

THE CARMELITE TRADITION

SPIRITUALITY IN HISTORY SERIES

The Carmelite Tradition

Steven Payne, O.C.D.

Phyllis Zagano, Series Editor



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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
The Carmelite Tradition	xxi
The Carmelite Rule (ca. 1207)	1
<i>Ignea Sagitta (The Flaming Arrow)</i> (ca. 1270)	10
<i>The Book of the Institution of the First Monks</i> (ca. 1380)	21
Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)	26
John of the Cross (1542–1591)	42
Jerome Gracián (1545–1614)	64
Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi (1566–1607)	72
John of St. Samson (1571–1636)	78
Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614–1691)	86
Michael of St. Augustine (1621–1684) and Maria Petyt (1623–1677)	97
Martyrs of Compiègne (d. 1794)	104
Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897)	115
Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880–1906)	127

Titus Brandsma (1881–1942) 135

Edith Stein (1891–1942) 147

Jessica Powers (1905–1988) 158

Recent Voices 170

Notes 180

Selected Bibliography 185

Acknowledgments

Rule of St. Albert, translated by Bede Edwards, from *The Rule of Saint Albert*, edited by Hugh Clarke and Bede Edwards (Aylesford and Kensington, 1973). Used with permission of the Anglo-Irish Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars.

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Preface

The worldwide explosion of interest in “spirituality” has sent inquirers in several directions. One of the more fruitful is toward the traditional spiritualities that have enriched and nurtured the church for many hundreds of years. Among the oldest Christian spiritualities are those connected to particular foundations, charisms, or individuals. This series of spiritualities in history focuses on five distinct traditions within the history of the church, those now known as Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan, and Ignatian.

Each volume in the series seeks to present the given spiritual tradition through an anthology of writings by or about persons who have lived it, along with brief biographical introductions of those persons. Each volume is edited by an expert or experts in the tradition at hand.

The present volume of Carmelite spirituality has been edited by Steven Payne, O.C.D., past editor of ICS Publications and of *Spiritual Life* magazine, and the author of several works in philosophy of religion, theology, and Carmelite spirituality. He is a member of the Carmelite Forum and of the Carmelite Institute in Washington, DC, of which he is a past president. Fr. Payne, of the Washington Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars, is a member of the Carmelite Friars’ formation team at the Monastery of St. John of the Cross near Nairobi, Kenya, and director of the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation (ISRF) at Tangaza College, a constituent college of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi.

Fr. Payne’s elegant presentation of the essentials of the Carmelite tradition traces the various paths followers of the original hermits of Mount Carmel have lived through the eight hundred years since Albert, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, handed them their simple plan of life. The remarkable contemplatives who move through these pages

demonstrate the results of their belief in God's immanence, even in darkness. Each entry adds another layer to the unfolding mysteries of Carmelite spirituality, inserted in the history of the church and of the world. The lives of the thousands of men and women who sought and seek the living God in silence and solitude form the quiet background for the few whose writings are here so well represented. Their contemporary witness to Christian contemplation gives living witness to the writings of their predecessors.

My own work on this book and for this series has continued with the able assistance of librarians, particularly the reference and interlibrary loan staff of Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, who have tirelessly met so many of my research needs. I am grateful as well for the congenial staff of Liturgical Press, and especially for the professional support and encouragement of Hans Christoffersen, editorial director, and Peter Dwyer, director of Liturgical Press.

Phyllis Zagano

September 8, 2010

Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Introduction

Brief introductions to this or that spiritual tradition never seem entirely satisfactory, especially to those who know the tradition firsthand. When I was unexpectedly transferred to the Discalced Carmelite Community in Nairobi, Kenya, some years ago, for example, among the first tasks I was given was to teach a few introductory classes on *African* spirituality. Needless to say, the African students were amused at my early efforts to present systematically, from the few available texts I had read, what they knew far better from lifelong personal experience!

Yet even to clarify the scope of our topic was not easy. We recognized that the term “spirituality” itself is notoriously difficult to define. But to speak of “*African* spirituality,” some argued, as if it were distinct from African religion, culture, ethics, politics, economics, and so on, is already to impose foreign categories on what Africans have traditionally experienced as part of a unified whole. Moreover, since the continent is home to hundreds of different peoples and cultures, each with its own traditional beliefs and practices, some wondered if we should speak instead of African *spiritualities* in the plural.

In the end, however, we came to admit the usefulness of the singular term. We could thereby refer collectively to certain distinctive ways of relating to the transcendent that, if not exclusive to Africa or exemplified in every African individual or society, are nevertheless found, in some form, virtually everywhere across the continent. In that sense, and with all the necessary qualifications, it seemed legitimate to us to talk of “*African* spirituality.”

The issues are much the same when we turn to Carmelite spirituality, the focus of this volume. Carmelites typically do not distinguish their spirituality from their whole way of life, and no simple description can capture all the rich diversity of its symbols, themes, practices, and

representative figures. The Carmelite tradition has been evolving for at least eight hundred years, and Carmelites have traditionally claimed spiritual (and sometimes even historical) roots going back much further, even to the biblical figures of Mary and Elijah. Over many centuries, the ancient "vine of Carmel" has sprouted many branches. Besides the friars and nuns of the two main groups (the Order of Carmelites and the Order of Discalced Carmelites), there are today the numerous "apostolic" congregations, secular institutes, and ecclesial movements that belong to the broader Carmelite family, as well as countless Lay and Secular Carmelites around the globe who live a Carmelite vocation "in the midst of the world."

Meanwhile, the classic spiritual texts of Carmel are now eagerly read by people of all faiths (and no faith). Surveys of Western spirituality invariably give great prominence to the Carmelite tradition. Three of the Carmelite saints (Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Thérèse of Lisieux) have been named doctors of the church for their spiritual teaching. All of this suggests that "Carmelite spirituality" is not monolithic but has many expressions and can take many forms. Certainly it is no longer the private monopoly of any one group, but belongs to the entire church and world. One might argue, then, that today there are *many* Carmelite spiritualities, because there are so many different perspectives on the Carmelite heritage and so many ways of being Carmelite.

And yet to speak of "Carmelite spirituality" in the singular is to acknowledge that, down through the ages, these varied Carmelite expressions have returned again and again to certain images, themes, and spiritual models in pondering the mystery of divine-human friendship: the mountain, the garden, the spring, the hermit's cell, the journey, night, fire, the heart, allegiance to Jesus Christ, continual pondering of the Law of the Lord, radical availability to God, mystical union, self-transcending love, contemplative prayer, prophetic zeal, Elijah, Mary, Joseph, and so on. At first glance this list of characteristic emphases may seem disappointing, since each one can also be found in other Christian spiritual traditions. But, in fact, this is only to be expected if Carmelite spirituality is but one way of trying to live the Gospel with complete fidelity. Carmelite spirituality seeks nothing more nor less than to "stand before the face of the living God" and prophesy with Elijah, to "hear the word of God and keep it" with Mary, to grow in friendship with God through unceasing prayer with Teresa, to "become by participation what Christ is by nature" as John of the Cross puts it, and thereby to be made, like Thérèse of Lisieux, into instruments of God's transforming merciful love

in the church and society. One of the striking features of the tradition's greatest saints and teachers is that the more thoroughly "Carmelite" they are, the more universal their message. They speak directly to hearts of those who may know little of religious orders but are somehow searching for meaning in life, yearning for a deep encounter with God. Perhaps the clearest example is Thérèse herself, dying at twenty-four in an obscure French Carmel; her simple yet profound reflections mainly on the ordinary struggles of convent life have inspired an audience of millions and helped make her the most popular saint of modern times.

The Carmelite tradition offers an abundance of spiritual "classics." We have chosen representative texts from the main periods of Carmel's history and from the main branches of the Carmelite family. Authors quoted here include men and women, ordained and lay, scholars and nonscholars, famous and little known. Inevitably, many favorite passages had to be omitted for lack of space, but the bibliography provides guidance for those who may want to explore further.

First in every sense is a work known as the Rule of St. Albert (ca. 1207), the earliest surviving document related to the Carmelites. Among the shortest of the classic rules, it is in fact a *formula vitae* composed by the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Albert of Vercelli, at the request of the original group of European hermits assembled in the *wadi-ain-es-Siah* on the western slopes of Mount Carmel. It sets out briefly the fundamental elements of the Carmelite vocation, and is the foundational text to which all later Carmelite reforms and renewal movements have turned for inspiration.

Next comes a selection from *The Flaming Arrow* (ca. 1270), which Thomas Merton once described as "representative of the pure and prophetic spirit of the early Carmelites."¹ Ostensibly written as he was retiring from office by Nicholas of France, a disillusioned prior general of the time, this highly rhetorical work laments that the Carmelites are already abandoning their original spirit by following the mendicant friars into urban life and ministry, and exhorts them to return to the prayerful solitude of the desert.

Medieval Carmelite spirituality, however, finds its fullest expression in the third work anthologized here, *The Book of the Institution of the First Monks*, first published in the late fourteenth century but long assumed to be much older. Written in the form of a lengthy allegorical commentary on the biblical account of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings, this book brings together the Order's Elijan and Marian spirit, as well as the prophetic and contemplative dimensions of its spirituality.

Many scholars suggest that, in addition to the Carmelite Rule, this *Book of the Institution of the First Monks* may have helped inspire the ideal of a renewed Carmel in Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), one of history's most remarkable women. In a period when the church and society in Spain were deeply distrustful of feminine initiative, Teresa not only managed to inaugurate and oversee a large-scale reform movement within the Order but also, in her rare free moments, composed some of the most highly regarded mystical texts of all time, from which we have chosen a few key passages.

Twenty-seven years her junior, John of the Cross (1542–1591) became Teresa's friend and collaborator, helping to extend her reform movement to the Carmelite friars. Today John is ranked among the greatest poets of the Spanish language and among the greatest teachers of mystical spirituality. In recent times, both Christians and non-Christians alike turn especially to his treatment of the "dark night" for guidance in facing the mystery of human suffering and the experience of God's seeming silence.

An unusual selection from St. Teresa's favorite friar, the prolific Jerome Gracián (1545–1614), brings out an important aspect of Teresian spirituality too often overlooked, namely, her aversion to "sad-faced" sanctity and her insistence on balance and a sense of humor for a healthy spiritual life. Gracián's *Constitutions of the Cerro* offers a satiric body of legislation for "melancholy" friars and nuns set on destroying their own religious orders.

The passages in the next section are from Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi (1566–1607), a near contemporary of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. She entered the Carmelite convent of Florence in 1582 and soon began receiving almost daily visions, messages, and ecstasies. Her ecstatic utterances, transcribed by the other sisters in the community, fill five manuscript volumes and are noteworthy for their doctrinal content.

In seventeenth-century France, the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance (i.e., the Carmelite Order from which Teresa's Discalced Carmelites had become canonically separate) underwent their own renewal movement, known as the reform of Touraine. Its great spiritual figure is John of St. Samson (1571–1636), the blind lay brother whose dictated mystical texts are once more available in contemporary critical editions.

The most influential representative of the Teresian reform in the seventeenth century, as it began to spread beyond Spain, was not a prominent theologian or even a canonized saint. Nicolas Herman, better known as Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614–1691), spent over fifty years in

the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of Paris, working mainly as community cook and sandal maker. Because he found the formal meditation methods of his era too complex, he developed his own approach of simply remaining always in God's presence throughout the day, in good times and bad. After his death, his surviving letters, notes, and records of his conversations were gathered under the title *The Practice of the Presence of God*, which has gone through myriad editions in many languages.

In Belgium, the O.CARM. Touraine reform produced a number of important spiritual writers, including the lay "tertiary" Maria Petyt (1623–1677) and her spiritual director, the Carmelite friar and theologian Michael of St. Augustine (1621–1684). As the passages included in this section show, their writings present Carmelite spirituality in an emphatically Marian form, yet firmly grounded in traditional Catholic doctrine rather than private devotions.

In the eighteenth century, the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Compiègne in France opened a new chapter in Carmelite spirituality, written not with pen and ink but in their own blood. The story of Teresa of St. Augustine and her companions, who offered their lives to "restore peace" and were martyred during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, has been immortalized in the Poulenc opera, *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. This section includes a more historically accurate account of their dramatic final moments.

Among the many admirers of the Compiègne martyrs was Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), whom Pope Pius X famously described as "the greatest saint of modern times." Known especially for her "little way," and represented here by passages from *Story of a Soul*, she remains one of the church's most appealing saints, and recently became the newest, and youngest, doctor of the church.

Seven years her junior, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880–1906) has been called Thérèse's "sister in the spirit."² Her famous "Prayer to the Trinity," included below, is quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and she is remembered especially for having so deeply experienced and taught the fundamentally trinitarian character of the Christian spiritual life.

World War II and the rise of Nazi ideology produced a new wave of Carmelite martyrs. Titus Brandsma (1881–1942), a member of the Carmelite Order in Holland, was a leading scholar and educator who served for a time as rector magnificus of the Catholic University of Nijmegen. As ecclesiastical advisor to the Dutch Catholic journalists, he consistently urged them to resist printing Nazi materials and was accordingly arrested and later martyred at Dachau.

Even more prominent among the Carmelite victims of Nazism was Titus's contemporary, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, better known as Edith Stein (1891–1942). Born into a Jewish family but abandoning her faith as an adolescent, Stein became a leading figure in the early phenomenological movement and personal assistant to the philosopher Edmund Husserl. Convinced of the truth of Christianity after a conversion experience in 1921, she sought admission to the Catholic Church and later to the Discalced Carmelite convent of Cologne, Germany. A transfer to the Carmel of Echt, Holland, provided only temporary safety. She was finally arrested by the Nazis and sent to her death at Auschwitz in 1942. More recently Pope John Paul II named her copatroness of Europe.

Closer to our own day, Jessica Powers (1905–1988) lived for nearly five decades as Sr. Miriam of the Holy Spirit, a nun of the Carmel of Pewaukee, Wisconsin. The subject of numerous books and articles, she is regarded as one of the great religious poets of our time. Her work reminds us that Carmelite spirituality, and indeed any profound spirituality, expresses itself most effectively in the language of imagery and symbol. Following a small sampling of her poems, we then close this volume with a few contemporary voices, sharing their reflections on what Carmelite spirituality can contribute to the church and world of the twenty-first century and beyond.

I wish to give special thanks to Liturgical Press and to series editor Phyllis Zagano for her unfailing patience and support. I am also deeply grateful to all the members of the Carmelite family who have advised and assisted me in this project or granted permission to use the texts quoted here, as well as those who, by their words and example over many years, have helped me better understand the practical significance of Carmelite spirituality in today's world. Finally, for each of the authors and works represented here, many others (e.g., John Baconthorpe, John Soreth, Baptist of Mantua, Anne of St. Bartholomew, Mary of Jesus Crucified, Francisco Palau, Teresa of the Andes) could also have been chosen. The Carmelite tradition offers an almost endless variety of spiritual treasures. These brief selections will have served their purpose if they whet the reader's appetite to explore further. But at the same time, it should be remembered that Carmelite spirituality is most fully expressed not on the written page but in the "living book" of day-to-day Carmelite life. Even within the Carmelite family, in different times and places, access to the "classics" of the tradition has often been limited for various reasons. Many exemplary Carmelites have lived and died without having had much opportunity for serious study of our great spiritual mas-

ters. Instead, they learned by faithfully living the life, by imbibing the wisdom and spiritual practices of the Carmelite men and women who handed on to them what they had received.

This volume, then, offers no formal definition of Carmelite spirituality but simply presents some of the major representative voices from the Carmelite tradition. Further resources are listed in the bibliography. But the most reliable guides to this heritage must be sought elsewhere, outside of books. What is Carmelite spirituality? Ask any Carmelite who knows what it is to “stand before the face of the living God.”

The Carmelite Tradition

The story of the Carmelite tradition can be told in many ways. Some authors begin with the prophet Elijah, or with Mary under the title of “Our Lady of Mount Carmel.” Others take Teresa of Avila as their point of reference. Still others work backward from the present to retrieve whatever in the Carmelite heritage seems useful for today.

Here we begin with the *place* from which this tradition takes its name. Mount Carmel is not, in fact, a single mountain but rather a range of high hills along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, in the northwestern part of what is now the modern state of Israel. From a high promontory above the city of Haifa, these hills stretch to the southeast for more than fifteen miles, and are dotted with woodlands and secluded valleys, bearing abundant and diverse vegetation. The town of Nazareth is visible in the distance to the east. Even today, despite the incursions of urban development, one can easily appreciate why the word “Carmel” is so often used in the Hebrew Scriptures to evoke natural beauty and fruitfulness (cf. Song 7:6; Isa 33:9; 35:1-2; Jer 2:7), a place to commune with God.

From antiquity, Mount Carmel has been regarded as sacred, even among the ancient pagans. Today it is home to several Druze communities and to the Bahá’í World Centre, with its spectacular Shrine of the Báb. But for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Mount Carmel is forever linked with the memory of the prophet Elijah the Tishbite, whose mission was to summon the people away from their religious syncretism (including worship of the Canaanite rain-god), back to single-hearted fidelity to the one true God. Elijah suddenly bursts onto the pages of Scripture with the powerful declaration: “As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kgs 17:1). Mount Carmel is identified as the site

of his dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:19-40), and the subsequent end to the long drought after Elijah's servant returned from the top of Carmel and reported seeing a small white cloud rising over the sea (1 Kgs 18:42-46).

Many extrabiblical traditions portray Elijah (and his successor Elisha) spending long periods on Mount Carmel, in solitude or guiding the otherwise obscure "guild of prophets" occasionally mentioned in the Elijah/Elisha cycle. Several patristic authors imaginatively portray Elijah as a kind of model for the Christian monk and even as the "founder" of monasticism and the eremitical life. During the flowering of Palestinian monasticism in the fourth to seventh centuries, a number of Byzantine monastic settlements and *laurae* (loosely knit hermit communities) were established on Mount Carmel, no doubt attracted by its association with Elijah.

Yet the origins of the Carmelites as we know them today still remain somewhat mysterious. Perhaps this is altogether fitting for a tradition so closely associated with mystical spirituality. In any case, most contemporary historians trace their beginnings to some time after the Third Crusade (1189-1192), when it seems that a group of "Latin" (that is, European) hermits settled in the *wadi-ain-es-Siah* on the western slopes of Mount Carmel, in a strip of coastal territory recaptured from Saladin. It was a time of dramatic social and religious change in Europe, with the decline of the feudal system, the rise of city-states, and the corresponding emergence of an urban middle class whose spiritual needs, like those of the urban poor, were not being met by traditional ecclesiastical and monastic structures. Popular piety of the day was marked by increasing devotion to the humanity of Jesus Christ and a corresponding desire to imitate his way of life as closely as possible, according to the understanding of the period. Pilgrims were eager to reach the Holy Land and to walk, literally, in the footsteps of Christ. Many vowed to remain there, pursuing a life of penance and prayer.

This was also the era of the "vita apostolica" movement. Countless ordinary Christians were unimpressed by a monastic life grown too comfortable (at least according to their perceptions). They sought instead what was understood to be a more "apostolic life," not by undertaking more numerous "apostolates" in the contemporary sense, but rather by imitating the poor itinerant preaching life of Jesus and the apostles. The new mendicant groups, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, who played such a key role in the renewal of the medieval church, grew out of this larger movement.

As far as we now know, the anonymous hermits who gathered together in the *wadi* on Mount Carmel would have shared many of these same aspirations. They had a “prior” rather than a monastic “abbot,” for example, and consciously chose not to embrace any of the traditional monastic rules. Instead, they approached Albert of Vercelli, the papal legate and patriarch of Jerusalem, for a brief set of written norms “in keeping with [their] avowed purpose.” The “formula of life” he provided (known to later generations as the Carmelite Rule or the Rule of St. Albert) outlines a simple fraternal life of “allegiance to Christ” in unceasing prayer and meditation, common ownership of goods, silence, manual labor, practice of the virtues, and mutual charity (Rule, pars. 2–4). It became the foundational document for the entire Carmelite spiritual tradition.

The original site also left its enduring imprint on Carmelite spirituality. The hermits had chosen to establish themselves “near the spring [of Elijah]” on the mountain sacred to his memory (Rule, par. 1). Little wonder, then, that later generations of Carmelites, pondering the group’s obscure beginnings, would come to claim not only a spiritual but even a historical connection with this great prophet whom the Scriptures link with the coming of the Day of the Lord and the appearance of the Messiah (see Mal 3:23-24; Sir 48:10-12; Matt 17:1-13). Elijah gradually came to be seen as the “father” and model of Carmelites.

In addition, following one of the directives in Albert’s “formula of life,” the hermits in the *wadi* built “an oratory in the midst of the cells,” which they dedicated to Mary (cf. Rule, par. 14). To the feudal mind, this choice meant that she was the “lady of the place,” the one under whose patronage and protection the hermits would fight their spiritual battles. Gradually, Christian pilgrims and the church at large came to identify this little community of hermits, according to the name of their chapel, as the “brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel,” and the Carmelites themselves came to identify Mary as their special patron, mother, and even sister, seeing in her life the pattern of their vocation.

Within a few decades, as the political situation in Palestine deteriorated, the Carmelites began migrating westward, making foundations in Cyprus, Sicily, southern France, England, and other parts of Europe. Yet they soon discovered that their eremitical lifestyle on Mount Carmel did not easily translate to the new European context. Moreover, as recent arrivals from the East, they were suspected of being in violation of the Fourth Lateran Council’s ban of 1215 against the founding of any additional religious orders (although their “rule of life” predated the council’s decision). Accordingly, in 1247, at the Carmelites’ request, Pope

Innocent IV promulgated the “Innocentian” version of the Carmelite Rule, which included minor alterations to Albert’s text. These brought out more clearly the communal dimension of their life and allowed the Carmelites to found houses not only in “solitary places” but wherever they were “given a site that is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order” (Rule, par. 5).

Later tradition also held that it was at this critical juncture, in 1251, that St. Simon Stock, prior general of the Carmelites, received from Mary the brown scapular, together with weighty promises of special assistance at the time of death to those who would wear it devoutly. Modern scholars have raised many questions about the historical accuracy of these scapular traditions. (Among other difficulties, the earliest surviving testimonies come more than a century and a half after the vision was said to have occurred, and modern research indicates that the prior general in 1251 was a man named Godfrey, not Simon.) But what is beyond dispute is that the Carmelites soon began to thrive, for which they gave thanks to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Moreover, in the centuries that have followed, the brown scapular has gradually become one of the most familiar expressions of Catholic Marian devotion, and has been repeatedly endorsed by the church as a way of symbolizing allegiance to Mary and her Son by wearing a part of the habit of the Order especially dedicated to her.

A more practical reason for their newfound success was that the Carmelites had begun assimilating themselves to the mendicants, who were attracting numerous vocations at the time. They followed the other mendicants in founding houses in the urban academic centers and sending their students to the universities to train them for scholarly and professional careers. With the Franciscans and Dominicans, the Carmelites and Augustinians came to be recognized as among the four principal mendicant orders of the Middle Ages (joined later by the Servites and others).

Not all were happy with these changes, however. The *Ignea Sagitta*, or *Flaming Arrow*, is a long lament about the decline of the Carmelites from their initial fervor, a critique of their new lifestyle in the cities, and a call to return to the contemplative life of the desert. The text was apparently composed around the year 1270 by the prior general of the Order, Nicholas the Frenchman (also known as Nicholas of Narbonne). This would make it the earliest surviving document of significant length originating from within the Order, and perhaps the earliest expression of a perennial yearning among dedicated Carmelites to recapture something of the original spirit of the first hermits.

In addition, because the Carmelites were unable to point to any saintly founder of recent memory when challenged about their legitimacy, they sought ever stronger ecclesiastical confirmation of their way of life, and became ever more insistent on their links with Elijah the prophet. A text known as the *Rubrica prima*, from the earliest surviving Carmelite *Constitutions*, has this to say:

Since some of the younger brothers in our Order do not know how to satisfy according to the truth those who inquire from whom and in what way our Order had its origin, we wish to respond to them, giving them a written formula for such inquirers. For we say, bearing witness to the truth, that from the time of those devout inhabitants of Mount Carmel, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, holy fathers of both the Old Testament and the New have truly loved the solitude of that same mountain for the sake of contemplation of heavenly things; that they undoubtedly lived a praiseworthy life of holy penitence there next to the spring of Elijah; and that by a holy inheritance this life has been continuously maintained. In the time of Innocent III, Albert, patriarch of the church of Jerusalem, gathered their successors into one college, writing a Rule for them which Pope Honorius, Innocent's successor, and many of his successors, approving this Order, have most devoutly confirmed with the testimony of their bulls. In this profession we, their followers, serve the Lord in various parts of the world until the present day.¹

With the collapse of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291, the Carmelites lost all physical contact with their original home. The hermits were finally driven from their *wadi* (Carmelite tradition has them martyred) and were unable to return until hundreds of years later. Yet even as their external lifestyle became less and less distinguishable from that of other mendicant friars, Mount Carmel itself remained for them a "dangerous memory," and Carmelites continued to see themselves as somehow still "sons of the prophets" and hermits at heart. In the last decades of the fourteenth century, the Carmelite provincial of Catalonia, Philip Ribot, published a collection of documents that included a remarkable text known as *The Book of the Institution of the First Monks*, allegedly written for the Carmelites in AD 412, though now generally thought to have been composed by Ribot himself, perhaps drawing on earlier materials. Insisting on Elijah as founder of the Order, the work takes the form of a detailed allegorical reading of the Elijan cycle from 1 and 2 Kings. Though no longer regarded as a reliable historical account, *The Book of the Institution of the First Monks* is appreciated today as perhaps the finest synthesis of medieval Carmelite spirituality, blending the Order's ascetical and mystical doctrine, and explaining the spiritual

significance of various elements in the Carmelite way of life. Most important, Ribot neatly ties together the earlier Elijah and Marian heritage. Thus, in an interpretation that would have an enormous impact on later Carmelite art and literature, Ribot suggests that the small white cloud rising over the sea (1 Kgs 18:44), ending the drought after the battle with the prophets of Baal, was a foreshadowing, for Elijah, of the torrent of grace that would come through the Blessed Virgin and her Son.

Meanwhile, throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Carmelites had their great saints (such as Peter-Thomas, papal legate and Latin patriarch of Constantinople), eminent scholars (such as John Baconthorpe), and national heroes (such as Nuno Alvares Pereira, who led the fight for Portuguese independence). Yet in the wake of the Black Plague, the Western Schism, the Hundred Years' War, and other calamities, they suffered the same general decline in religious observance as the other Orders and the rest of the European church.

Perhaps the best known Carmelite example is the career of Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1469), subject of a famous poem by Robert Browning. According to some sources, he was orphaned in infancy and entrusted to the care of the friars at the Carmine in Florence, where he was professed at the age of fifteen. Florence at this time had become the cultural center of the Italian Renaissance, and the Carmine played its part. Thus, as a young friar, "Lippo" was able to observe the masters Masolino and Masaccio painting their famed frescoes in the Carmine's Brancacci Chapel. Encouraged by the prior to develop his own artistic skills, Fra Filippo went on to become one of the most outstanding painters of the *quattrocento*. But as his fame grew and the number of commissions increased, he spent less and less time in the monastery, setting up his own studio in the city and obtaining his own property. Despite the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, Filippo seems to have been chronically short of money and was even taken to court for forgery. In 1456 he was appointed chaplain to the Augustinian nuns of Prato, where he met an attractive younger boarder, Lucretia Buti. Their relationship produced a son, Filipino Lippi, who went on to become an important painter in his own right. Fra Lippo Lippi is perhaps the greatest visual artist that Carmel has so far produced. His paintings hang in major galleries around the world, and his Madonnas, in particular, remain perennial favorites. But unlike his near contemporary, the saintly Dominican Fra Angelico, Lippi's mode of living his vocation left much to be desired.

In 1432 Pope Eugene IV granted further modifications of the Rule, relaxing somewhat the requirement of abstinence from meat and allow-

ing the friars to move about more freely. Modest though the changes were, rejection of this “mitigation” became one of the rallying points for those who sought to renew the spirit of Carmel, such as members of the Mantuan and Albi reforms. The most important contribution to the renewal efforts in this period, however, came from John Soreth, prior general of the Carmelites for twenty years (1451–1471). Besides encouraging more faithful religious observance, he obtained papal approval in 1452 to formally accept laity into the Order as “tertiaries,” and communities of women as Carmelite nuns. The permission was worded broadly, and the lifestyle of the tertiaryes and nuns took different forms in different parts of Europe, but Soreth clearly hoped that the addition of these new members would have a beneficial influence on the friars as well.

Indeed, it was from the first such community of Carmelite women in the Castilian region of Spain that the Order’s most influential renewal movement would eventually emerge. In 1535 a lively and outgoing twenty-year-old by the name of Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda reluctantly left her father’s home to join the nearby Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. It was a large and busy religious community that reflected the economic and class divisions of Spanish society, with many visitors to entertain and long hours spent in elaborate liturgical prayers. At first Teresa found the life surprisingly congenial, and she began to grow in prayer, but a complete breakdown in health and long convalescence found her settling into a life of religious routine. After a “second conversion” at the age of thirty-nine, however, Teresa rededicated herself to faithfully living the Carmelite Rule, especially what she called its “most important aspect,” namely, “unceasing prayer” (*Way*, 4.2), which she understood in terms of “an intimate sharing between friends” and “taking time frequently to be alone with the one whom we know loves us” (*Life*, 8.5).² As her spiritual life deepened and her extraordinary religious experiences raised concerns among confessors and superiors, Teresa began writing, both to clarify her own path and to teach others the ways of contemplative prayer. From her pen would eventually flow such spiritual classics as *The Book of Her Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, and *The Interior Castle*.

Seeking to create a more conducive environment for “unceasing prayer,” Teresa established the new monastery of San José in Avila in 1562. Everything was arranged according to her ideal of a small austere community of enclosed Carmelite women, living together as friends and supporting one another in a vocation of intense contemplative prayer for the sake of the church. The Teresian reform had begun. Visiting five

years later, the Carmelite prior general approved what he saw, and Teresa eagerly took up his challenge to establish as many similar foundations as she could. At her invitation, Juan de Yepes, a young Carmelite priest, also joined her project, taking the name "John of the Cross" and helping her to spread this reform to the Carmelite friars. John himself was an outstanding poet, and his poems "The Dark Night," "The Spiritual Canticle," and "The Living Flame of Love," together with their prose commentaries, are considered among the greatest works of Western mystical literature. For many today, the message of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, for which both were named doctors of the church, is virtually synonymous with Carmelite spirituality. More successfully than previous authors, they offer a detailed analysis of requirements, pitfalls, and progressive stages in the journey toward transforming mystical union, and their writings provide a dynamic synthesis of major Carmelite themes and symbols. They teach, among other things:

- that the spiritual life is a process (like climbing a mountain, watering a garden in different ways, traveling by night, journeying through an enormous castle, changing from a silkworm to a butterfly, or searching for a beloved who, it turns out, was always near) through predictable stages toward an outcome beyond all expectation;
- that the goal is nothing less than intimate loving union with the Trinity and an ever-deepening friendship with Christ that transforms us into his likeness, by dying and rising with him who heals all our brokenness (one might call it a "christification" that includes both "divinization" and "humanization," yet without ever losing our creaturely identity);
- that faithful friends, a loving community, wise spiritual guides, liturgy and sacraments, good books (especially Scripture), learning, "determined determination," silence, solitude, humility, healthy asceticism, affability, fidelity to regular times of quiet prayer, and so on can be great helps along the way, but must never become idols;
- that the purpose is not self-satisfaction but service of others. (Indeed, it has sometimes been said that Teresa was the first founder of a contemplative community to fully grasp the essentially apostolic nature of an authentic contemplative vocation, that a life dedicated to contemplative prayer may, in some mysterious way, be the greatest service of all that one can render.)

Though initially the prior general preferred the term “contemplative Carmelites” for Teresa’s followers, they soon became popularly known as “discalced” (because members typically wore sandals or went barefoot as a sign of greater austerity). After the death of Teresa (in 1582) and John of the Cross (in 1591), the movement they had begun separated from the original Carmelite Order (sometimes called the “Ancient Observance” and identified by the religious initials O.CARM.) to become the Order of Discalced Carmelites (sometimes called, a bit misleadingly, the “Primitive Observance,” and identified by the initials O.C.D.). Soon the Discalced Carmelites themselves had divided further into a Spanish and Italian Congregation, with the latter embracing Teresa’s enthusiasm for the missions and carrying the Carmelite presence to many parts of Europe, the Middle East, and beyond.

Teresa’s writings were also enormously popular throughout Europe in the seventeenth century, and especially in France, influencing Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, and many members of the French school of spirituality. During that same time period, a lay brother of the Discalced Carmelite community in Paris, Lawrence of the Resurrection, developed a simple and appealing approach to prayer by “keeping God always present”; a collection of his letters, notes, and conversations, published posthumously under the title *The Practice of the Presence of God*, remains a perennial favorite among many Protestant Christians, who are often unaware of the implicitly Carmelite origins and orientation of Lawrence’s spirituality. Meanwhile, seventeenth-century France also gave birth to a new renewal movement among the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance. Known as the reform of Touraine, it likewise featured outstanding mystical and spiritual authors such as John of St. Samson. This Touraine reform included, among other points, a stronger emphasis on well-celebrated liturgy, and its influence eventually spread throughout the Carmelite Order.

But the papal condemnations of Quietism and semi-Quietism in 1687 and 1699 had a chilling effect on Catholic interest in mysticism, and for the next two centuries mainstream Catholic spirituality tended to focus on more “active” expressions of piety, such as personal devotions and structured methods of meditation. Carmelite spirituality became closely associated with Marian devotions, especially the brown scapular. Teresa’s influence helped spread devotion to St. Joseph, about whom she had written so warmly. From Carmelite communities in Beaune (France) and Prague came widely popular forms of devotion to the Infant Jesus, just as devotion to the Holy Face would later emerge from the

Carmel of Tours. But even among Carmelites the works of Teresa and John were approached with some caution, and their more mystical texts were not ordinarily considered suitable reading for the laity or those in early religious formation. Meanwhile, Carmelite spiritual theologians of this period spent considerable effort trying to squeeze the doctrine of Teresa and John into scholastic categories, and wrote at length on increasingly technical issues such as the nature and possibility of “acquired contemplation.” Among Catholics, in other words, popular interest in Carmelite mysticism had gone into temporary decline.

Along with the whole church, Carmel was deeply shaken by the political revolutions that swept through Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She continued to produce saintly members but they were typically noted more for the example of their holy and heroic lives rather than for any memorable spiritual writings. The best example, perhaps, is that of the sixteen Discalced Carmelite nuns of the community of Compiègne, France, who collectively offered their lives “to restore peace to the church and to the state” and died at the guillotine in 1794 during the Reign of Terror. The inspiring story of their martyrdom has become widely known, albeit in a somewhat fictionalized form, through the novelette *Song at the Scaffold* and the opera *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

Verging on extinction after so much persecution and so many losses, the Carmelites of the Ancient and Primitive Observances, like other religious orders, experienced an astounding resurgence in numbers and vitality as the nineteenth century progressed. Once again, they enthusiastically embraced the work of the missions. And just when it seemed as if Carmelite spirituality had nothing more to offer the modern world beyond the recycling of its rich spiritual heritage, a fresh flowering of the “vine of Carmel” occurred in the unlikeliest of places, an obscure Carmelite community in Normandy. There in 1897 Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face died of tuberculosis in the Lisieux Carmel at the age of twenty-four, virtually unknown. Yet her spiritual autobiography, published a year later under the title *Story of a Soul*, quickly captured the hearts of the Catholic faithful everywhere, with its account of “ordinary” holiness through her “little way” of confidence and love, and its promise of a “shower of roses” through her intercession. Once described by Pope Pius X as “the greatest saint of modern times,” Thérèse is certainly among the best known and most popular, cherished even far beyond the bounds of Roman Catholicism for her message of childlike confidence in God’s merciful love. Numerous religious congregations and lay movements have based themselves on her message, and she has been the subject of more

films, books, and articles than almost any other modern Catholic figure. In 1997 she was named doctor of the church, by far the youngest—the third Carmelite and only the third woman—to receive this recognition.

With the general resurgence of interest in mysticism and spirituality at the beginning of the twentieth century, the new chapter in Carmelite spirituality opened by the “Little Flower” was soon followed by others. Influenced by Thérèse and following a similar course, Elizabeth of the Trinity died of Addison’s disease in the Carmel of Dijon (France) in 1906 at the age of twenty-six, leaving behind a trove of letters and retreat notes testifying to her intense focus on the reality of the indwelling Trinity, of which Teresa and John had written so eloquently. Meanwhile, inspired by *both* Thérèse and Elizabeth, nineteen-year-old Teresa of the Andes professed her religious vows on her deathbed in 1920 at the Carmel of “los Andes” in Chile, subsequently becoming the first Chilean to be canonized and Carmel’s youngest canonized saint. Her shrine draws thousands of pilgrims each year, especially among the youth, who are attracted by her theme of God as “the joy of my life.”

Two twentieth-century examples of Carmel’s Elijan spirit of prophetic witness are Titus Brandsma, O.CARM., and Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D., better known as Edith Stein. Both were scholars and teachers, both wrote extensively on Carmelite topics, both strongly opposed the ideology and actions of the National Socialists, especially their persecution of Jews, and both died in 1942 in Nazi concentration camps (Brandsma at Dachau and Stein at Auschwitz). Brandsma was a professor of philosophy and history of mysticism at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. At the time of his arrest he was serving as ecclesiastical advisor to the Dutch Catholic journalists, urging them to refuse publication of Nazi propaganda. Jewish-born Edith Stein was a noted philosopher and leading member of the Göttingen Circle of early phenomenologists before her conversion to Catholicism and eventual entry into the Discalced Carmelite community of Cologne. In 1933 she had already written to Pius XI urging the pope to speak out more forcefully against the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis. Transferred to the Carmel of Echt in the Netherlands, she was completing a major text on St. John of the Cross when she was arrested, along with her sister Rosa and other Catholics of Jewish descent, in retaliation for a pastoral letter of the Dutch bishops critical of National Socialism. The example of Stein and Brandsma helps remind contemporary Carmelites that their spiritual heritage has social implications, and that the mystical and prophetic dimensions of Carmelite spirituality are inseparable.

The twentieth century also brought a fresh flowering of Carmelite spirituality in the Anglophone world, with new English-language translations and studies of the Carmelite classics, new Carmelite authors, and new initiatives to interpret the Carmelite tradition for contemporary English-speaking audiences. Carmelite themes pervade the work of American author Sr. Miriam of the Holy Spirit, o.c.d., better known as Jessica Powers (1905–1988), who is increasingly recognized as among the best of modern religious poets.

In our own day, Carmelite spirituality is more popular than ever, and the Carmelite classics are read by men and women of every religious background. It could be said, in fact, that during its long journey through history, Carmelite spirituality has become ever more “democratized.” A heritage once viewed as the special preserve of medieval hermits and cloistered nuns is now seen as speaking profoundly to the universal human longing for self-transcendence and integral liberation. John of the Cross’s description of the “dark night,” Thérèse’s “trial of faith,” and the honest witness of so many Carmelites to their own spiritual trials and struggles strike a responsive chord with people today facing a world of massive suffering and injustice, where God often seems silent and hidden. Nor has it escaped notice that over the centuries, in varying degrees, Carmel has provided a significant space for women’s religious experience and testimony, even when these were not always sufficiently respected in the broader church and world. And busy Christians today, who cannot withdraw to the silence and solitude of a cell in the *wadi* on Mount Carmel, still look to the Carmelite tradition for guidance on how to cultivate the far more important *interior* silence and solitude essential for spiritual growth, how to center themselves in the *hermitage of the heart*, where the living God is encountered.

And what of the future? Since the nineteenth century, many new “apostolic” congregations, secular institutes, and ecclesial movements have associated themselves in some way with Carmel and embraced at least some aspects of Carmelite spirituality as part of their charism. The Lay and Secular Carmelites have experienced a phenomenal upsurge in numbers in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, and are increasingly assuming roles of greater leadership and responsibility. Today Carmelite vocations seem to be most plentiful in the developing world, where the different branches of Carmel are experiencing their most dramatic growth. Thus the Carmelite family is becoming increasingly diverse and “global,” facing the exciting challenge of inculturating its spirituality in new and varied contexts. Perhaps the next great representative of

Carmelite spirituality will come from Africa, Latin America, or Asia, and may not come from the ranks of the Carmelite friars, nuns, and sisters. Given the surprising turns in Carmel's rich spiritual heritage, however, it is risky at best to predict its future, except to affirm that Carmelite spirituality will continue to nourish people of goodwill throughout the world for many generations to come.

The Carmelite Rule (ca. 1207)

A part from the Bible itself, no text is more fundamental for Carmelite spirituality than what has come to be known as the Rule of St. Albert. It has shaped generation after generation of Carmelites, and is the original articulation of the spiritual ideal to which all Carmelite renewal movements have attempted to return. Yet at least in its earliest form it is not technically a “rule” at all in the strict canonical sense, but a simple *formula vitae* (formula of life), composed for a single community of medieval hermit-penitents on Mount Carmel in Crusader Palestine, by someone who was not himself a member.

St. Albert of Jerusalem, as he is called by Carmelites, was born around 1150 in the diocese of Parma, and later joined the canons regular of Mortara before being chosen as bishop of Bobbio in 1184. A year later he was named bishop of Vercelli, a post he ably filled during the next two decades. In 1205 he was elected patriarch of Jerusalem and subsequently took up official residence in Acre, near Mount Carmel, because Jerusalem itself remained under Muslim control. During his distinguished career he played a role in drawing up rules for several religious groups, including the Humiliati, and carried out many important diplomatic missions for the pope.

Much about the first recipients of the Rule of St. Albert remains obscure. We do not even know their names. Tradition has given the name “Brocard” to their leader, though only his first initial, “B,” appears in the earliest manuscripts. Most scholars today would at least agree that they were a group of “Latin” hermits who assembled sometime around the beginning of the thirteenth century in the *wadi-ain-es-Siah* near the “spring of Elijah” on the western slopes of Mount Carmel, already sacred to the memory of the prophet Elijah as the site of his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:20–46). Europe was in the midst of a religious

2 *The Carmelite Tradition*

revival and devout Christians everywhere were seeking a more “apostolic” life (that is, one more closely imitating the poor and simple lifestyle of Jesus and his apostles) in contrast to the perceived complacency and wealth of the traditional monastic orders. At the same time, as noted earlier, a deepening spiritual focus on Christ’s humanity inspired many to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to visit the sites associated with Jesus, and sometimes even to remain, dedicating themselves to prayer and penance.

Such were the first Carmelites. We do not know precisely when they settled on Mount Carmel. Presumably it was some time after the Third Crusade (1189–1192), that is, after Richard the Lionhearted had recaptured from Saladin’s Muslim troops the narrow coastal strip that included Acre, Mount Carmel, and the *wadi-ain-es-Siah*. Presumably also the hermits had been living on Mount Carmel for some time before they requested Albert’s intervention. The Rule of St. Albert bears no date, but we know that it must have been delivered to the Carmelites between 1206, when Albert first arrived in Acre, and 1214, when he was assassinated.

The text is in the form of a letter from the patriarch of Jerusalem to “his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mt Carmel” (par. 1). Albert notes at the outset that there are already “many and varied” approved ways of living “a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ . . . pure in heart and steadfast in conscience, . . . unswerving in the service of [one’s] Master” (par. 2). Indeed, at the time, new groups like the Carmelites were being pressured to conform to more familiar models of religious life by adopting one of the classic Rules, of Benedict or Augustine. But Albert evidently approves of what he observes in this hermit community, and wishes to grant their request for a particular *formula vitae* “in keeping with your avowed purpose” (par. 3), which suggests to many commentators that there had been some kind of consultation process. The hermits may even have presented him with a preliminary draft indicating what they hoped would be included. In any case, the fact that this document differs so dramatically from other legislation Albert helped to write seems to imply that it was based on what the hermits were already living, or aspiring to live, rather than on some alien model.

Thus despite many points of contact with the earlier desert and monastic traditions, and traces of the influence of Cassian throughout the document, these first Carmelites consciously opted for an alternative to the Benedictine model, at least as it was being lived at that time. Albert requires first of all that they have a “prior, one among yourselves, to be

chosen by common consent, or that of the greater or maturer part" (par. 4). Unlike the traditional monastic abbot who served for life as the supreme authority and spiritual father of his community, the Carmelite "prior" is simply the "first among equals," chosen for a set term of office, and making decisions in regular consultation with the brethren he serves. Again, in contrast with the Benedictine tradition of dormitory living, each Carmelite hermit is to have his own "cell," presumably to better support a life of intense personal prayer.

Albert goes on to offer a few general guidelines regarding the duties of the prior, the daily schedule, community prayer, common ownership, fraternal correction, fasting, abstinence, and so on. He instructs the hermits, as they prepare for their spiritual battles, to "clothe yourselves in God's armor" (par. 18), which includes chastity, holy meditations, holiness of life, faith, and the word of God. The longest paragraphs in this *formula vitae* are devoted to work and silence.

Particularly notable throughout is the spirit of freedom and balance. Albert is content to lay down a few key points, and leave the rest to the ongoing discernment of the group. His use of many qualifying phrases ("if necessary," "if it can be done without difficulty," "unless bodily sickness, or feebleness, or some other good reason, demand a dispensation") allows for great flexibility (cf. pars. 14–16). And though, in closing, Albert encourages the brothers to ever greater generosity of spirit, he reminds them to use holy *discretio*, which is "the guide of the virtues" (par. 24). Thus the text reveals far more about the original spirit of the thirteenth-century hermits in the *wadi-ain-es-Siah* than about the details of their daily life, which is why it has proved so durable an inspiration for generation after generation of their successors living in vastly different times and circumstances.

Nevertheless, the hermits themselves soon felt the need for some adaptations as they began returning West in the face of mounting Muslim pressures in Palestine. They quickly discovered that the eremitical lifestyle they had followed in the *wadi* did not easily translate to the very different climate and culture of western Europe, where they also were suspected of violating the Fourth Lateran Council's 1215 ban against the further founding of new religious orders. Accordingly, they were eager to seek papal approval as well as certain "clarifications" and "mitigations" of their *formula vitae*. Responding to their request, Innocent IV promulgated a slightly revised version in 1247. The changes he approved included meals and canonical office in common, some moderating of the requirements regarding silence and abstinence, and most important,

permission to establish foundations “where you are given a site suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order” (par. 5). The Carmelites interpreted this clause as allowing houses in the towns and cities, where they soon began assimilating themselves to the ranks of the mendicants (Franciscans, Dominicans) and began sending their students to the universities. In 1432 Pope Eugene IV granted further dispensations, which many saw as symptomatic of a decline in religious observance.

Thus when Teresa of Avila in the sixteenth century called for a return to the spirit of the “Primitive Rule” of Carmel, she actually had in mind the Innocentian version, which Carmelites of her time described as “primitive” when contrasted with the mitigation of Eugene IV. In fact, with its stronger emphasis on the communal dimension of Carmelite life, the Innocentian version, though not the earliest, was better suited to her reform efforts. Today it is Albert’s *formula vitae* with the Innocentian modifications that stands at the head of most Carmelite legislation. The following pages, therefore, present the reconstructed original version of Albert’s Rule, with the Innocentian modifications and additions indicated in italics.

What, then, is this Rule all about? Many authors of the past have insisted that its “heart” lies in the precept that “each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord’s law [i.e., Scripture] day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty” (par. 10). Thus in *The Way of Perfection* St. Teresa writes that “our primitive rule states that we must pray without ceasing. If we do this with all the care possible—for unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the rule—the fasts, the disciplines, and the silence that the order commands will not be wanting” (*Way*, 4.2). Some more recent commentators, however, would also insist on the centrality (both in the text and in the life of the first hermits) of the “oratory” where the Carmelites are “to gather each morning to hear Mass” (par. 14), and of the elements of life in common sketched out in the surrounding paragraphs. But however one interprets the balance between personal prayer and community life in Albert’s *formula vitae*, certainly both are crucial in the Carmelite tradition.

More surprising are the apparent omissions. Albert’s text says nothing directly about the apostolate, although we know the first hermits had established themselves near a source of fresh water along the main pilgrim route, and so presumably attracted many visitors. Moreover, the two biblical figures who would assume such importance in the later Carmelite tradition, Elijah and Mary, are not even mentioned by name.

Their presence must be found “between the lines.” Albert addresses his text to the hermits living “near the spring,” known to the locals as the “spring of Elijah”; thus the first Carmelites had founded at a site resonant with memories of the great prophet. Likewise, the “oratory” that Albert had directed them to build they dedicated to Mary, who thus became the “lady of the place” and their adopted patron. Such seemingly small details had a decisive impact in shaping Carmelite spirituality ever after.

The Carmelite Rule

(Albert’s “formula of life,” with the AD 1247 additions and modifications by Innocent IV indicated in italics. In cases where Innocent IV replaced some of Albert’s text, the two versions are indicated by “[Alb.]” or “[Inn.]”)

1. Albert, called by God’s favor to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring [of Elijah] on Mt Carmel.

2. Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ—how, pure in heart and stout in conscience, he must be unswerving in service of his Master.

3. It is to me, however, that you have come for a rule of life [*formula vitae*] in keeping with your avowed purpose, a rule you may hold fast to henceforward: and therefore:

4. The first thing I require is for you to have a Prior, one of yourselves, who is to be chosen for the office by common consent, or that of the greater and maturer part of you; each of the others must promise him obedience—of which, once promised, he must try to make his deeds the true reflection—[Inn.] *and also chastity and the renunciation of ownership.*

5. [Inn.] *If the Prior and brothers see fit, you may have foundations in solitary places, or where you are given a site that is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order.*

6. Next, each one of you is to have a separate cell, situated as the lie of the land you propose to occupy may dictate, and allotted by disposition of the Prior with the agreement of the other brothers, or the more mature among them.

7. [Inn.] *However, you are to eat whatever may have been given you in a common refectory, listening together meanwhile to a reading from Holy Scripture where that can be done without difficulty.*

8. None of the brothers is to occupy a cell other than that allotted to him, or to exchange cells with another, without leave of whoever is Prior at the time.

9. The Prior's cell should stand near the entrance to your property, so that he may be the first to meet those who approach, and whatever has to be done in consequence may all be carried out as he may decide and order.

10. Each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty.

11. [Alb.] Those who know their letters, and how to read the psalms, should for each of the hours, say those our holy forefathers laid down and the approved custom of the Church appoints for that hour. Those who do not know their letters must say twenty-five "Our Fathers" for the night office, except on Sundays and solemnities when that number is to be doubled so that the 'Our Father' is said fifty times; the same prayer must be said seven times in the morning in place of Lauds, and seven times too for each of the other hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.

[Inn.] *Those who know how to say the canonical hours with those in orders should do so, in the way those holy forefathers of ours laid down, and according to the Church's approved custom. Those who do not know the hours must say twenty-five "Our Fathers" for the night office, except on Sundays and solemnities when that number is to be doubled so that the "Our Father" is said fifty times; the same prayer must be said seven times in the morning in place of Lauds, and seven times too for each of the other hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.*

12. [Alb.] None of the brothers must lay claim to anything as his own, but your property is to be held in common; and of such things as the Lord may have given you each is to receive from the Prior—that is from the man he appoints for the purpose—whatever befits his age and needs. However, as I have said, each of you is to stay in his allotted cell, and live, by himself, on what is given out to him.

[Inn.] *None of the brothers must lay claim to anything as his own, but you are to possess everything in common; and each is to receive from the Prior—that is from the brother he appoints for the purpose—whatever befits his age and needs.*

13. [Inn.] *You may have as many asses and mules as you need, however, and may keep a certain amount of livestock or poultry.*

14. An oratory should be built as conveniently as possible among the cells, where if it can be done without difficulty, you are to gather each morning to hear Mass.

15. On Sunday too, or other days if necessary, you should discuss matters of discipline and your spiritual welfare: and on this occasion the indiscretions and failings of the brothers, if any be found at fault, should be lovingly corrected.

16. You are to fast every day, except Sundays, from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter Day, unless bodily sickness or feebleness, or some other good reason, demand a dispensation from the fast; for necessity overrides every law.

17. [Alb.] You are always to abstain from meat, unless it has to be eaten as a remedy for sickness or great feebleness.

[Inn.] *You are to abstain from meat, except as a remedy for sickness or feebleness. But as, when you are on a journey, you more often than not have to beg your way, outside your own houses you may eat foodstuffs that have been cooked with meat, so as to avoid giving trouble to your hosts. At sea, however, meat may be eaten.*

18. Since man's life on earth is a time of trial, and all who would live devotedly in Christ must undergo persecution, and the devil your foe is on the prowl like a roaring lion looking for prey to devour, you must use every care to clothe yourselves in God's armour so that you may be ready to withstand the enemy's ambush.

19. Your loins are to be girt with chastity, your breast fortified by holy meditations, for, as Scripture has it, holy meditation will save you. Put on holiness as your breastplate, and it will enable you to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength, and your neighbour as yourself. Faith must be your shield on all occasions, and with it you will be able to quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked one: there can be no pleasing God without faith; [and the victory lies in this—your faith]. On your head set the helmet of salvation, and so be sure of deliverance by our only Saviour, who sets his own free from their sins. The sword of the spirit, the word of God, must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all you do have the Lord's word for accompaniment.

20. You must give yourselves to work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy; no idleness on your part must give him a chance to pierce the defenses of your souls. In this respect you have both the teaching and the example of Saint Paul the Apostle, into whose mouth Christ put his own words. God made him preacher and teacher of faith and truth to the nations: with him as your leader you cannot go astray. We lived among you, he said,

labouring and weary, toiling night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not because we had no power to do otherwise but so as to give you, in your own selves, an example you might imitate. For the charge we gave you when we were with you was this: that whoever is not willing to work should not be allowed to eat either. For we have heard that there are certain restless idlers among you. We charge people of this kind, and implore them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they earn their own bread by silent toil. This is the way of holiness and goodness; see that you follow it.

21. The Apostle would have us keep silence, for in silence he tells us to work. As the Prophet also makes known to us: Silence is the way to foster holiness. Elsewhere he says: Your strength will lie in silence and hope.

[Alb.] For this reason I lay down that you are to keep silence from Vespers until Terce the next day, unless some necessary or good reason, or the Prior's permission, should break the silence.

[Inn.] *For this reason I lay down that you are to keep silence from after Compline until after Prime the next day.*

At other times, although you need not keep silence so strictly, be careful not to indulge in a great deal of talk, for, as Scripture has it—and experience teaches us no less—Sin will not be wanting where there is much talk, and He who is careless in speech will come to harm; and elsewhere: The use of many words brings harm to the speaker's soul. And our Lord says in the Gospel: Every rash word uttered will have to be accounted for on judgement day. Make a balance then, each of you, to weight his words in; keep a tight rein on your mouths, lest you should stumble and fall in speech, and your fall be irreparable and prove mortal. Like the Prophet, watch your step lest your tongue give offense, and employ every care in keeping silent, which is the way to foster holiness.

22. You, brother B., and whoever may succeed you as Prior, must always keep in mind and put into practice what our Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever has a mind to become a leader among you must make himself servant to the rest, and whichever of you would be first must become your bondsman.

23. You other brothers too, hold your Prior in humble reverence, your minds not on him but on Christ who has placed him over you, and who, to those who rule the Churches, addressed the words: Whoever pays you heed pays heed to me, and whoever treats you with dishonour dishonours me; if you remain so minded you will not be found guilty of contempt, but will merit life eternal as fit reward for your obedience.

24. Here then are the few points I have written down to provide you with a standard of conduct to live up to: but our Lord, at his second coming, will reward anyone who does more than he is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense [*discretio*] are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues.¹