

very Rule authorized legitimate exceptions from the contemplative life. Was it not right that the Discalced Carmelite should forgo a little the delights of prayer and devote himself to the sanctification of his neighbours? To the second he retorted that all the greatest founders of Orders, and propagators of the Faith, e.g. S. Ignatius Loyola, had begun with a handful of helpers: why not therefore also the Discalced Carmelites? Was it not more deleterious to a community to be too many in numbers for the little occupation offering than the reverse? As to the third he suggested that, if S. Ignatius Loyola, S. Francis Xavier (to take modern examples of men of the world converted to the religious life) had stopped to consider that they were not sufficiently holy or such saints as had been S. Francis and S. Dominic, and so did not deem themselves worthy to go out and evangelize the poor, would they not have grievously injured themselves, their Order and the Church by depriving the world of the great benefits they have in fact bestowed on it? It was not, in fine, skill in dialectics, oratory in preaching, so much as knowledge of the Faith and doctrine, and piety and holy life, which were the armaments to gain the hearts of infidels.

Taken by the Commissary General and laid before the Pope, Clement VIII read this thesis and found it decisive for the future of the Congregation, repeatedly exclaiming to Fr. Peter:¹ "In Persidem! In Persidem!" (To Persia!). This was in the early summer of 1604.

All those of the Congregation of Italy embraced this decision with alacrity, to the extent even that in the Chapter General held in Rome the next year, 1605, all members of the chapter, from the Praepositus General to the most junior, offered their resignations and took a vow to go to the Missions for the conversion of infidels or heretics, whenever called upon by their superiors. Straightaway it was settled to found a seminary for those to be prepared for such work.

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The Popes, Christendom and the Turkish menace

It is important to take note that Pope Clement VIII, in placing a mission in Persia, was doing so in the double sense of the word—if the Carmelites had solely in mind conversion of infidels, reconciliation of schismatics, preaching the Gospel in short, the Sovereign Pontiff was primarily using them as legates to forward his policy, which was to protect Christendom against the Turks by developing friendly relations and ensuring direct and reliable communications and negotiation with the ruler of Persia. In a sense these first Carmelites were not free agents, but doing another's bidding: and the importance for the reader lies in grasping this, and the dual role which lasted for many years and coloured their work and results accordingly: this dual role predominated in the first twenty-five years of their stay, but many times in the course of their story came to the front, and thereby altered their status in the country. To spend days in public attendance at the Court, to be with the Shah at his camps and follow his military expeditions, to drink and eat with him, ride on horseback, mix with the seculars from other European countries, above all with the Persian nobles, may have been unsatisfactory in the eyes of their Chapter General as being remote from the strict life expected of their Religious and, it will be seen, did call forth protest and visitatorial objections; but those worthy and capable fathers on the spot realized better that they must not refrain from doing their best in the guise of envoys to serve the interests of His Holiness, which would be in fact to render the highest possible service to the Faith, if such a course contributed to the overthrow of Turkish power and its terrible menace to Christianity at large.

Thoroughly to understand the need which Pope Clement found for political relations and negotiation with distant Persia in 1604 would require a historical treatise so long as to make a book in itself, for the skein is extremely tangled, as well as running back through several centuries—threads indeed might be traced from the Muhammadan conquest of Spain,

¹ Some writers of the Order have it that these words were written across the paper of the thesis.