

Hans Urs von Balthasar, a famous Swiss theologian and writer, once said: "The 'I' can only arise and exist in a loving 'You'". These words well illustrate the main premise of this project, which aims to show the impact of the contacts that the Carthusians began to establish with the world around them from the time of the foundation of the charterhouse in Vauvert near Paris in 1325, on the shaping of their identity and self-awareness.

The Carthusian Order stood out from other Catholic orders by its austerity. Until the 14th century, Carthusian monasteries were established in isolated places, which fostered seclusion. The early period of the order's history was associated with the creation of the *Consuetudines*, which constituted the original rule of the order, created by the fifth prior of the Grande Chartreuse, Guigo I. Being a Carthusian at that time meant living according to the *Consuetudines*. This was not a period of deeper reflection on identity or even the history of the congregation's origins.

The process of shaping the Carthusian identity began to intensify in the 13th century. The Laudemus chronicle from 1250 attempted to answer the question of why St. Bruno, the founder of the order, abandoned the secular world. Interest in the history of the congregation's beginnings increased when the Carthusians began to establish new monasteries in large cities. This process has been compared by some researchers to the "Copernican revolution".

The Carthusians, despite their contacts with the outside world, did not significantly change their customs, which is reflected in the saying "*Carthusia nunquam reformata, quoniam nunquam deformata*". Contact with the outside world initiated a process of deeper self-reflection. This phenomenon is well characterized by von Balthasar's words - the deeper "I" of the Carthusians began to take shape through interactions with the "you" of society.

As the Carthusians encountered criticism, the importance of apologetic and polemical texts aimed at defending the order grew. Opponents accused the Carthusians of, among other things, lacking papal approval and being too austere, which was manifested in abstinence from meat. The sanctity of St. Bruno and other holy monks was also questioned. It was not until the 16th century that the Carthusians regained the monastery founded in Calabria along with the tomb of St. Bruno and obtained papal permission for the public cult of the founder.

Chronicles and writings from that period testify to the developing narrative concerning the sanctity of the founder and the order. The lives from the 15th and 16th centuries contain both a biographical part and almost equally a part devoted to refuting accusations, which shows the importance of polemics in shaping the order's identity.

The analysis of Carthusian writings also indicates the probable development of a new literary genre, tentatively defined as *autoordography*. These works describe the order, its founder, customs, and refute the critics' accusations. It should be added that these writings were used in connection with the formation of novices, although some of them were also made available to external audiences.