of Ana de Jesús, which the nuns feared would be desecrated by Joseph II's forces.

Yet, Madame Louise was not in a position to guarantee the Brussels nuns' passage into France or entrance into Saint-Denis. Fortunately, an *ange consolateur* [comforting angel] appeared in the person of Monsieur de Villegas d'Esteimbourg, a member of the High Council of Brussels. One of the nuns' greatest concerns was the safekeeping of the relics that had escaped the raid on their possessions. Among their treasures were a finger of Saint Teresa given them by the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia, a fragment of the column to which Jesus was fastened, a large thorn from his crown, part of neck of Saint Élisabeth de Thuringe, and a reliquary of Saint Anne. Villegas promised to ensure these items were transported safely to France, and he kept his word (Proyart 225). Auspiciously, a young lady who was leaving for Paris offered to transport the box of relics and hand it over to Madame de Flavigny, mother superior of the sisters of Fontevrault. They, in turn, transferred the box to Saint-Denis. Madame Louise wrote to the prioress in Brussels assuring her of the safe arrival of the relics and begging her to send the body of Ana de Jesús.

Although the Brussels council still had not decided the fate of the nuns, in the event they had to leave the Low Countries, the sisters did not know whether they would be permitted to emigrate to France, for they still had not received authorization to enter the country. After energetic intervention from Madame Louise, who put the matter to her nephew King Louis XVI, the problem was resolved: Madame Louise writes to Mother Thérèse, "J'ai vu hier le roi… Je lui ai parlé de vous et de vos filles. Il consent bien volontiers à ce que vous veniez vous refugier dans son royaume; et je me hâte de vous le mander, afin qu'il ne vous reste plus d'inquiétude" (298) [I saw the King yesterday… and spoke to him about you and your daughters. He consents gladly to your coming to take refuge in his kingdom, and I hurry to beckon you, so that you'll suffer no more worries" (Proyart 228). The French superiors, she writes to the prioress, will distribute the Brussels nuns among the least poor of the Carmelite houses in France, for

these women can no longer count on any help from the Emperor, and although a few may receive assistance from their families, one can't be sure. All she asks in exchange for facilitating the relocation, she writes, are the bodies of Ana de Jesús and Ana de San Bartolomé.

Yet, the Brussels council still had not reached a decision. The members were debating how to implement the reform, whether to force the orders to alter their Rules or to close the religious houses altogether. Proyart explains that the government's proposals varied from one day to the next (228). Madame Louise wrote to Thérèse de Sainte-Marie: "don't put up with this. As long as you don't consent to it, they can't force you. Just come to France and practice your vows, and don't fear their threats. What violence can they do to you?" After swearing her support, she goes on, "We are acutely interested in everything that is happening to you. You have only to say, 'I don't consent to the changes you want to make, and I'm going to retire to France, where a refuge in our Order is being prepared for us, because we want to live and die Carmelites, just as we promised.'" (Proyart 230). Given the ensuing events in France, Madame Louise's words sound eerily ironic.

The Brussels nuns were not the only ones to face expulsion. News from all over the Empire reached Madame Louise and the Carmelite General in Rome of the plight of nuns in parts of Germany, Poland, Italy and elsewhere. How to relocate so many displaced women? Madame Louise had now decided to receive all the nuns from Brussels at Saint-Denis, but space was an obstacle. The convent at Saint-Denis was not large enough to hold them all. In fact, according to Madame Louise, there wasn't a single spare cell in the house. The King had agreed to finance new quarters, but these were still under construction. However, in a touching letter Madame Louise wrote to Villegas late in 1782, she explained that the problem had been resolved thanks to the magnanimity of the Saint-Denis sisters: "Our nuns are filled with sadness about the plight of our sisters in the Low Countries, and in particular those in Brussels, and it seems they are truly worthy daughters of our holy Mother Teresa… Today, at our hour of recreation, all of our sisters knelt before me, and each one offered her cell and whatever bits of furniture she had. Our good God has been generous to us, they said, and so we can share. They were so motivated, Monsieur, that I was delighted and deeply moved" (Proyart 235).

In spite of the invitation that Madame Louise extended to all the Discalced Carmelite houses in Flanders, the Belgian nuns were slow to respond, and Madame Louise felt obligated to write to the Father General to enlist his help in pressuring the sisters to come to France. The Father General took the matter before the Pope, who praised Madame Louise's zeal and applauded her efforts to transfer the remains of the two Anas to France. More importantly, he notified the provincial of Brabant of his approval of Madame Louise's project. Although the Brussels nuns continued to demur, the constant pressure eventually paid off. Their superior, Abbot Bertin, notified the nuns that the entire Brussels

community would be admitted to Saint-Denis. Madame Louise wrote to Thérèse de Sainte-Marie immediately:

> I am sending you, my reverend mother, the letter that I received from Abbott Bertin, to assure you of how much he and our own superiors are disposed to receive you. It is not only now that Abbot Bertin has expressed to me his paternal feelings for you. He has often assured us that we must certainly receive our poor sisters. Let us have only bread to eat, so that we can share it with them. Our mother Thérèse will assign pairs of our sisters together in one cell. I hope it will be fine… Oh, my reverend mother, I worry about you. What state can your hearts be in? We dream only of offering you some consolation. Leaving Flanders, you leave everything—your country, your parents, friends, superiors… well, everything. (Proyart 241)

Madame Louise goes on to explain that in Paris, they will have Jesuit confessors and to describe the house as "fervent, united, strict, and extremely charitable" (Proyart 242).

> Thérèse de Sainte-Marie responded soon afterward:
> Madame, my pen has no way of expressing the gratitude that our hearts feel because of the extraordinary generosity you have shown us by permitting us to find refuge in your blissful retreat… Up until now, we have no inkling of what will happen. We are growing bored, Madame, in this long waiting period. It is true that the commissaries have been named, as well the office where our affair will be taken up, but what will happen, only God knows. Those who are involved prevent anything from getting done, and we hear a thousand lies, all of which contradict each other. We are hoping, once we reach our happy refuge, to find peace once again, for our health is suffering. May we conserve it so we will be useful to our dear sisters, the Carmelites of Saint-Denis. (Proyart 243)

To "sweeten the bitterness of a situation that was becoming more difficult to bear by the day," Thérèse de Sainte-Marie and Madame Louise determined to send some trustworthy person Brussels to calm the sisters and find out what was going on (Proyart 244). Madame Louise selected Abbot Consolin, once one of the confessors of Saint-Denis and then canon of Sainte-Opportune, in Paris. Upon receiving him in Brussels, the "joy of the Carmelites was inexpressible" (Proyart 244). However, in this tumultuous period, joy was short-lived. While Consolin was visiting another convent, the edict of suppression was finally announced. Immediately, the superiors began to assign the nuns to different convents. Villegas took charge of making travel arrangements. All nuns from the Flemish convents

were invited to relocate in France. However, some refused to accept the asylum they were offered, opting to defy orders and stay in their houses.

The decisive date was 8 April 1783. The edict promulgated in Brussels announced "the suppression of those nuns called contemplatives, and the Carmelites were at the top of the list" (Proyart 246). Mother Thérèse de Sainte-Marie informed Madame Louise right away. "Finally, Madame, the anticipated time of the decision about our fate has arrived. We've been expecting this announcement since Easter Tuesday. We will undoubtedly receive a separate decree that will make us suffer" (Proyart 246).

Proyart tells us that the day before the Belgian nuns were supposed to arrive in Paris, Madame Louise bustled around Saint-Denis making arrangements for the newcomers. What she didn't know was the Emperor had denied Villegas permission to accompany the Carmelites from Brussels to Paris. In view of this refusal, Villegas thought it futile to present the requests of Madame Louise before the Council. However, "the mother prioress of Brussels, in the name of her community, addressed the government with an appeal for the body of Saint Albert and the bodies of the two venerable mothers, Ana de Jesús and Ana de Saint Bartolomé. She requested once more that the nuns be permitted to buy back their sacred vessels, along with the silver that should be returned to them for the viaticum. The Council accorded her the bodies of the two venerable mothers but refused the return of Saint Albert and the silver items" (Proyart 251).

The 10th of May was the "fatal day" when the Carmelites received official word of their suppression. The nuns were given four options: 1.) to return to their families and live a secular life 2.) to join a convent that has not been suppressed, that is, one devoted to teaching or nursing 3.) to live together in a secular house 4.) to leave Belgium. For these devout Carmelites, there was no choice. They had vowed to live and die as Discalced Carmelites. It was time to begin the long trek south to Paris.

However, the Discalced Carmelite nuns who sought refuge in France were not free from persecution for long. When the French Revolution erupted in 1789, the Church was a prime target. The population of France was almost entirely Catholic, and the revolutionaries recognized the Pope as head of the Church, but they negotiated considerable independence for the Gallic church, giving it a clear national identity. Church lands were confiscated, and religious vows taken in France were temporarily suspended. In February of the following year, all religious orders were abolished, and the State seized their property. As under Joseph II of Austria, the only exceptions were those orders engaged in teaching or healthcare.

In July 1790, the National Assembly required diocesan priests to become salaried employees of the State. Only those taking an oath of fidelity to the Constitution were allowed to perform their priestly duties. Furthermore, all clergy could be freed of their vows completely and receive a sum of money

simply by declaring their wish to become laypersons. Rohrbach notes that "in comparison with other Parisian communities, the Carmelites did not fare badly during the early days of the new republic because the friars were sympathizers of the revolution, and they were allowed to remain quietly in their monastery, although the church was closed, and they were not able to function publicly as priests" (294). The aversion of the Discalced Carmelites to the pomp and gaudiness of some churches and the self-indulgence of many priests made them natural allies of a movement devoted to the elimination of superfluous ostentation on the part of the unproductive elite. However, the September massacres of 1792 altered the environment radically, ushering in "a new phase of the revolution, a fanatical attack of unbelievable venom and irrationality against the Church in France" (Rohrbach 294). The Reign of Terror, a period of cruel measures against anyone suspected of opposing the Revolution, had begun. Paris saw mass executions, while in the provinces, local surveillance committees targeted enemies of the working classes (nobles, clerics, merchants).

As the Reign of Terror intensified, the revolutionary government implemented more draconian measures. No religious order was safe from persecution. For example, the friars of the Discalced monastery on the Rue de Vaugirad were expelled, and the house was transformed into a prison. The revolutionaries considered all forms of Catholicism suspicious. They associated the Church with the *ancien* régime, which had espoused values incompatible with the Republic, and vowed to excise religion from society. In October 1793, public worship was outlawed. In November of the same year, churches were closed, and some became warehouses or stables. The Cathedral of Notre Dame was converted into a temple dedicated to the goddess of reason. Priests were forced to abandon their vows, and in some cases, to marry. Those who failed to comply were arrested and threatened with deportation. All public Christian symbols were removed. Church bells were melted for bullets, crosses were confiscated from places of worship, and statues and other works of art were appropriated and sometimes destroyed, in spite of protests from people concerned about the obliteration of France's national treasure. Streets and squares bearing names of saints were renamed. A new ten-day revolutionary calendar was created, and Sunday was no longer recognized as a day of worship.

During this period, the six Carmelite provinces in France succumbed to the anti-Catholic hysteria. Rohrbach writes, "Prior to the revolution there had been seventy-nine monasteries of friars and seventy-five convents of nuns, and all of these properties were confiscated by the government" (295). Some of the surviving Carmelites emigrated to other countries such as Spain or Italy, while some remained in France and practiced their faith according to their Rule in secret. Some were discovered and executed. The most famous case is that of the nuns of Compiègne, Mother Thérèse de Saint Augustine and her fifteen spiritual

daughters, who were led to the guillotine. Their martyrdom was celebrated in the 1956 opera, *Dialogues des Carmelites,* with music and libretto by François Poulenc.

In spite of these horrors, the Order did not disappear. Faith had remained strong among segments of the French population, and when Napoleon rose to power in 1799, he recognized that an accommodation with the Church was desirable. Although he was not a religious person himself, the Church constituted a buffer against the some of the most fanatical elements in French society. Furthermore, the State-sponsored re-establishment of the orders could save the government money because certain religious congregations ran hospitals and schools. More important still, a Church-State alliance could help to solidify his rule. In spite of opposition from revolutionary factions, Napoleon pursued an alliance with the Church.

On 16 July 1801, France and Rome signed an agreement known as the Concordat, which recognized Catholicism as the religion of the majority of French citizens, but not as the official religion of the nation. Furthermore, the Concordat brought the Church under the authority of the State. The government was to pay the salaries of the clergy, who were to swear allegiance to the government. Furthermore, Napoleon was to appoint all bishops. The following year, without consulting Pius VII, the French government added an article requiring that all directives from Rome be approved by the State, in effect, undermining Church authority. Although Napoleon incorporated many of the reforms of the revolutionaries, the violent furor against the Church had abated. Religious practice continued, often in private spaces and with increased participation of the laity.

By the 1830s, the Carmelites had begun their recovery. After Napoleon was defeated and exiled to Elba in 1814, conventual life gradually resumed in France, and by the end of the century, the Order was once again flourishing. Rohrbach notes: "By the year 1880, there were 113 convents, but only 16 of that number were legally established with the necessary permission of the government. And that statistic tells a great deal about the reconstruction of the Order in France and in other parts of Europe: the antireligious laws were still on the books, but the nuns disregarded them and intrepidly founded their convents, and the government made no effort to impede them or enforce the laws" (308). The friars were in a more difficult position, however, as they were more often than the nuns viewed with suspicion and forced to curtail their activities.

A similar development occurred in the Low Countries. Joseph II had reestablished Habsburg authority in 1790, following the Brabant Revolution. In 1792, France invaded Belgium and in 1795, annexed it to the French Republic. Although peasants had revolted against French rule in the Low Countries, Holland remained under French rule and in 1810, was annexed to the empire of the Bonapartes. It was not until 1830, when Belgium obtained its independence from Holland, that the monasteries began to reopen. The friars in Bruges

immediately returned to their monasteries. Little by little, other foundations were made, and the nuns, too, began to return to their convents or to found new ones. The first foundation for Carmelite nuns in the United States was made in Maryland by four nuns from the convent of Hoogstraten, three of whom were Americans who had gone to Europe to join a convent.

Today, Carmelite life flourishes in many parts of Europe and the Americas, and the Antwerp convent, where I conducted much of my research on the Belgian Carmels, still stands on the Rue Rosier, where it was originally built.

Notes

[1] "Convent" and "monastery" can both refer to either a male or female religious house. The terms are interchangeable.
[2] For a detailed description of the foundations in Portugal and France, please see Mujica, *Women Religious.*
[3] A *converso* is a Catholic convert from Judaism. Teresa's grandfather, Juan Sánchez, was a *converso* who procured a Patent of Nobility to show his pure Christian lineage. See Teófanes Egido, *El linaje judeoconverso de Santa Teresa.* Egodo provides ample documentation pertinent to the case.
[4] See *Women Religious* 241.
[5] For a description of the complications that followed the establishment of the friary, see Morgain 200ff and Mujica, *Women Religious* 243-255).
[6] For a detailed description of the attack by Protestant soldiers on the Castle of Antwerp, where Ana de San Bartolomé was hiding with her nuns, see the letter from the Archduchess Isabel Clara Eugenia to her confessor in Mujica, *Women Religious* 284-285.
[7] Between May and October 1648, representatives of the warring nations signed a series of peace treaties in the Westphalian cities of Osnabrück and Münster.
[8] See Venturi 707ff.
[9] Translations from the French are mine.

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