



## MARY'S KEEPSAKE – THE SCAPULAR

*This article by Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm. was published in booklet form in the 1950s but was re-edited and re-printed in 1974 in the light of Marialis Cultus which was promulgated in 1974.*

### **Introduction**

Recently there has been a tendency to reduce Mary's place in cult as much as possible and even to eliminate it. In some sanctuaries all images or statues of her have been taken away. Christ is kept at the centre and rightly so but Christ as God-man cannot be dissociated from Mary, His mother. He is born of woman. The Church has continually developed devotion to Mary with faith in Christ. The cult of Mary is associated with that of Christ. To-day the reduction or elimination of Mary's role is even less justifiable. The figure of the woman in the birth of Christ and in 'completing' His work is the figure of the ideal woman associated with the ideal man. The nobility of all women is manifest in the cult of Mary.

\* \* \* \*

When Christ was nailed on the Cross His first word was one of pardon for His enemies. His second was the promise of Paradise to one of the thieves. His third was to His Mother, and to the human race in the person of St. John, establishing between them that maternal and filial relationship through which the graces of God flow on mankind.

In addressing His Mother with the words, “Woman, behold thy son,” it was as though He said, “Dear Mother, My time is come to pass from this world to the Father. I bequeath to you that which is dearest to me – the human race. For them I became a man. For them I am shedding My Blood on this Cross. You have been a perfect Mother to me. I want you to be the same for all men. Be a real mother to them as you have been to me. Bring them forth into the life of grace as you brought me into this mortal life. Provide them with food for their souls as you have provided for me by your milk and by the labour of your hands. Guard them in times of danger; save them from the wiles of Satan; accompany them in their journey through life. Be with them at the decisive moment of death as you are here near me. Offer to God the sacrifice which they will make of their life and obtain that by dying in union with me, they may enjoy eternal happiness with us.”

It was over thirty years before, on Christmas night, that Mary’s Child had been born. She had wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and had laid Him in a manger. The first duty which she had performed for Jesus had been to clothe Him. One of the last incidents recounted in connection with Calvary was the casting of lots for the tunic or seamless robe of Jesus. While we have no evidence in the Gospels that Mary made this garment, Christian tradition suggests that she did make it. It is significant that Mary’s relations with her own special Order – the Order of the Brothers of Our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel – should be represented by a garment to which the Church has attached very great graces and favours.

### **The Carmelites on Mount Carmel**

When the Crusaders came to the Holy Land they found hermits living on Mount Carmel. Returning from the Holy Wars in 1216, one of these soldiers climbed Mount Carmel. His name was Ralph Fresborn, a native of Northumberland in England. He had come to exchange his crossed shield for the barred cloak of the hermit. (In 1287 the cloak was changed to white). His life was one of prayer, fasting and almost perpetual silence. But the even tenor of eremitical life was once again disturbed by the return of the Saracen soldiers. Carmel’s recent foundations in Tripoli, Jerusalem and Saint Jean d’Acre were razed to the ground and great numbers of the monks were put to the sword.

“While the hermitage of Carmel was stabilizing itself and growing, forces were at work outside which would eventually lead to its destruction. The third decade of the century, spanned by the 10-year truce negotiated by Frederick II in 1229, was not marked by any major recurrence of hostilities between Saracen and Christian. Nevertheless the hermits must have suffered disturbance, for it is at this period that many of them decided to leave the Holy Land and return to their native countries”.

“Dedicated as they were to keep vigil in prayer on the soil hallowed by the footprints of Christ, the hermits must have had very urgent reasons for leaving. Some in fact elected to remain and face whatever fate was in store for them. But what, at the time, must have seemed a measure of desperation in the long run was to prove a blessing. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that efforts at repression of an ideal led to its wider

dissemination. The mustard tree of Carmel was to scatter its seed over the receptive soil of Western Europe.” (*The Carmelites* by Joachim Smet, O.Carm.).

In time, groups of hermits set out from Carmel for Cyprus, Sicily, France and Flanders. An English ship carrying some of the crusading armies left the port of Ascalon on 3rd May, 1241. On board were twelve Carmelites, two of whom we know by name, Ivo the Breton and Ralph Fresborn. At Christmas of the same year the Carmelites were presented to Henry III, King of England. With his permission to found monasteries in his kingdom they divided themselves into groups. Monasteries were founded at Hulne, at Aylesford, at Bradmer in Norfolk and at Newenden in Kent.

In accordance with the Rule, each of the monasteries was situated in a remote place and was laid out in quadrangular shape. The monastery of Aylesford still recalls these features. The cells were part of the same building with their oratory in the centre of the quadrangle where the hermits assisted at daily Mass. The Prior’s cell was next to the entrance so that he could regulate the communications between the monastery and the neighbourhood. A great wall or moat surrounded the monastic enclosure.

The daily life of the hermits centred round the Mass which was offered at a very early hour. Much of the day and night was spent in prayer, which was the only purpose of their way of life. The Hours of the Divine Office were said at the appropriate times.

The life of these early Carmelites was austere. They observed perpetual abstinence. Their day was given to prayer and manual labour. Poverty was severe in the early foundations. They were allowed to possess sheep, goats and fowl to supply them with eggs, cheese and milk, but they could not have flocks for the purpose of gain. Their sole means of support was the alms and offerings of the faithful. These, however, due both to the situation of the monasteries and to the fact that the hermits took no part in the active ministry, were inevitably small.

A General Chapter of the Order was held in Aylesford probably in 1247. The experience of the monks in their western surroundings made it clear that certain modifications of the Rule should be made to suit the Order to the new conditions in which it found itself. The result was that the Order, while retaining its contemplative spirit, took its place beside the Dominicans and Franciscans as a mendicant Order. This change called the Carmelites to the active apostolate and this new work brought with it many new difficulties.

Mendicant Orders were viewed with a certain misgiving both by the secular clergy and by the older monastic Orders. In the ancient monastic regime stability, or permanent residence in the abbey, was almost as necessary for perfection as poverty, chastity or obedience.

The old monks who had known life on Mount Carmel with its purely contemplative aspect could not understand, much less agree with, the young enthusiasts who wished to outshine the Dominicans and Franciscans in their active apostolate. One set wished to return to the

life of solitude, the others yearned for greater activity.

These were the difficulties with which the General, St Simon, was faced. Age had brought him wisdom. He realised that Our Lady, the Patroness, Protectress and Queen of Carmel, was the only person that could save her Order. Tradition indicates his feelings in this prayer:

*Flower of Carmel,  
Vine blossom-laden,  
Splendour of heaven,  
Child-bearing maiden,  
None equals thee,  
O Mother benign,  
Who no man didst know,  
On all Carmel's children,  
Thy favours bestow,  
Star of the sea.*

A tradition also tells us that Our Lady appeared to him to assure him of her protection. In her hand she held the Scapular of the Order and said "This shall be a sign for you and for all Carmelites. He who dies in this shall not suffer eternal fire".

Nowadays opinion is divided as to the historicity of this vision but there are reasonable grounds for accepting it. As we shall see the historicity of the vision has little bearing on the question of the scapular devotion.

### **Popes, Saints And The Scapular**

St. John of the Cross rejoiced that he was dying on a Saturday. "The Mother of God and of Carmel hastens to Purgatory on Saturday and delivers those souls who have worn her scapular. Blessed be such a lady who wills that on this Saturday I shall depart from this life". The Venerable Francis Yepes, a brother of St. John and a layman, made his apostolate consist chiefly in the propagation of the wearing of the scapular.

A strikingly beautiful incident in the life of Pope Leo XI shows his devotion to the Brown Scapular. It occurred after his election to the Papacy in 1605, when his Cardinal's robes were being doffed for the papal vestments, One of his attendants removed his scapular. He protested: "Leave me Mary, lest Mary leave me". Before Alexander VII went into the conclave (which elected him Pope) in 1655 he was clothed in the scapular because of his special devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

A contemporary of Pope Alexander VII, the famous and saintly preacher, Blessed Claude de la Colombiere, had a very great esteem for the Scapular and did not hesitate to say that it was the most famous of all Marian devotions. For him the Scapular is the abiding proof of Mary's protection. "Here it is the Queen Herself who reveals all the tenderness of her heart

in that celebrated revelation to St. Simon Stock... I wish to know if she protects my interests. She gives me manifest proof. I need but glance at my scapular, tangible proof before my eyes, and recall the promise attached to the devout wearing of it. "Whosoever dies clothed in this shall not suffer eternal fire."

Pope Pius IX, the Pope of the Immaculate Conception, expressed his devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in these words: "This extraordinary gift of the scapular, from the Mother of God to St. Simon Stock, brings its advantages not only to the Carmelite family of Mary but also to the rest of the faithful who, affiliated to that family, wish to follow Mary with a special devotion."

Pope Leo XIII, famed for his doctrine of social reform, had an abiding love for the scapular. "Its nobility of origin, its venerable antiquity, its extraordinary spread on the Church, its spiritual effects, the miracles worked through it, give great prestige to the Carmelite scapular." When he saw that his death was approaching, he called his household to his bedside and said: "Let us make a novena to Our Lady of the scapular and I shall be ready to die." He granted a plenary indulgence, applicable to the souls in Purgatory, each time a Carmelite church is visited on 16th of July, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Each Pope since then has expressed his devotion to the scapular. Saint Pius X extended the protecting power of the scapular to soldiers and sailors in 1912 before the outbreak of World War I. Benedict XV recommended it particularly to clerics preparing for the priesthood. Pius XI once said "I learned to love the Scapular Virgin in the arms of my mother". Pope Pius XII has given us an excellent appreciation of the Scapular devotion in his Letter on the 7th centenary of the Scapular Vision. As this Letter will be given in full later, little need be said here. But it is quite clear from the foregoing pages that Popes and Saints have testified clearly to the value of the scapular as a sign of devotion to Mary and as a claim to her protection.

### **Meaning Of The Scapular**

The Carmelite's Marian life was one of reverence, trust and zeal for Our Lady. He tried to keep her frequently in mind and lived his life under her benign influence. His thoughts and acts were first for God and then for her. He was conscious that he lived and worked depending on her power with God and her love for her children. The Immaculate Virgin, the exemplar of all virtues, was his model. He had consecrated himself to her in his religious profession and was known as a "brother of Our Lady of Mount Carmel". The scapular was for him the reminder and symbol of this life.

The scapular is called the sign of salvation. "There are some who call it the sacrament of the Virgin Mother of God but that is analogical" writes a Carmelite in the seventeenth century. "The scapular given by Mary", he says, "is a sign of spiritual things leading to piety and the exercise of virtue and thus remotely to the salvation of souls and is approved by the Church."

“The scapular is a special sign of service to the Blessed Virgin. It is called the yoke and the burden of Christ to remind the wearer how Mary carried that yoke and burden. The scapular is placed on his heart by Mary as a reminder of her presence. It is a sign of the pact between Mary and the wearer, a sign of love, protection and adoption. It is a sign of the obligation to clothe oneself with the virtues of Our Lady, to imitate them.” So, concludes Fr. Daniel of the Virgin Mary, the scapular kindly and firmly binds the wearer to serve Our Lady. It draws him to salvation and liberates him quickly from Purgatory.

The scapular has been approved by different Popes. So it must have meaning and value in the eyes of the Church. It must manifest some aspect of the Church to the world. How does it do this? The word *sign* is much used at the moment in sacramental theology. We may look on the scapular as a sign of Mary’s life of deep commitment to God and to His saving word in her Son. This is not merely an acknowledgement situated in the mind alone but in the whole person. It is a sign of a way of life, Mary’s way of life, which can be summed up in the very rich idea of her virginity.

The older Carmelites stressed the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady many centuries before the dogma was defined. They saw her virginity in the light of her openness to God, her faith, or to use the Carmelite’s summary of his whole life *vacare Deo*. The wearer of the scapular tries to embody a way of life which seeks to be illumined by the Sign of the Church and tries to relive the response to Christ as she lived it. The Council quotes the well-known line of St. Ambrose “whose life is a rule of life for all”.

Where does it originate? History provides us with two alternatives. As it embodies a genuine aspect of the Church’s life it could call for a special providence directing this development, i.e. a vision or a very intense devotion in the Order. To me the question of the vision is still an open one. But the fact of the vision is not of vital importance to the devotion. The important question in the devotion is “Does it point to a christian reality?” If not it is useless even if you could prove a vision. The scapular is a sign of a way of life which is an acknowledgment of and a participation in Mary’s way of life, a life of deep faith, This way of life together with the scapular which is its solemn pledge has the official sanction of the Church given by a succession of Popes. This association in the Carmelite way of life and Mary’s way of faith and the scapular as its sign and pledge may justifiably be seen as the object of a special providence.

There has been that intense devotion to Our Lady in the Order and in these early centuries of devotion to Our Lady the Carmelite Order witnessed to the various aspects of devotion to Mary which have been high-lighted and set into close inter-relationship by the Council. In the Order from early times we find the realization that Our Lady embodies the spirit of Elias. She is the model and patroness. Carmelites studied every detail of her life. They were convinced that Carmelite life reflected her life. We find virginity and the scapular closely associated – the white cloak and purity of life – the white cloud seen by Elias and the Immaculate Conception linked together.

So the scapular devotion and the spirituality associated with it is an extraordinary pure

manifestation of this devotion to Our Lady. Now that we have the richness of the Council's teaching on Our Lady as Model of the Church the Carmelite Order and those affiliated to it by the scapular must deepen their devotion to her by studying her life and reproducing its guiding principles in their own.

"Associated with Christ, the Virgin is also strongly united to the body of Christ, the Church. She is invested with a particular function towards the Head and the members. From this function derives her cult."

"It is necessary that exercises of piety with which the faithful honour the mother of the Lord should clearly show the place she occupies in the Church – the highest place and the closest to us after Christ."

Mary has relations with the pilgrim Church: watchful care; maternal intercession; praying presence "producing in the children the spiritual characteristics of her First-born."

The foregoing are some of the guide-lines expressed in *Marialis Cultus* and one sees how well the ideas underlying devotion to the scapular tone in with them.

In the Middle Ages the thought is quite clear that the best way to follow Christ is through the imitation of Mary. Arnold Bostius, a Carmelite from Ghent, was one of the great promoters of the imitation of and consecration to Our Lady. In his writings, all the elements of total consecration to Mary are to be found. He wrote his famous book on the *Patronage of Mary* about A.D. 1480. His sentiments should be taken to heart by all wearers of the scapular. "By right you are Queen, but by your loving kindness you are Mother. In you, O Mother, the land of Carmel has its protector. The Carmelites in their white cloaks lift their heads with confidence to you. May the family of Carmel be nurtured in your arms that you may bear the child of your love to God in Heaven."

He saw clearly that Mary was a real Mother to him from the day of his birth.

"All that I am - I confess with all my heart - I owe to Mary. In the past she has so lavished her gifts upon me that it is my duty to venerate her kindness everywhere. I was born in the parish of St. Mary - on a Saturday. I was baptised in the Church of St. Mary. In its school I learned to lead a Christian life. There I learned to read and - favour supreme - even from my early infancy she received me, certainly unworthy, to her bosom and brought me into the land of Carmel, that I might dwell all the days of my life in the house of my Mother. She covered me with her mantle white as snow. She nourished me and strengthened my powers. She crowned me with her glorious title. Beginning at my cradle, she has been a most lovable mother and a very dear patroness to

What exquisite sentiments for wearers of the scapular, members of the Confraternity and especially for members of the Third Order.

Both the Constitutions *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Lumen Gentium* show that there is a cult

which is strictly liturgical and one which unfolds in a terrain of private prayer and pious exercises of the christian peoples. This latter must be fully in harmony with the liturgy and must draw its inspiration from it and must lead to it.

In the ceremony of enrolment Christ is seen as the “one mediator between God and man”: ‘May Christ take you into the number of His faithful and we, though unworthy, pray for you. May God, through His only-begotten Son, the Mediator between God and men, give you time in which to live devoutly, the opportunity to do good, constancy to persevere and to attain to the happy reward of eternal life; and just as fraternal love joins us together today on earth, so may supernatural piety, which is the origin of love, unite us with His faithful in heaven’.

Later Our Lady’s aid is invoked “that by the intercession of our Mother, we may be defended from the wicked enemy and persevere unto death”. While the scapular is being placed over our shoulders the Church prays: “Receive this blessed habit, beseeching the Virgin Mary that you may wear it always without stain through her merits, and that she may defend you from all evils and bring you to everlasting life”.

Thus the scapular becomes for us what the German people so aptly call it a ‘garment of grace’ (*gnadenkleid*). Pius XII expands this thought when he writes “this keepsake of the Virgin herself is a mirror of humility and purity . . . the very simplicity of the garment is a concise lesson in modesty and simplicity”.

The next prayer in the ceremony brings the recipient into close relationship with the Order: “I, by virtue of the authority granted me, receive you in to participate in all the spiritual goods which, with the co-operation of the mercy of Jesus Christ, are obtained by the religious of Mount Carmel”. How clearly the words of Pope Pius XII comment on this “All Carmelites whether they live in the cloisters of the first and second Orders or are members of the Third Regular or Secular, or of the Confraternity, belong to the same family of our Blessed Mother and are attached to it by a special bond of love”. Hence enrolment in the scapular is the call to a life of special union with Mary, a life based on a meditation on her words and actions. Mary’s *Fiat* is for all christians a lesson and example in obedience to the will of the Father, which is the way and the means of one’s sanctification.

### **The Scapular In Ireland**

Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation points out that the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel can be considered ecclesial by reason of its popularity. This is very much in line with Irish traditional devotion to Our Lady. From the eighth century onwards we have the clearest evidence that Mary’s protecting power, especially at the hour of death, is a very important belief among our people. Consequently this element in devotion to her which is symbolized so well in the Brown Scapular struck a very deep note with them. We see a typical instance of this in the entry “When Ruaidhrí the chief (of Fanad) died he was buried in the Carmelite habit and when Máire (his wife) died in 1523 she was also buried in the habit”. Note that this is a half-century before the Counter-Reformation to which the

scapular devotion in Ireland is sometimes attributed.

In the Catholic revival which followed quickly on the Reformation in Ireland the Rosary and the Brown Scapular were the two principal devotions. There is abundant evidence to show a widespread devotion to the Scapular during the Penal Days. Even in Dublin, the seat of the Protestant ascendancy, and within a stone's throw of Dublin Castle, the monthly procession in honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was being held.

The last two centuries have seen a very appreciable increase in devotion to the Brown Scapular. Even in parts far removed from the influence of Carmelite monasteries there are evidences of a very ancient devotion to it. One particularly interesting instance of this comes from the Gaelic-speaking parts of Donegal - more than a hundred miles from any of the Carmelite monasteries in existence to-day. The confessions heard in these districts before the Feast of the Assumption are called the "Confessions of the Scapular". Before the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was fixed on July 16th the Assumption served as the Scapular Feast. The change was introduced by a General Chapter of the Order towards the end of the fourteenth century.

Gaelic and Anglo-fish literature abound in references to the scapular. A translation of a Gaelic poem (probably from the seventeenth century) reads:

*"In the Scapular of Brown ye walk, who hear  
The message I would speak, lest pain*

*And fear and friendless woe be near*

*Thy final hour on deathbed lain.  
In Mary trust, thy heart keep true  
Or false, thy heart shall learn to rue*

*And Wednesday's meat thou shalt not share  
Nor reck the anguish of thy care.*

*Thy pride of self sustain the least  
Her humble child, before the priest.*

*Five feasts of Mary wilt thou keep  
To win her loved one's peaceful sleep.*

*Confess at least thy sin-soiled state  
And thou will see her dear Son's fête."*

In this short poem the atmosphere of the scapular devotion is clear: trust in her protection at the hour of death, humility, confidence and the celebration of her great feasts so that we may be happy with her Son in heaven. "Exercises of piety should throw light on the

relationship of Mary and Christ" (*Marialis Cultus*).

The following couplet is very frequently found in the traditional prayers of the people:

"Whoever wears this mantle in my name and in my honour  
Shall have my seal on his soul in heaven forever."

In Gaelic writers such as Canon Peter O'Leary, Martin O'Kane, John McMenaman and especially in the well-beloved Canon Sheehan, the wearing of the scapular is normally the sign by which a Catholic is distinguished from members of other religions.

The traditions which have grown up round this devotion indicate that the people made it part of their daily lives. They believed that the devil could have no power over anyone wearing the scapular. If the person intended to commit sin, he should first remove his scapular. The fishermen along the west coast of Ireland from Donegal to Galway had a great faith in the scapular as a protection against drowning. In the midlands it is considered as a protection against fire. Many instances are given of lives which were saved or fires stayed by the power of the scapular.

Closely connected with the wearing of the scapular is the practice of burying the dead in the Brown Habit of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This Habit, of which the scapular is a prominent part, is still frequently used in Ireland to-day. Customs and stories have evolved around it. Nowhere better, perhaps, has the belief of the people found succinct expression than in the words of a Tipperary schoolteacher, "*As the Scapular is the garment of the living, the Brown Habit is the garment of the dead.*" Half a century ago people were careful to have the habit in their house for the greater part of their lives.

The custom of borrowing the habit became very widespread. If somebody became suddenly ill and was in danger of death, it often happened that there was no habit in the house. In that event one was borrowed from a neighbour. It was customary to put the habit on the right shoulder of the dying person and then slip it over the head as death came. If the person died the habit was used for the burial and a new one was returned to the neighbour. There are instances of the same habit being borrowed nine times. Needless to say, stories about borrowed habits were told at wakes. One of these stories has the imprint of the local storyteller in its curious blending of humour and faith in the power of the scapular. "The common belief was that the habit was put on a corpse to protect the body from being scorched by the flames of Purgatory and when the coffin was being closed the hood was put on the head to protect it in like manner. The people had it is a common story that one time a lady died and the habit put on her was just a little bit short as it did not cover her toes. She appeared later and told her people that her toes had been scorched by the flames of Purgatory because they were not protected by the habit."

The habit was kept in a special place in the house and "as sure as the voice of the cuckoo was heard in the springtime it was taken down and laid out on the hedge to be aired." The man-of-the-road always carried his habit in his sack so that if death should overtake him in his travels it would not find him unprepared.

From the rich variety of examples in Gaelic folklore which testify Ireland's devotion to the scapular, one may be selected in virtue of its lucid simplicity and exquisite sincerity.

"About a hundred years ago a priest called to see a family who lived at the foot of a mountain in his parish. On arriving at the house he found only a young girl at home. She bade him welcome and asked him to bless a scapular and enrol her as he had enrolled her father and mother a short while before.

'You are too young yet, child,' said the priest, 'you would not understand what the scapular is. But when you grow up I will give it to you.'

'Well,' she said, 'it is true that I am young. But my father is a shepherd and when a sheep dies he brings the skin home with him. As often as not it is the skin of a young sheep that he brings.'"

### 1798

In a book written by Richard Musgrave in 1801 dealing with different rebellions in Ireland devotion to the scapular is treated as a Papish superstition. Nevertheless he is a good witness to the fact that the devotion was very widespread in Sligo and Mayo at the time of the French landing in the West in 1798.

He tells us that bags of scapulars used to be sent to the markets in these two counties and were bought by the shoppers. Dealing specifically with the rising in the West he says

"Another circumstance which contributed to promote the cause of rebellion in these two counties, and to cement its votaries, by a bond still more binding than the oath of the United Irishmen ... was the propagation of the mysteries of the Carmelites among Roman Catholics."....

"This (i.e. the scapular) became the signal by which those of the true faith were to know each other, and the rallying point for those devotees who carried on the crusade against the Hereticks; and a shop was opened after the landing of the French, where all the sons of Em, with their pikes in their hands, were supplied with scapulars at regular prices: These were intended not only to unite them more strongly against the common enemy, but to arm them with fresh courage, and to protect them from danger in their hour of trial".

Though Musgrave laments this superstition and is somewhat sarcastic in his tone of writing he succeeds in giving us a very valuable testimony of the devotion of the soldiers to Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

## **The Confraternity In Ireland**

We turn for a moment to consider the different branches of the Confraternity in Ireland. Each Carmelite Church has a Carmelite confraternity - Dublin, Kildare, Knocktopher, Kinsale and Moate. The last four, we know, boast a long and venerable history: the fact is clear, but the details are unfortunately lacking. We are more fortunate with the history of the Scapular Confraternity in Whitefriars Street, Dublin. The two oldest manuscripts dealing with Carmelite matters in Ireland, which we possess, are very closely connected with this Confraternity. Both date from the closing years of the 18th century.

Scapular Confraternities were founded with a view to extending Our Lady's promise and patronage to the faithful who were affiliated to the Order through enrolment in the Brown Scapular. We are told of the existence of a confraternity at Toulouse, France in 1273, at Bologna, in Italy, in 1280. A century and a half later the Third Order was founded, and henceforward lay people could become real participators in the life of the Order of Our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel.

In the years preceding the Protestant revolt and during the reformation many of the confraternities suffered very severe set-backs. In some cases they were completely suppressed. But in the counteraction of the Catholic Church, and especially under the influence of the French Carmelite Fathers in the 17th century, the Confraternity and Third Order once again received a new lease of life. These men, whose lives were so austere, revived the whole Order, including the Confraternity and the Third Order, throughout Europe even as far as Kiev in Russia. Political and religious unrest troubling Europe in the last two centuries did not spare the Confraternity. In it, as in the Order, the call of suffering was heard – and answered. But suffering is only a stage on the road to victory. So within the present century devotion to the scapular blossomed anew. A generation ago it was almost impossible to estimate the number of people who wore the scapular. It certainly ran into millions. To-day it needs to be revived.

## **The Scapular Confraternity**

The word 'confraternity' denotes a society of lay persons for some religious purpose. Associations of this nature are mentioned in the church of Constantinople and Alexandria from ancient times. In the West we find the earliest mention of them in France during the eighth and ninth centuries. But it is only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that we meet with confraternities, as we now know them, with regulations approved by the Holy See. The first is said to have been founded by Odo, Bishop of Paris, in 1208, and was dedicated to Mary.

On New Year's Day, 1789, a meeting was called in Ash Street and new rules were drawn up for the Dublin Carmelite Confraternity. Some of these are extremely interesting. Intending members were obliged to have a recommendation from a Carmelite or from some other priest or reliable person. The Confraternity Book is proof that this rule was enforced. A high moral standard was demanded of all members and anyone who failed to comply was liable to be excluded from the Confraternity. The government of the Confraternity was

vested in a Rector, Vice-Rector and a council of nine members. All these officials were elected annually. Subscriptions were received and the governing body with the consent of the Fr. Prior, was empowered to make use of the money as it deemed best.

The installation of the officials must have been an impressive ceremony when we remember that Ireland was only shaking off the shackles of the Penal Laws at the time. They were vested with special Scapulars at Our Lady's Altar and they promised to serve God and the Confraternity. An entrance fee of one shilling was paid by all who attended. Each third Sunday the members subscribed sixpence halfpenny. This was used to have Masses offered for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the members; to supply candles, charcoal, incense and sand for the altar and for cleaning the brasses; to supply wax tapers and special candles for the members who walked in the procession. Finally, the surplus, if any, was given to the Chapel.

An examination of the income of the monastery reveals a regular monthly contribution from the Confraternity. This together with the money given to the fathers in the course of their quest, was the only steady income to the Chapel (Church collections, it appears, were rare in Ash Street). It is well to remember that some of the regular expenses from Ash Street were tithes to the Protestant minister and a tax to the Foundling Hospital which tried to make perverts of the children. The Carmelite Fathers were tolerated in Ash Street only until their lease expired. They were then forced to seek a new house. One was eventually found in French Street. This would necessitate an almost completely new membership of the Confraternity. From 1806-1827 they remained there till they were once again able to return to their original site in Whitefriars Street, which had been reacquired by Fr. John Spratt.

The law of fraternal charity was also provided for meticulously in the rules of the Confraternity. Any destitute members were to be alleviated by the others, but due caution and discretion were to be exercised. Members were to visit the sick members and prepare them for death. Each year special Masses were offered for the dead members. All attended, wearing the Scapular. On these occasions a procession, consisting of a Crossbearer, three members wearing surplices, the members of the Council, the Registrar, Vice-Rector and Rector, walked from the Confraternity Room to the High Altar.

The growth of this Confraternity was due to the labours of Carmelite priests who made a house to house visitation in certain parts of the city and county. So great was their success that it spread outside the Archdiocese of Dublin to the counties of Louth, Kildare, Wexford and Wickow. To give a few instances of activity in the Dublin area – Fr. Barry, a member of Ash Street community, was active in Rathcoole, Crumlin, Clondalkin, Bohernabreena, Swords, Skerries, Balbriggan, Balrothery and Lusk, while Fr. Finny worked in Crumlin, Bohernabreena, Rathfarnham, Newcastle, Saggart, Lusk, Rush, Black Ditches, Ashford, Hollywood, Ballimore, Annamoe, Roundwood and Kilbride. It is well to bear in mind that there was no trains, buses nor motorcars on the roads in those times and that the roads themselves were fewer and, compared with present standards, in very poor condition.

At the meeting of the Confraternity held on 13th November, 1859, the Rector was called upon to issue an invitation to the other Confraternities in the city with a view to calling a joint meeting to draw up and present an address of sympathy to His Holiness, Pope Pius IX. The meeting was held and the address duly drawn up and sent. The letter which Fr. Spratt sent with the address may be seen in the Irish College, Rome. This meeting is regarded as having played no small part in the formation of the Irish Brigade to help the Pope regain control of the Papal States.

The Confraternity may look back with lawful pride on its past - its teaching of Christian doctrine after Mass in Sundays; its assistance to the famine-stricken in 1847; its visits to the sick; its attempts to pay off the church debt and its numerous daily acts of charity and thoughtfulness which fall under no exact classification but which are known to God.

“The action of the Church in the world is like a prolongation of the solicitude of Mary. The active love she shows at Nazareth, in the house of Elizabeth, at Cana and on Calvary – all salvific episodes having vast ecclesial importance - finds its extension in the Church’s concern that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth, in the Church’s concern for people in lowly circumstances and for the poor and the weak, and in her constant commitment to peace and social harmony, as well as in her untiring efforts to ensure that all men will share in the salvation which was merited for them by Christ’s death. Thus love for the Church will become love for Mary and vice versa. These words of Pope Paul serve as a beautiful ideal for wearers of the scapular.

When Fr. Peter Elias Magennis lived in Rome as Assistant-General and later as Prior General of the Order (1919-1931) he used all the means in his power to promote devotion to the scapular. Before he died in 1937 he could already see the fruits of his labours.

While I lived in Rome 1951-5 I could see from the Registers there that there was a tremendous growth in the number of people being enrolled in the scapular. When we recall that the final vision of Our Lady at Lourdes was on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and that her last appearance at Fatima was as Our Lady of Mount Carmel we hope that this booklet will help towards a revival to devotion to her through her habit or scapular. On the occasion of the 7th centenary of the Scapular Vision (1951) the Holy Father eloquently expressed to the Order his appreciation of this spiritual force. His Centenary Letter (which we give below) outlines the meaning of the devotion and the part which it should play in our salvation. In a passionate world of shallow beliefs, the words of the Supreme Pontiff tell of a way to simple, sincere faith and purity of heart.

#### **Letter of Pope Paul VI (1951):**

*Christ is the way; Mary reflects the way; her Scapular is our keepsake on the way.*

*There is no one who is not aware how greatly a love for the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, contributes to the enlivening of the Catholic faith and to the raising of the moral standard. These effects are especially secured by means of those devotions which, more than others, are seen to enlighten the mind*

with celestial doctrine and to excite souls to the practise of the Christian life. In the first rank of the most favoured of those devotions, that of the Holy Carmelite Scapular must be placed – a devotion which, adapted to the minds of all by its very simplicity, has become so universally widespread among the faithful and has produced so many and such salutary fruits.

Therefore it has pleased Us greatly to learn of the decision of our Carmelite Brethren both Caked and Disalced; namely, to take all pains to pay homage to the Blessed Virgin Mary in as solemn a manner as possible on the occasion of the Seventh Centenary of the Institution of the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Prompted therefore by Our constant love for the tender Mother of God and mindful also of Our own enrolment from boyhood in the Confraternity of this same Scapular, most willingly do We commend so pious an undertaking and We are certain that upon it will fall an abundance of divine blessings. For not with a light or passing matter are We here concerned, but with the obtaining of eternal life itself which is the substance of that Promise of the Most Blessed Virgin that has been handed down to us. We are concerned, namely, with that which is of supreme importance to all and with the manner of achieving it safely. For the Holy Scapular, which may be called the Habit or Garment of Mary, is a Sign and a Pledge of the protection of the Mother of God. But not for this reason, however, may they who wear the Scapular think that they can gain eternal salvation while remaining slothful and negligent of spirit, for the Apostle warns us: “In fear and trembling shall you work out your salvation.” –Phil. 2:12.

Therefore all Carmelites, whether they live in the cloisters of the First and Second Orders or are members of the Third Order Regular or Secular or of the Confraternities, belong to the same Family of Our Most Blessed Mother and are attached to it by a special bond of love. May they all see in this Keepsake of the Virgin herself a Mirror of humility and purity; may they read in the very simplicity of the Garment a concise lesson in modesty and simplicity; above all, may they behold in this same Garment, which they wear day and night, the eloquently expressive symbol of their prayers for the divine assistance; finally, may it be to them a Sign of their Consecration to the Most Sacred heart of the Immaculate Virgin, a consecration which in recent times We have so strongly recommended.

And certainly this gentle Mother will not delay to open as soon as possible, through her intercession with God, the gates of Heaven for her children who are expiating their faults in Purgatory - a trust based on that Promise known as the Sabbatine Privilege.

Now, therefore, as a pledge of the divine protection and help, and as an assurance of Our own special predilection We most lovingly impart to you, Beloved Sons, and to the whole Carmelite Order, the Apostolic Benediction.

GIVEN IN ROME AT THE SEE OF PETER ON THE  
ELEVENTH DAY OF FEBRUARY, ON THE FEAST OF  
THE APPARITION OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN  
MARY, IN THE YEAR 1950, AND THE ELEVENTH OF  
OUR PONTIFICATE.

PAUL PP VI

=====

In speaking of Marian devotions, and especially (here) of the Scapular, Pope Paul VI says: “Let the faithful hold in high esteem the practices and devotions to the Blessed Virgin approved by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of the centuries. It is Our conviction that the Rosary of Mary and the Scapular of Carmel are among these recommended practices. The Scapular is a practice of piety “which by its very simplicity is suited to everyone, and has spread widely among the faithful to their spiritual profit.”

*Peter O’Dwyer, O.Carm,  
1975.*