

AN INDIAN REREADING OF “THE PRIMITIVE RULE” OF CARMELITES

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1. HERMENEUTICAL PROLOGUE

A reading of The Primitive Rule from Indian point of view is a new invitation for Indian Carmel to re-evaluate and re-express in a more authentic and relevant manner, the right relationship between faith, history and tradition. The Primitive Rule is no rule and no law, but a symbol in which the faith, the history and the tradition of carmelite ideal are crystallized. After 750 years it remains the embodiment of the Spirit, resisting still the temptation of petrification and fossilization. We, who have tried to live the ideal, “the formula of life” vivified in this text, have yielded to the temptation of its reification and institutionalization. The Rule has survived 750 years as ever primitive yet ever novel, ever ancient, yet ever alive, containing in itself the principle of dynamism that can set people and situations in motion, leading to deterritorialization. The Primitive Rule is not the mummified presence of a dead tradition because it contains not terms which are measurable quantities of expressions belonging to logical level, but words which are containers of experience belonging to rhetorical level. The text is not only communicative but also meta-communicative in function transcending the historical, temporal – spatial definition and taking a transhistorical dimension and becoming prescriptive at all times. Hence any new dialogue with the Primitive Rule gives an opportunity for the dialoguer to experience the dynamic life emerging from it, and the consequent deterritorialization and mutation challenging to authentic transparency and radical simplicity.

Here there are three realities in the process of interaction causing and undergoing interculturalization: the interpreted text – The Primitive Rule, the interpreter – Carmelites, and the context of interpretation – Indian. The text serving as the medium of communication and yet a meta-communicative text, is itself to

be viewed from the angles of the three moments of formation: its origin – source, preservation – text and reception – transmission. Now, through an inter-cultural dialogue between Primitive Rule and Indian context of life, a new moment of preservation and reception of the text is created. In other terms, it is a historical re unfolding of the Rule. For Indian Carmel, it is a relistening to the newly evoked speech of the Rule: hearing a sound, identifying the speaker, understanding the content of the sound and realizing that we are spoken to. The result is the growth of the text or the meaning of the text and the growth through change or transformation of life of the subjects of dialogue. Thus a rereading of the Primitive Rule from Indian perspective will illuminate the Rule itself, the readers and the context of reading. It helps the emergence of the hidden implied meanings of the text and the identification of the new challenges in the actual situation.

This mode of reading is neither katachronic nor anachronic i.e. we don't employ the ancient categories to interpret the present neither do we have recourse to modern categories to explicate the past. Instead with the diachronic approach we let it cut through the surface into the inner core of both the text and the reader and with synchronic approach, we look at the text as a result of a long process of growth into a total, unified whole and the reader and his context as part of the actual wholeness.

Accordingly, there are three important moments in our procedure;

1. The deep consciousness about the actual Indian situation in which the Carmelites are challenged to live this ideal.
2. The organization and meaning of the text Itself, and especially the model of action that it contains.
3. The challenges for a new mode of authentic presence and praxis of Indian Carmel.

II. SOCIO-POLITICO-RELIGIOUS SITUATION OF INDIA TODAY: THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

To get acquainted with actual India and to lay hold of the real undercurrents and the underlying principles as a necessary preunderstanding, we have to reflect on the following themes: The traditional values of Indian world vision, massive poverty, violence, consequences of the new economic policy, seculariza-

tion, religious fanaticism, stigmatisation of Christian community, ritualistic, elitist, individualistic, institutionalized church, politicization and commercialization of Religion, a church in search of identity, insecurity of minorities, regionalism and nationalism.

1) Indian world vision/s

An Indian reading of any reality should take into consideration the traditional values of Indian world vision, those distinctive elements which constitute the Indianness in which the whole humankind and the world are viewed. A disregard for this would lead to insensitive cultural imperialism. We should remember here two facts which are specific to Indian situation. First, in the realistic context of immense cultural complexity we have to speak of Indian world visions. Second, this however should not be seen as identical with Hinduism as often people are prone to do. Hinduism has predominantly shaped it but is not specific to it.

The Indian world view is prevalently characterized by the consciousness of the Sacred or Godcentredness. The attitudes that represent and articulate this vision are: inclusive, cosmocentric, symbolic and practical. Indian thinking is guided by the principle of identity and not contradiction. The truth is defined not by exclusion. Something is, not because something is not something else. The inclusive attitude uses the formula "both... and" and not "either... or". In that horizon there is no possibility to nurture discriminatory, separatist, violent, communalistic, divisional attitudes. Everybody belongs to the area of Sacredness and is influenced by its all-permeating and all-pervading power.

It is a world vision that is fundamentally cosmocentric, which is in fact an inevitable consequence of being inclusive. It means that the complete cosmos is encompassed in the whole. There is no violent, destructive, exploitative domination over the cosmos, but a dialogical, communion-based, harmonious relationship to the nature enhancing the ecologically balanced euphony of melodiousness.

The symbolic world view takes us to the depth or numinous dimension of all things beyond the external, superficial, visible and literal one. This is the result of looking at the world, in

Indian terms, as the body of God. The universe is entirely pervaded by the presence of God. So, one is very sensitive to the evocative power of every reality. It gives one the capacity to listen with openness to the depth meaning, while being aware "of other echoes that inhabit the garden." Hence the meaning can not be, according to this view, defined or framed to one alone but it remains metaphorical, universal and multidimensional beyond the historicist approach.

Finally, Indian world view is pragmatic. Everything is oriented to praxis, karma which is not only *niskama* and *akama*, free from all sorts of desires and ambitions, being earthy to the core, but also *aptakama* and *atmakama*.

These traits of Indian world view give the possibility for going beyond the settled ways and for crossing the economic, cultural, religious, sociological and psychological frontiers and boundaries.

2) Massive Poverty

Poverty is an undeniable factor of Indian social reality. This should become a major concern of an Indian reader or interpreter of a text like the Primitive Rule. If 2% of Indian population belong to the superrich, 20% belong to the upper and middle class, 25% belong to the middle class and poor and the remaining 53% belong to the class of the poorest with hardly one meal a day. From another angle, more than 40% of Indians numbering around 400 million are living around or below poverty line. 90% of the population is earning less than Rs. 6 per head per day and the lowest 20% is earning less than Rs 4 per head per day.

The injustice involved in the situation of poverty is spotlighted by the fact that around 45 million children are condemned to work and 450,000 girls below eighteen are compelled into the business of prostitution. The contractors and the selfish oppressive middlemen and wrong patrons like the employers who are solely motivated by the profit-making hire and fire the workers freely. Hence the paradoxicality of staggering growth of poverty in the midst of plenty.

The poverty can not be seen in its pure nakedness if we measure it only on the basis of the poverty line. The thinking and theory of the economist Amrtya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner, is

relevant and important for a better understanding of the mystery of poverty. His theories of economics are not meant for exploring the possibilities for the multinational, multimillionaire companies to make larger profits but in favour of the lowest class of the society, based on the analysis of poverty and famine from an alternative angle that is normally ignored and discarded. Famine does not mean merely lack of goods, it could mean also the availability of goods and the non-availability of money to acquire them. If so poverty can be properly highlighted only in the context of a deeper understanding of human deprivation. Inequality of human capital as expressed in the quality of human labour-power, health facilities, educational facilities and dehumanization experienced by those who are deprived of effective possibilities for satisfying their basic needs are all manifestations of poverty.

Hence, poverty in India is not the result of fate, neither is it the consequence of backwardness of the country itself. It is the bitter fruit of the unjust, oppressive, exploitative, man-made social structures. So a radical transformation is possible only under the protection of an authentic self-less and responsible patron who is not the representative of a system that legitimises the oppressive structures. This is possible only through the change of heart and change of structures. Thus alone can India be liberated from the process of poverty which has the capacity to reproduce itself, the process of dehumanization beyond economic disadvantage, the process of oppression that only contributes to making the poor more dependent, voiceless and incapable of controlling their lives and fate.

3) Consequences of New Economic Policy

The new economic policy introduced in the country through the globalization of market, dominated by unipolar economic system, by yielding to General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (Gatt) and entering into World Trade Organization with dependence on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank who impose the so called Structural Adjustment Policy without any alternative and almost with economic fundamentalism has initiated the neo-colonial situation in India. In a context of massive poverty, by this new decision, India has inescapably, with no choice than to follow, enslaved herself.

True, it has begun to contribute positively because the capital market has expanded, a new professionally oriented entrepreneurial class is emerging, competition is helping the quality of business and new commodities are constantly produced and made available. However, for a country like India with the agrarian economy based on around 600,000 villages and multitudinous task force consisting of landless, illiterate poor, who are not merely economically disadvantaged but are deprived of the basic assets because of the unequal distribution of income, unequal distribution of rural and industrial assets, inequality of human capital (human labour power) and inequality in employment opportunities and the unfavourable exchange of entitlement for the poor as the number of goods that they can acquire with their available assets is being constantly reduced, this system influences negatively, making corruption and violence rampant in the society. The poor man is reduced to cheap labour that can be dispensed with when enough high quality goods have been produced because the production is not in favour of the population but for export. So the persons are subordinated to the materials and they become expendable. The gap between the rich and the poor increases as the accumulation of assets in the hands of a few will be in constant increase. Above all, because of cutthroat competition and growth of greed which are against the values of sharing and love, violence and secularization have become the important traits of the new leading impulses of consumerism and profit-making. It creates artificial needs for man out of otherwise non-essential things and so convince them through the false language of advertisement, the product of modern media explosion. It gives the impression that the material things can give satisfaction and bring fulfillment to man. So materialistic well-being and affluence is considered the ideal around which everything pivots. A God-less culture is emerging as a result.

An essential offshoot of a secularized culture and of the exploitative social and political structures causing dismal poverty is violence. It originates from the discriminatory, divisional and fanatically separatist and exclusive vision of life. The other, in this vision, is taken for an outsider who does not belong to one's own "family" / "group". Then, there is the tendency to demonize the other using "scape goat" dynamism and to seek the means to get rid of the block from the way and then to justify the violence through institutionalization. So violence is the result of polytheistic life.

To summarize, in the emerging new culture we are compelled to think that "man lives by bread alone" and that "only rational proofs can verify the truth of something" and that "devil also has powers in his hands, be they, muscle power, minister power or money power and they can be obtained only by worshipping him."

4) Religious Fanaticism in the Multireligious Situation

Certain situations and events in India give the alarming impression that the Indian pluriform religiosity which is usually boasted of, is proving to be a major disaster than the usually much lamented over massive poverty. The fanaticism in religion and the consequent religious communalism results from the exaggerated adherence to one's religion, as though it is under threat and the organization of those belonging to it into a closely knit, defensive group maintaining a hostile and aggressive stance against the adherents to other religions. So the religions which ought to be the basis and stimulus for mutual communion becomes a medium of exploitation, division and violence. The fanaticism of religion refuses to delve down into the depth level, to touch the sandbed on which level the islands cease to be islands, as they are all interlinked. This challenges us to make a deeper reflection on the nature and function of religion itself, because fanaticism is based on the superficial, exclusivistic and absolutist attitude to one's religion, based on surface level and worldly knowledge (*Vijnana*). Only when religion is interpreted on the basis of experiential knowledge of God (*Jnana*) the depth-dimension of our existence is touched and authentic knowledge of each other or communion (*Samjnana*) is made possible.

The Hindu religious fanaticism which has taken new shape and dimensions in the recent times especially against christianity works on a three level strategy; stigmatization of christian community in terms of foreignness and conversion; emulation of christian community organizational and welfare activities and of dogmatism and absolutism which can be rightly characterized as semitization of Hinduism; the mobilization of masses against the minorities. Further, religion has been very much politicized and commercialized by various groups for selfishly making profits for themselves.

So the church is challenged to react in a christian manner,

while the temptation to react in an unchristian and passive manner is very great. It is by the authentic manifestation of the worth and value of christianity it can show that the fanatic *hindutwa* is against the very spirit of tolerance, dialogue and mutuality which are the normal ideals of civil life. They should realize that by opposing these values what is at stake are not, the human rights of a minority, but of all Indians and that the very national Ethos is in question. So the real challenge is to bring to the focus of the whole nation, by life witness, the values of universality, tolerance, fraternity and non-violence or reconciliation. The very being of the church should manifest to people that it represents the authentic selfless patron who wills the all-embracing growth of everyone and that the values for which it stands are valid and relevant to all. Hence a fanatic reaction would be unchristian as communalistic, divisional, discriminatory and polarizational attitudes contradict its very nature and message. Hence even the inter-ritual and intraritual problems of Indian Church are the results of Christian fanaticism. Therefore they are unchristian.

5) A Church in Search of Identity

The Indian church is very powerful from the point of view of infrastructure, manpower etc. But in comparison with the resources it is blessed with, the fruits it produces are meagre and scanty. There is a lot of stagnancy and legitimization and beatification of that stagnancy in this traditional church. It is a ritualistic, elitist, individualistic church that has yielded to the process institutionalization and has let the Spirit to be dammed up and has found its own security in the opaqueness of the institutions. So even after the long tradition of faith, the christianity in India is still identified as that which gives the leadership in the organization and management of the Institutions in different fields and not yet as a movement of the Spirit or as a spiritual force. The institutionalization has affected not only our mission through the institutions but also the liturgy, the prayer and worst of all even the relationships. A community is evaluated on the basis of the institutions and their growth and the persons are evaluated in terms of the "doing" they perform in an institution.

The impressive church institutions represent the privileged status of the owner. Can a church that is immersed in ritualism,

triumphal manifestations, celebration of anniversaries, jubilees and centenaries that is involved in raising huge cathedrals and other imposing concrete structures really represent a universalistic, non-communalistic, non-violent, new society committed to the poor? Indian church, we may say, is in search of its identity as an authentic interlocutor in the civil society by containing in herself the qualities of the real patron who takes a direct contact with the clients and lets the clients have a direct contact with him. She exemplifies in herself the dynamic principle and pattern of a progressive movement from violence to non-violence, thus crystallizing the quality of the very real patron – not that of an oppressive, exploitative, corrupt middle person. She helps the people say “no” to the negative effects of the inevitable globalization, empowers the people to assist and defend their rights, promotes the value of solidarity, helps the rulers realize the need for making all their policies in favour of the oppressed and the poor so that the option for the poor is not the ideal for just a few people, for a few communities but by its being integrated into the national agenda, it becomes the concern of the whole nation.

6) *Carmel in India Challenged*

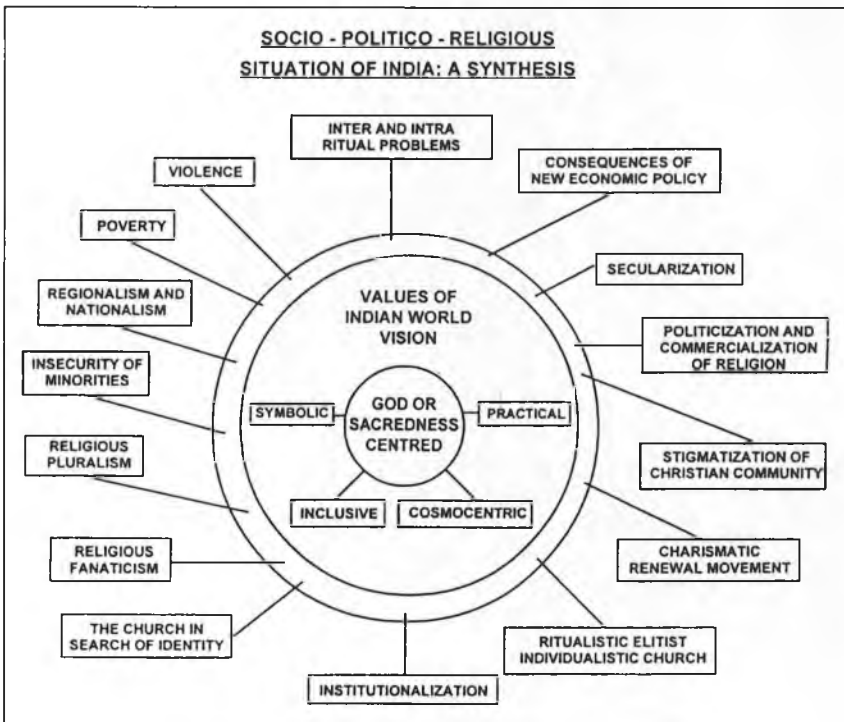
In the context of massive poverty, religious fanaticism, emerging secular society, increasing violence and strife, oppressive social structures, profit-oriented, professional and non vocational political systems that breed poverty, corruption and injustice, that has topsy-turveyed the traditional values of sacred-centredness, inclusiveness, cosmocentrism, symbolism and pragmatism Carmel is challenged to question its own identity. Does Carmel belong to the upper class, being owners of the assets, being elitist, being fanatic and communalistic, being the breeding ground of injustice? Does not the charismatic path revealed to her through the Primitive Rule challenge her to tread the christian way to the sacredness, cosmocentrism, inclusive vision and symbolic and pragmatic attitudes, to be an agent of the formation of the new society?

Then, in a church that is terribly traditional, highly institutionalized, tremendously securityconscious, widely triumphalistic, largely ritualistic, and deeply external, yet radically challenged by charismatic renewal movements, and by the situation

of opposition and persecution, is Carmel supposed to let the institutions fossilize the charism, the external and the ritualistic to cover up the interior, the spiritual, the charismatic, and God-centredness to be replaced with matter-centredness, to let the social responsibility to be superseded by personal security and pleasure and the communitarian to be supplanted with the individualistic?

The challenge is to become symbolic, God-centred, undefined, open, inclusive, cosmo-centric and totally flexible to cross all the boundaries and frontiers, to be an effective instrument of radical subversion and depth-level reversal.

Hence the need to return to the roots! Let us now, let our Primitive Rule, as an everlasting oracle, speak to us anew and listen to that new speech, identifying the sound, the speaker, understanding the content of the sound and admitting that we are spoken to with a precise pragmatic target.



III. THE PRIMITIVE RULE: A REREADING

We shall read the text on two levels: first on the organizational or structural level which will help us recapture the core of the text at a glance, and then on the content level which will enable us to lay hold of the ideas and message.

1) *Organization*

Departing from the traditional understanding of the structure of the Rule in terms of a letter, with different themes presented one after another and concluded with the final greeting, we would like to reread the text from a different angle.

The text has around 2000 words in about 57 sentences. There are around 140 verbs in the text, making average 3 verbs in a sentence which is a manifest accumulation. Looking for the actors, or subjects of the verbs "God" or the equivalent occurs 21 times, "Prior" 12 times and rest of the verbs have mostly the addressees of the Rule as subjects.

Two conclusions that may be drawn from these preliminary observations are: the text is intended to be a source of action and dynamism; this dynamism is to be lived by the members of this particular community addressed by the Rule.

Let us go to the details of the articulation of the text which can be followed on the given Chart.

The text between "Albertus....." and "quam tenere in posterum debeatis" is the prologue. The following expressions are relevant to be taken note of: "in obsequio Jesu Christi", "Vivere debeatis", "Formula vitae", "tenere debeatis". They are key expressions for understanding the nature, form and purpose of the text to follow.

Parallel to this, at the end of the Rule we have the epilogue in the text between "Haec breviter" and "quae virtutum est moderatrix". The key expressions which are parallel with prologue are: "Formulam statuentes", "vivere debeatis" and "Dominus... reddet ei". Then, there are two other significant expressions which articulate "the further horizons" of the text: "supererogaverit", ipse Dominus cum redierit".

The Epilogue while repeating the nature and purpose of the preceding text, creates an inclusion with the prologue. "Albertus" is evidently introductory and "Haec breviter" is by all means

concluding expression. The purpose is to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ" which is remembered at the end through the words "the Lord himself will reward him". The purpose is achieved by "being bound to live" (*vivere debeatis* repeated in prologue and epilogue) according to "Formula vitae / formula statuentes".

Then, through two other expressions it indicates that what has been presented in the text should not be fossilized and declared interpretatively 'closed'. It is left as an open frontierless horizon into which one is invited to venture transcending (*supererogaverit*) the legalistic, narrow-minded approaches, widening itself to perfect globality at the end time (*ipse Dominus cum redierit*).

Life "in obsequio Jesu Christi" should not be defined in terms of legalistic fidelity. It is rather a deep personal relationship and the consequent experience of commitment or being bound to a person, and not to a legal system. Hence the text is characterized as "Formula Vitae". The gist is that text introduces and guides a person on a particular way of life. In a way of life, guiding principle is the interiority – the heart, and the heart uses the language of the "word" and not "term". It is an involvement demanding boundless risk and even prophetic violation of traditions and rituals for a subversive culture. It is a journey without getting stuck – petrified – towards the eschatological moment (*ipse Dominus cum redierit*). So prologue and epilogue are literary boundaries of the text, but theologically, they are transparent and open boundaries.

The sections that follow have the thematic burden "prior". The word is used seven times in the text starting with "De priore habendo..." and ending with "De Prioris potestate". They speak about the different aspects of the person, authority, and importance of the prior.

Parallel to this, just anterior to Epilogue we have a section centred on the theme "Prior" starting with "Exhortatio Prioris ad humilitatem" and ending with "Exhortatio Fratrum ut priorem suum honorent". The word "Prior" occurs 4 times in this section. Besides eleven times in these two sections, this word is used only once more in the rest of the text. So these two parts on "Prior" together make another framework for the "formula of life", but again a flexible and transparent frame, inevitable though.

Contentwise, both sections deal with the person of the Prior as animator and with his authority. The first specially mentions

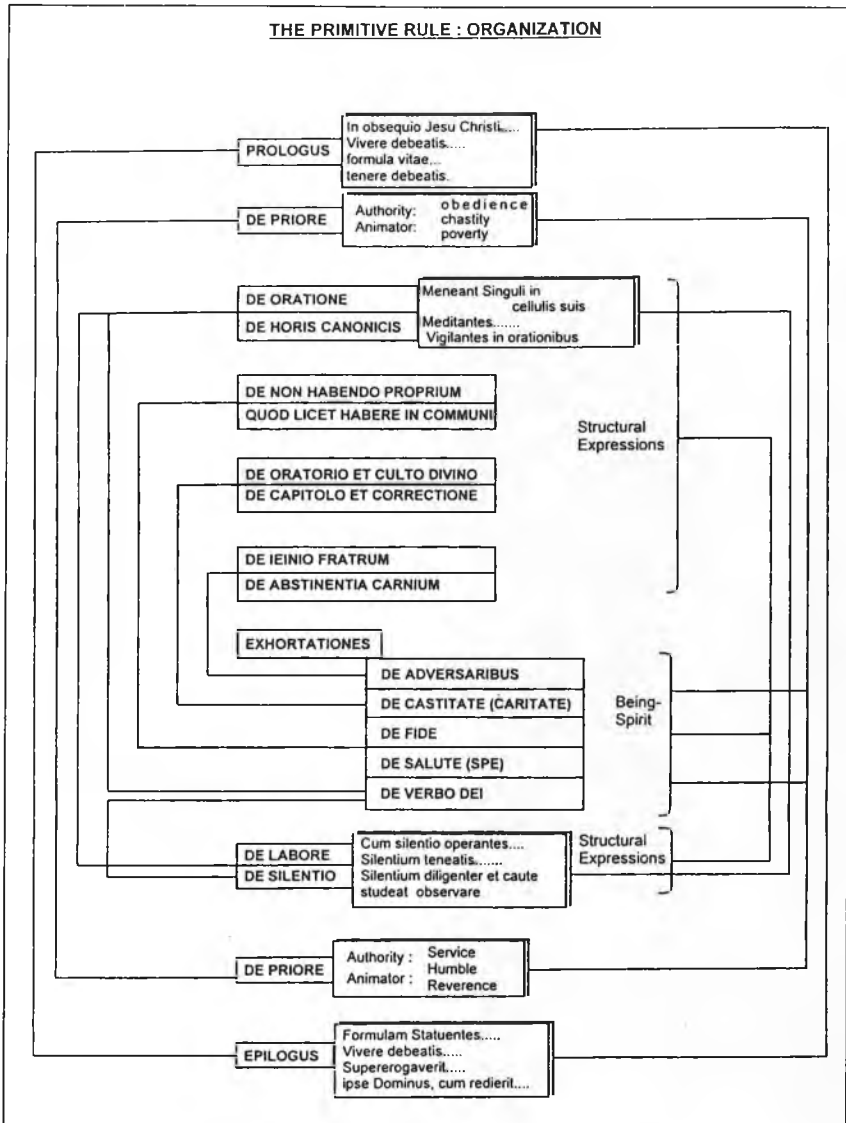
the promise of obedience, chastity and poverty to him by other members and the last section about his authority as service and the relationship of others to him as humble reverence.

The remaining part of the text can be divided into five thematic pairs and the central section called "Exhortationes" – with 4 pairs anterior to it and one posterior. The five thematic pairs together form the structure of the "formula vitae" and make the external expressions of the inner spirit of life, crystallized in the "exhortationes". The first pair is on prayer and canonical hours; the second on possessions, not individually but in common, the third about the oratory and Eucharistic celebration and community meetings, the fourth about fasting and abstinence and the fifth about work and silence. The first and the fifth form the framework and there is an inclusion between both through the repetition of the following motifs: "Meneant Singuli in Cellulis Suis", "meditantes"; "vigilantes in orationibus" (1st pair), "silentium teneatis" "silentium diligenter et caute studeat observare" (5th pair: In this section -16 times the word "Silence" occurs).

"Exhortationes" is the longest individual section and remains a part with no structural alignment. This is the central section of the Rule and it crystallizes the spirit of the form of life and epitomises and depicts the core of the being of the one who follows such a formula of life. It is expedient and impressive to note that this section with 8 sentences has 27 verbs and most of the verbs express the different aspects of the being of one who wants "to live devotedly in Christ". More affecting is the fact that out of total 45 citations from Holy Scripture in the Rule, 17 are found in this section, practically two Bible quotations each in every sentence.

This central section deals with the Adversaries and the means to overcome them, namely chastity i.e. charity, faith, salvation or hope and the Word of God. These themes have their linkage in the thematic pairs. The adversaries are implicit in the section on fasting and abstinence; chastity is linked to Prayer, worship and correction; faith and hope are related to the theme of possessions; and the Word of God with prayer and canonical hours as well as with work and silence. So the thematic pairs express in structures what is synthesised as the very core of charism/life envisaged in the "exhortationes".

Hence, the comprehensive vision of the organization of the Primitive Rule manifests in the very form what an authentic Carmelite religious ought to be and how he ought to live. It has



an outer frame in the prologue and epilogue and an inner frame in the section on "Prior" and a centre (exhortationes) epitomising the spirit and structural expressions of the same in the thematic sections in pairs, preceding and following the central one.

Now let us try to understand more closely the central section (Exhortationes) and its relationship to organizational elements.

2) *Exhortationes: The Being – The Spirit: An Inward Journey*

The "exhortationes" begins with a description of the actual situation of the world in which one is called "to live devotedly in Christ" which is the aim. This is perfectly in agreement with what is said in the prologue "in allegiance to Jesus Christ". Then the means are proposed: "Clothe yourselves in God's armour". The means are chastity i.e. love, faith i.e. obedience and salvation or hope i.e. poverty. Their source is then presented as the Word of God.

The Word of God is the core which serves as the point of departure for the dynamism of the theological virtues. The Word is called the Sword of the Spirit. When one's inner being is identified with Word of God, one has the very Spirit of God, i.e. God's own very being. Three qualities emerge from this experience, namely purity of heart, steadfastness in conscience and unswervingness in the service as presented in the prologue. Your life has become, then totalhearted, singleminded, authentically transparent and radically simple. One enjoys a freedom of Spirit. It is to this destination that one journeys through the formula of life.

Let us go back to the beginning stage of the journey i.e. the actual situation of the world. The situation is depicted through imageries and words: Earth, Trial, Persecution, Devil, Foe, Enemy, Ambush, Roaring Lion and Wicked one. This is not a pessimistic view of the world, but a realistic one. The ideal is to be lived in this world of non-values. The ideal is "to live devotedly in Christ" (In the prologue: "in allegiance to Jesus Christ"). The means proposed is: "clothe yourselves in God's armour". Then, this armour is identified as chastity, faith, salvation and its assurance and Word of God. Chastity is interpreted as "loving the Lord with all your heart, and soul and strength and the neighbour as oneself". Therefore it is essentially single-minded, total-hearted and undivided love that gives the experience of

being committed to or bound to God. And Faith is a means negatively to transcend the “flaming missiles” of the wicked one and positively “to please God”. This can be identified as the path of obedience because faith is a personal commitment to God who reveals himself to us and consequently demands obedience from our part to his will in spite of and in all situations. The word “hope” is not used directly, neither the word “poverty”, but both are implied in the words: “...set the helmet of salvation and so be sure of deliverance”. It is the assurance of deliverance by the Lord (hope) that gives us the capacity to renounce the world and its allurances (poverty).

These three together is a synthesis of the Christian existence in terms of personal commitment to God through the life of three theological virtues and of the deeper expression of the same in religious consecration through three vows. It is the explicitation and theological deepening of what is said in the section on “Prior” in terms of vows to be promised to the Prior.

So too every other element mentioned in the thematic pairs belonging to the outer frame of the text articulates the structural expressions and concretizations of these three principles of the spiritual dynamism: Faith, hope and charity. Accordingly, these sections manifest either the concrete ‘yes’ to God, or ‘no’ to the World and to the ‘self’. These ‘yes’ or ‘no’ are related to Faith, Hope and love as the point of emergence because they are expressions of these virtues and the point of convergence as they all lead to growth in these virtues.

The whole process can be seen as an inward journey of purification towards unconditional freedom and universal radical love. It is in order, at this point, to remember that in this section we have the preliminary or rather primordial form of the spiritual journey lived and taught by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

Finally, there is another means for clothing oneself with God’s armour, and that is the “word of God” which is the Sword of the Spirit. The Rule envisages the life of a Carmelite as a word-centred life, the word serving as the very fountain – head and inner core, the kern of every other things and all the powers flow from this. Spirit and Word are inseparable. Spirit is breath and life and word is the articulated and uttered form of the Spirit or breath i.e. the very inner being of God. Experience of the cutting power of the Word, creates an inner compulsion and urge which finds expression in the actual life, the word that

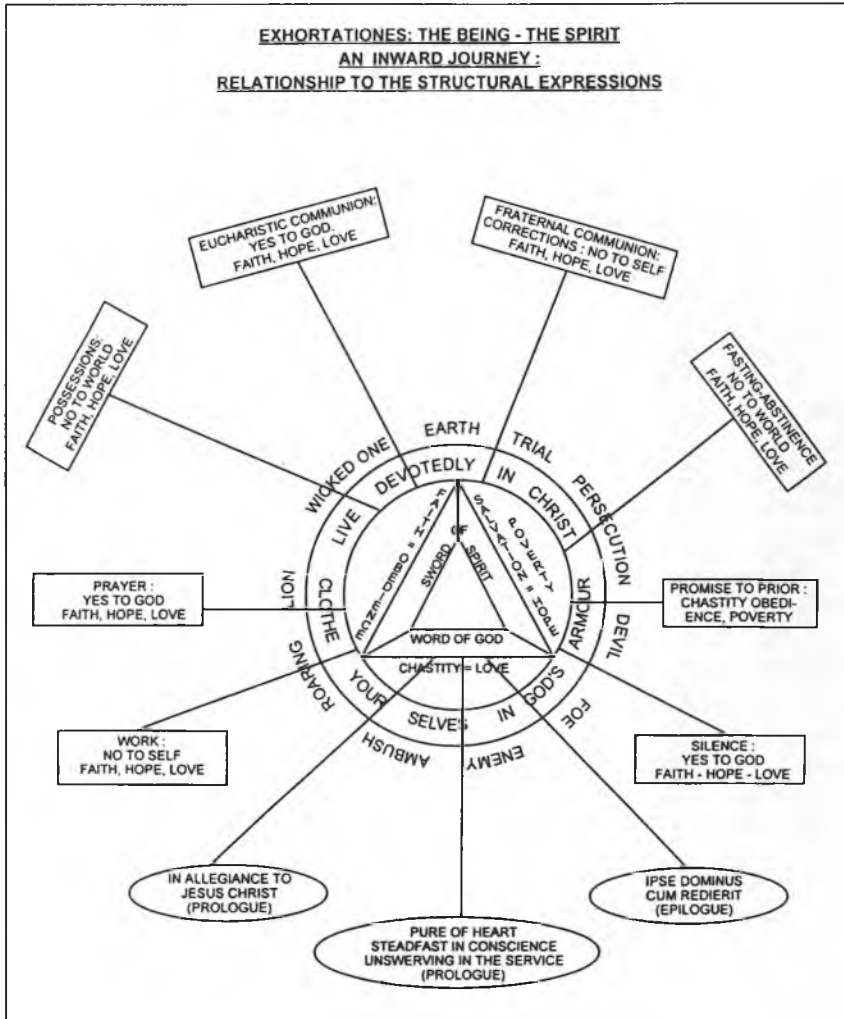
"becomes lamp to the feet and light to the path" (Ps. 110,105), the word, that is like "burning fire, shut up in my bones". (Jer 20,9;23,29), like a "hammer that breaks the rock" (Jer 23,29), "like rain and snow that come down from heaven, but do not return thither but water the earth...." (Is 55,10-11), like "a double edged sword" (Heb 4,12). This is the radically renewed interiority that becomes the law of the new covenant people: "a heart of flesh in the place of heart of stone and the spirit put into it" (Ez 36,22f); "the new law written on the heart" (Jer 31,31f.). This is the core or being of the new man in whom the spirit dwells permanently: "... and he will be in you" (Jn 14,16). This is the nature of the new man of the new covenant who lives by the spirit, walks in the Spirit and is guided by the spirit (Gal 5,16-26), "with a true heart in full assurance of faith, sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" (Heb 10,22), dwelling place of God (Eph 2,22). Such a person is able to "live devotedly in Christ" or "in allegiance to Jesus Christ" "being pure of heart, steadfast in conscience and unswerving in the service" (prologue).

In sum, what is proposed in the Rule is a way of interior journey, being purified of the world and the self and being committed to God and humanity, to reach the perfect freedom and perfect love, with an interiority recreated by faith, hope and love, lived through chastity, obedience and poverty transformed into the word of God, as the double-edged sword of the Spirit and constantly in the process of transformation.

IV. CHALLENGING IMPULSES FOR A SUBVERTIVE PRAXIS FOR INDIAN CARMEL

Being deeply aware of the actual socio-politico-religious situation of India, when we let the Primitive Rule speak to us, it has emerged as a basic pragmatic impulse and action model for authentic, radical and adequately relevant response of Indian Carmel today. In other words, this reading has affected our understanding of the Rule and our "Sitz im Leben" and the self-understanding of Indian Carmel. Let us now identify the various aspects of this model of praxis:

1) The Rule teaches the art of journeying from the worldly culture to the sacred divine culture. It crystallizes the path of an



inward purification process that leads to deep and radical religious experience which empowers one to be a catalyst for the unfolding of the culture based on love and freedom. Indian Carmel existing in a dominantly secular, violent, corrupt, communalistic, greedy, profitmotivated, institutionalized, fossilized and dehumanized socio-cultural situation, in the midst of massive poverty, is challenged to be a catalytic instrument for a total subversion and for the emergence of a new counter culture. The Rule calls us, persons and communities, to be converted to a word-centred life, through the profound experience of faith, hope and love. In Indian language, the Rule challenges the Indian Carmelites to risk on a journey from *Ahamkara* to an authentic *Atmabodha* leading to *stitaprajna* or *jeevanmukti*. It demands resistance to the temptations of the apparently attractive, colourful effects of the secular culture which hampers the free flow of the power of the Spirit which alone can liberate the society. In different words, the Rule teaches Indian Carmelites how to move from the allurements of *Vijnana* (worldly knowledge) to *Jnana* (divine knowledge) which alone can serve as the inexhaustible fountain-head of *Samjnana* (communion) based on a world vision which is God-centred at the core and is expressed through the inclusive, symbolic, cosmo-centric and pragmatic attitudes. Carmel in India has to be a representative and agent of this holistic perception and experience.

2) In a situation of massive poverty and extensive dehumanization, profound corruption and systematic exploitation the authentic subversion is possible only under the guidance and protection of a selfless patron. The Rule has clearly shown that this patron is God and his Spirit. So the Carmel in India has, by vocation and mission to possess an interiority that is Divine-Spirit-centred and to be empowered through the inward journey and to be a live presence of that patron, facilitating the direct contact of the clients with Him.

3) All the problems of Indian society today, be they religious, social, economic or political are ultimately the result of the presence of the "middle persons" who in the name of the patron or making themselves small patrons exploit the others especially the poor and the downtrodden. They block, in every way possible, the direct contact between the client and the real patron, both within the nation and on the International level. There are

persons and systems who do not want the violence to stop, who want the corruption to continue, who promote religious fanaticism, who sponsor and manure the breeding of poverty, who do not want, most unfortunate of all, that the marginalized become conscious of their worth and dignity and of their rights for justice, who do not want the voiceless to be empowered with voice. These attitudes are not based on the values of interiority but on worldly power with which they can buy violence, sexual and other worldly pleasures, position and profit. They do not represent God and his values.

In this context, the vocation and mission of the Indian Carmelites is to live, to promote and to witness to the value of interiority based on God-centredness as envisioned by the Rule. This is the deepest bottom, the sandbed of the waters on which level all the islands are experienced as one and interlinked and so the differences on the surface level are integrated into the experience of a deeper level unity. It is on this level, love, freedom and justice are experienced as identical. Hence, the being level transformation and a transformed life is the target of the Rule and a credibly authentic life-witness is its objective.

4) In a society where violence is being legalized and approved (of more than 50 cases of atrocities against Christian missionaries in this decade in India, including murder, only in a few cases legal action has been taken for finding the culprits or when found to bring them to book) the Rule challenges the Carmelites to be the source of counter-inspiration and action. The pattern of violence is the consequence of polytheistic life and the parallel discriminatory, separatist, divisional perspective and style of action. Hence the Rule teaches us the path to monotheistic experience, with singleminded, inclusive, integral, cosmocentric and holistic perspective of life. The *Samabhavana* is the result of our rootedness in the Spirit of God that interiorly compels us to make God the only point of reference in our thinking, speaking and doing. This is the specific contribution that Carmelites have to make to the conflicting situation of India taking the inspiration from the Primitive Rule.

5) The Indian Carmel is challenged by the Rule to say No to the exaggerated institutionalization. Rather, the Rule gives the guidelines for being charismatic enough to charismaticize the institutions. The Rule is a "Formula of Life" that invites us to "go

beyond" the boundaries and frames, to a constant deterritorialization so that a global culture may emerge not only through the horizontal movement but also through vertical movement. Our vocation is not to an institution but to a movement.

6) For a radical transformation in Indian social situation, the cause of the poor has to be brought to the national agenda so that all the policies taken by any government led by any party may participate in this commitment to the poor. Here the church has to be an interlocutor in the civil society. The Carmelites with the profound inner being that is the fruit of the journey delineated by the Rule will be able effectively to mediate such a function, making the cause of the subalterns the cause of the whole society. The challenge is to literally experience "landlessness" by being in the wilderness of insecurity with an option for radical simplicity and transparent authenticity. It is a challenge to be present in and to, the secularized, powerful, violent centre of the society yet have the delicate, fleshy and flexible heart that is tuned to the waves of the echoes (*Dhvani*) of the voiceless cries of these downtrodden at the margin of the society and to become their voices in the centre in the form of non-violent confrontation. An existence of Indian Carmel without this dimension is an irrelevant existence!

7) The image of the Carmelite community that springs up from the path sketched by the Rule has the following underpinning orientations: mysteric, sacramentalized, relational, ministerial. This allows a proportionately right combination of synchronic and diachronic approaches, with an overture to creative polarities instead of dialectical oppositions. It is a challenge to be a community in which the members can interact and interrelate without any cover of "diplomacy" and self defence of any "games", with sincerity, openness and trust.

V. CONCLUSION

In a synthesis, evoking a new speech in the Indian context from the Primitive Rule, it became a relistening, perception of the sound, identification of the speaker, understanding of the contents of the sound, the recognition of ourselves as spoken to and our effective openness to the demanded new praxis. The

speaker, the spoken to and the sound with its content have been interpreted, illuminated, and transformed in that process. The ultimate pragmatic stimulus is to dare to let be Being (*logos*) overtake, penetrate and envelop the doing, and thus to be God-realized persons and Word-bearers with credibility. Thus through the integration of interpersonal and transpersonal approaches an authentic spirituality may be realized and a mystical perception of universal harmony and prophetic commitment to integral liberation through contemplation, and compassion, solitude and solidarity may be accomplished. The challenge is to facilitate the reanimation of the heart of Indian tradition and the regeneration of its contemplative dimension igniting a revolution of heart and a recovery of sight, radiating in to the whole Indian Society. This is the path of authentic religion ie. *Dharma*, normatively drawn out by the Primitive Rule.

Living it in the present India, a counter culture can be initiated and promoted not by exclusion but by inclusion which results from God-centredness alone which widens the vision to cosmic horizons and lets the "wind" or "breath" of God hover over the chaotic waters of India and become "*Vak*" (uttered breath ie. word=*logos*) and recreate its face manifesting only the "tempiternity" and "theandrophany" in the historical present and in the future present.

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