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*The Brown Scapular
Of Carmel*

HENRY M. ESTEVE, O. CARM.

Number 32

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Rev. Henry M. Esteve is a Spanish Carmelite Father who holds doctorates in philosophy, theology, and Sacred Scripture. Besides teaching for many years at the International Carmelite College of Saint Albert in Rome, he has written a popular history of the Carmelite Order. In 1953 his *De Valore Spirituali Devotionis S. Scapularis* appeared as the third title of the "Bibliotheca S. Scapularis," a series of scholarly studies inaugurated in 1950, the 700 th anniversary of the gift of the Brown Scapular to St. Simon Stock. Father Esteve is one of the charter members of the Spanish Mariological Society.

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THE BROWN SCAPULAR OF CARMEL

HENRY M. ESTEVE, O. CARM.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SCAPULAR

Seven centuries ago, when the Carmelite Order found itself in imminent danger, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Patroness of the Order, appeared to the General, St. Simon Stock, and gave him the Scapular of Carmel, saying: "This shall be a privilege for you and for all Carmelites, that whoever dies wearing this shall not suffer eternal fire." From this incident the Scapular devotion took its origin, being later developed by the Sabbatine Privilege, and gradually becoming, like the Rosary, a universal form of Marian devotion.

THE FORM OF THIS DEVOTION

What is the form of the Scapular devotion? As its material object the devotion has the principal part of the Carmelite habit, the Scapular, which must be worn until death. In its reduced form for use of the faithful, the small Scapular aptly signifies affiliation with the Order. Yet the Scapular, although worthy of honor as the habit of a Religious Order, in itself --- as an ordinary piece of cloth --- would signify little enough. The true aspect of the devotion, as it has always been understood in Carmelite tradition, is much more profound. On the part of the person who wears the Scapular, the devotion consists in a perfect consecration of himself --- to Mary; on Mary's part, the devotion consists in the two great promises she has made to those who wear the Scapular devoutly: final perseverance and liberation from Purgatory, especially on the first Saturday after death.

Hence we can say that the Scapular is the habit of an eminently Marian Order. Moreover, by force of the promises annexed to it, the Scapular concretely recalls the **prerogatives** of the true devotion to Mary. Therefore it is universally recognized as a symbol and a means of consecration, a sign of alliance by which Mary, uniting us to herself, regards us as sons and assures us of her maternal protection, while we on our part pledge ourselves to serve her constantly with that respect and love characteristic of children --- children of **predilection**.

THE BASIS OF THE DEVOTION

The basis of the Scapular, even in its small form for the use of the faithful, must be sought only in the habit of the Carmelite Order, of which it has come to be the principal and distinctive part. From this it follows that the first effect of the devotion, as well as the foundation of the privileges

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attached to it, consists in an association with the order. Although various degrees can be admitted in such an incorporation, we must suppose that when a person receives the habit he intends in some way to unite himself to the Order so that he may enjoy its spiritual graces and benefits.

This idea of incorporation is in conformity with the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ in his Church. In that Body, the Religious Orders vividly represent the spirit of sanctity: by means of their external profession of the three great evangelical counsels --- poverty, chastity and obedience --- they are, so to speak, the incarnation of the ideal of perfection. Thereby they exert an influence upon all the members of the church and fill up, by the holocaust of their lives, that which --- according to the teaching of St. Paul --- is lacking to the passion of Christ. Therefore the union of charity and grace which exists among all Christians, especially those in the state of grace, as the result of Communion of Saints, is stronger still between the Religious Orders and the faithful.

The conception of this mystical incorporation, as it is found in the Scapular devotion, will be more deeply appreciated when we have theologically explained the true and full sense of the devotion. We can do this better when we consider the Scapular itself in the spirit, in the ideal of the Carmelite religious life, of which life the Scapular is the most apt expression.

THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE SCAPULAR

The Scapular derives its religious value above all from its intimate connection with the life of the Order; hence its spirituality will be no different from the spirituality of the Order, of which it is a sign. Nevertheless, to understand fully the spirituality of the Scapular, we must keep constantly before our eyes its distinctive symbolism.

Now it is certain that the value of the Scapular depends upon the matter; still since this value is of an eminently spiritual order, it does not consist entirely in the matter. To understand it well, therefore we must consider it in its relation to the plan of the supernatural economy of the redemption. For just as the redemption depends on the mystery of the Incarnation, by which the Church incorporated in Christ has become a "sacrament" of salvation, by visibly continuing His work of salvation, so the Scapular in the Church and dependent upon the Church has become a sign of salvation.

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In the last analysis, the religious habit signified nothing except the vow of a Christian by which he consecrates himself to the Lord, divests himself of the old man and puts on the new man, created according to God. This vow which, so to speak, renews Baptism, has come to share in that sacramental character, which it makes known in all its fullness. It signifies the desire to win redemption once again together with the garment of innocence, immortality and glory lost by sin.

In this sense the Scapular not only signifies but also, through ministry of the Church, effects, inasmuch as it establishes a religious state, a certain dignity by which all actions come to possess a new moral value.

THE MARIAN CHARACTER

Besides this general religious value, the Scapular has also its particular Marian character which distinguishes it from all other habits and which constitutes its essential worth. Nor must it be thought that these two values, general and Marian, are mutually exclusive; rather they complete each other. For Marian devotion, in fact, is just as much the complement of Christian religious piety as was the Blessed Virgin herself the complement of Christ's work of salvation by her intimate association with Him.

This Marian character of the Scapular comes from the Marian character of the Order: Carmel is wholly Marian. In reality, the Order of Carmel, which takes its origin from the patriarch and prophet Elias and whose spirit is found in divine contemplation to be reached by purity of heart together with perfect love of God and neighbor, is so constituted among the Church's many Orders as to have its **raison d'être** in the glorification and cult of the Mother of God. For this reason, from the most remote times the order has been officially known as the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel this is both its greatest glory and its greatest hope.

The habit which represents the Order is also, like the Order itself, totally Marian; by itself, therefore, by its very nature, the Scapular has become a symbol and a means of the devotion to Mary. Purposely we say of **the** devotion, and not of any devotion whatsoever. By this phrase we wish to be understood that true and perfect devotion which is due to Mary: that devotion which is so intimately united to the devotion due to God Himself. Hence, just as the life of the Order is entirely consecrated to the service of Mary, so he who by the imposition of the habit asks to be associated with the Order must also intend to consecrate him-

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self wholly to her, and through her to God.

The connection between the properties of the perfect Marian devotion and those of the Scapular devotion is so intimate that the Scapular clearly appears as a typical symbol or ideal of that devotion. We owe Mary, as the worthy Mother of God and as our own spiritual Mother in virtue of her association with the Redeemer, a special devotion which stands between that due to the saints and the adoration due to God alone. Theologically, this Marian cult is called hyperdulia, and in practice it is expressed in consecration, that is, the permanent, total intimate and filial offering of oneself. Now these properties are expressed by nothing else as perfectly as they are expressed by the Scapular in as far as it is Mary's garment.

In the first place, it is clear that a sacred garment intrinsically affecting a person, is much more adapted to designate the intimate character of Marian consecration, by which we, as children, offer ourselves to Mary entirely and forever, than a simple remembrance would be, like a statue, a medal or a distinctive secular livery which affect persons in a rather extrinsic manner. Moreover, the Scapular by reason of its history, which has made it for so long a universal means of intimate Marian devotion, is also a marvelous instrument of the Blessed Virgin's singular protection, and for this reason too it is a distinctive reminder of consecration to her.

From the foregoing, results the importance of the Scapular. Consecration does not consist solely in a formula, but in that intimate sense of permanently pertaining to Mary and totally depending upon her. This intimate sense is perfectly symbolized by the Scapular which, worn continually, is a figure of the sweet and light yoke of Christ, is as a shield in all dangers, especially on the day of death. By recalling constantly to our mind the remembrance of Mary, the Scapular nourishes the sense of our belonging to her; it makes us realize that our close alliance with her keeps us always under her protection.

THE SCAPULAR AND THE VALUE OF MARIAN DEVOTION

The Scapular so much the more encourages Marian consecration in as far as it shows to all most concretely and clearly, by means of Mary's great promises, the real devotion to her. In fact these promises, doctrinally speaking, are only the practical application of that famous principle: no one devoted to Mary shall be eternally lost; or of the other princi-

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le: devotion to Mary is a sign of salvation. Certainly by showing this value in a concrete manner, the Scapular develops the greatest confidence in Mary who takes such tender care of her devoted ones, and who is so powerful that those who rely on her patronage can have a firm and unlimited hope of obtaining eternal salvation. It is true that theological hope does not exclude the fear which arises from the weakness of human nature; nevertheless this fear is more than compensated by consideration of the supernatural motive of the salvation, which, in this case, is the power and mercy and fidelity of the Blessed Virgin.

The Scapular devotion, therefore, supposes Mary's most singular dignity, by which she has been placed above all created things and has them all subordinated to her in the actual order of salvation. When we consider diligently this dignity which is hers as Mother of God, we do not find it strange that such great promises should be attached to the Scapular devotion which she has given us. Rather would the contrary be strange. By means of the Scapular we become so intimately united to Mary that she becomes our only Patroness and Lady, our Mother and Queen, even our Sister, as she is constantly called in Carmelite tradition.

When we are made part of Mary's family, placed under her protection, we should not worry about the various privileges being obtained by her and made known by St. Simon Stock who invoked her as the Flower of Carmel; we should simply seek that we may constantly persevere in her service, clothed until death in her garment.

THE CHRISTIAN VALUE OF THE SCAPULAR

It is worthy of note, moreover, that the Scapular by consecrating us to the Blessed Virgin leads us to the very essence of Christianity, so to the Scapular can be applied in all its fullness the phrase: to Jesus through Mary. Although the Scapular devotion is in itself most simple, yet hidden under this simplicity which, superficially considered, might seem disparaging, is a wonderful depth, in virtue of the fact that to such a simple practice such great spiritual values have been attached --- a fact which, ordinarily, is a criterion of the supernatural.

In the first place, the Scapular, by nourishing our hope of eternal life based upon Mary's promises, gives to our existence a profoundly Christian direction. The essence of Christianity consists in this, that the gates of eternal life have been opened for us by Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

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Death's Conqueror. For this reason hope must be joined to faith and charity, for by hope we are saved; having a foretaste of the happiness of our future heavenly home, we live for God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

The Scapular also stresses the fact that salvation is supernatural and a free gift. By attributing salvation first of all to Mary's patronage, we set in sharp relief the fundamental characteristic of Christianity, in so far as it is more a religion of love and grace than of strict justice. This does not exclude good works or merits; on the contrary, these are brought about by the accomplishment of the duties imposed by religion. There results however, the special inculcation of the necessity of grace which heals and elevates nature wounded by original sin --- a necessity which extends from the first moment of our elevation until the crowning gift of final perseverance. Consequently, the Scapular devotion, while it shows us the goodness of God and His Mother and nourishes our hope, also manifests to us our own weakness and frailty, thereby encouraging our humility. Essentially therefore, the Scapular devotion could be called the devotion of hope and humility.

In the foregoing we see the explanation of the great influence of the Scapular in the salvation of souls. Predestination depends upon final perseverance which, in turn, according to God's ordinary law, is granted only as the fruit of persevering prayer, humble and confident; and it is clearly apparent how the Scapular, worn until death and nourishing sentiments of contrition and of confidence in the intercession of Mary, helps us to obtain this gift of final perseverance.

Furthermore, the full sense of the Scapular --- its devotion and its promises --- cannot be understood by one who forgets its sanctifying power. By associating us, through consecration, to the life of the Blessed Virgin, the Scapular continually admonishes us to imitate her in that immaculate purity by which she was eternally predestined to give God to the world and give the world back to God. Indeed, by means of the Scapular we can live with Mary, in Mary and through Mary.

THE CATHOLIC SPIRIT OF THE SCAPULAR

We should not wonder that the Scapular, together with the Rosary, has become a universal form of Marian piety. For just as the Rosary presents the ideal form of prayer to the Blessed Virgin, so the Scapular expresses in an ideal way that consecration which is due to her.

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This universality is attested by history. A few examples will suffice to recall it. In 1593 Joseph Falcone, in his Carmelite Chronicle, wrote: "Today, Spain flourishes; there is not a home where the habit is not worn in order to gain its indulgences . . . does not Spain together with Portugal seem to be one large Carmelite convent? Soldiers wish to be clothed in the Scapular, that they may be proof against corporal and spiritual infirmity. In the whole of Spain there are Carmelite convents and numberless Carmelites. Then in Italy and especially in Sicily, in the Kingdom of Naples and in Lombardy are seen numberless confreres filled with zeal and devotion. In Piacenza, in our catalogue of confreres there are more than ten thousand men, women, layfolk and monks of other orders, secular priests and nuns from various congregations. In Germany there are also many confreres, though their number has been lessened by the heretics. Today in France too, which is supreme in Christendom, is also being felt the oppression of heretical enemies."

Closer to our time, Fr. Petitot writes alluding to the final apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes, July 16, 1858: "...before the beginning of the pilgrimages to Lourdes there was no more pleasant title in all Christendom than that of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. At the time of Bernadette most children in all Christian families wore the Scapular." (**Les apparitions de Notre Dame a Bernadette**, Paris, 1934, page 93.)

The Scapular devotion began to be especially propagated at the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century; at the time of the counter-reformation it was recognized as the sign of the true Catholic spirit. As we know, the Protestants and the Jansenists, under the pretext of exalting devotion to Christ, fought against the Church's Marian cult, not without great detriment to souls. Under these conditions the Scapular was kept by almost all faithful Catholics as a means and a concrete manifestation of Marian devotion, in the same manner as, somewhat later, the devotion to the Sacred Heart eloquently expressed devotion to the Savior.

Certainly the Scapular was a perfect expression of the Church's doctrine concerning Mary and the devotion which is her due. Moreover, it particularly demonstrated her universal mediation upon which consecration is based. In fact the Scapular promises, for the hour of death and for purgatory, are nothing but a splendid application of that universal mediation, and our faith in that mediation is greatly increased by our devotion.

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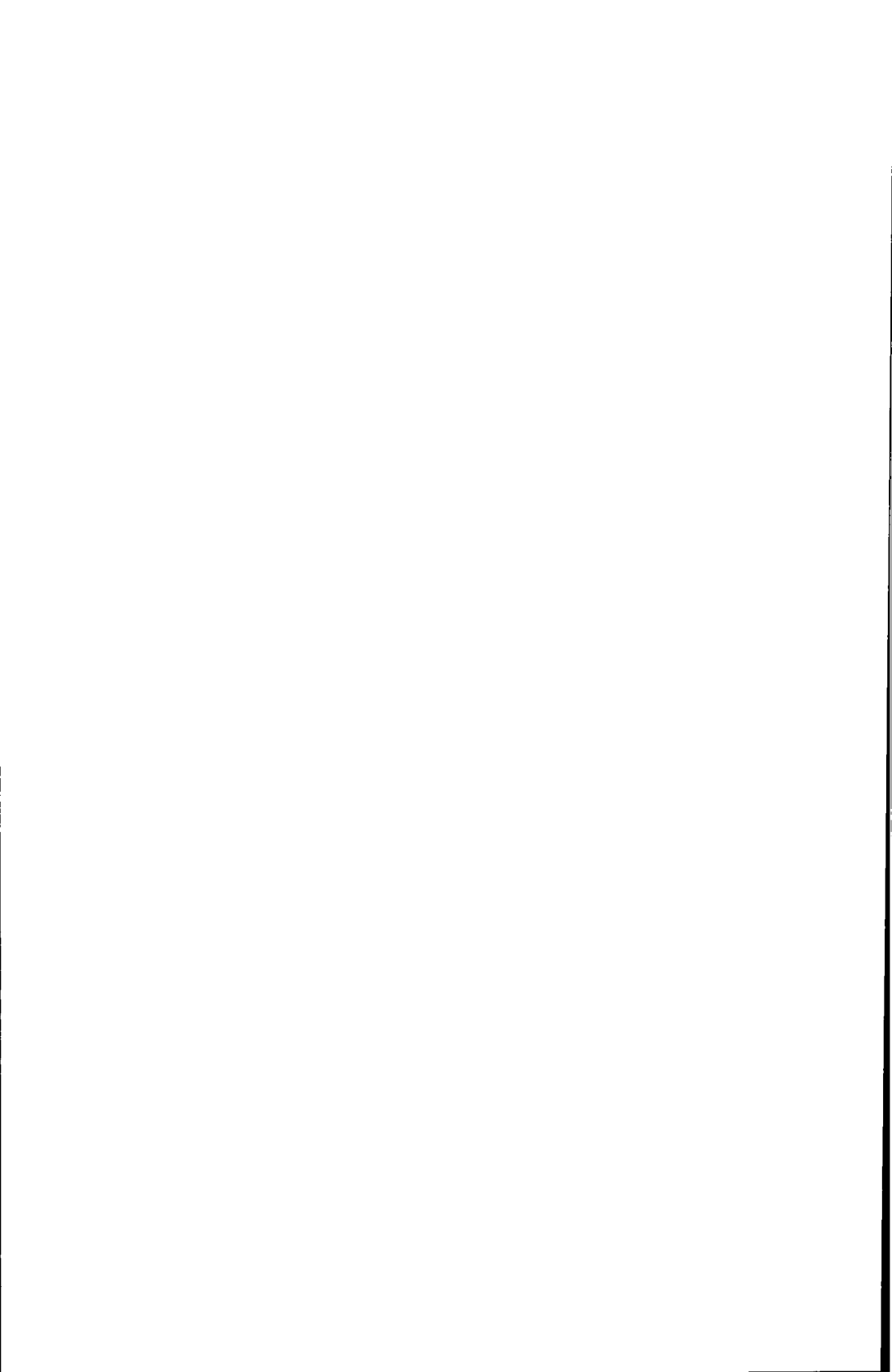
THE SCAPULAR AND THE RESTORATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

From all that we have said it seems that Scapular devotion is still as well adapted to nourish the Christian spirit, as it has in the past. It is clear how important in the life of the Church devotion to Mary is; suffice it to recall the greater and lesser splendor of Catholicism in proportion to greater and lesser devotion to the Mother of God. And in reality, together with the Rosary, there is no other form of Marian devotion which has been found so perfect as that of the Scapular. Therefore it is evident that the Scapular can play an important part in restoring the Christian spirit.

The antiquity of the Scapular has by now consecrated its symbolic value, and its profound simplicity has made it universal. The Scapular devotion is such that it does harm to no other devotion, but, by giving a general Marian orientation to life, it causes the other devotions to be practiced with greater fervor.

The Scapular then seems to answer in a practical way the present day need of expressing with a definite permanent sign the consecration of the human race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that, this consecration being always present to us, the Blessed Virgin may be for us that Star of the Sea which, through the storms of this life, brings us happily to the port of eternal salvation towards which we tend.





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