

## CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

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While Carmelite Spirituality flowers with particular brilliance in the sixteenth century Spanish Reformation and again in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century France, its roots are sunk deeply in the Vita Apostolica movement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Until recently Carmelite Spirituality focused very narrowly, interpreting its experience almost exclusively through the writings of the two great mystical Carmelite Doctors of the Church from sixteenth century Spain, Saints Teresa of Jesus (Teresa of Avila) and John of the Cross. The historical and theological scholarship of the last fifty years has extended the field both backwards into the medieval period and forwards into the modern era. There has been a serious study of the medieval tradition preceding the two Spanish mystics, a study which has not only shown the Carmelite roots of the two great Doctors but which can stand on its own as a valued mystical tradition. There has also been a serious theological reevaluation of the works of Therese of Lisieux, a 19<sup>th</sup> century French Carmelite named Doctor of the Church in 1997, a reevaluation that has moved her teaching from popular piety to serious mystical theology. Other contemporary Carmelite writers, most notably Saint Edith (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) Stein, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Blessed Titus Brandsma, have added to the substance of this rich tradition.

## **Origins: The Primitive Carmelite Spirit.**

The Carmelites must be located in the context of the lay hermit movements that arose in Europe during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These movements, typified by the disciples of Francis of Assisi and by the various hermit groups of central Italy that were united in 1256 to form the Augustinian Hermits, were a product of the great 12<sup>th</sup> century renewal of the Church called the *Vita Apostolica* movement in which devout men and women strove to live in imitation of Christ and his twelve apostles. Central to this scheme was a radical poverty in which the hermit imitated the apostles sent out to preach with no bag, no spare tunic, no walking stick (Matt 10:10). Although the lay hermits were essentially contemplative, their identity cannot be separated from a mission of witnessing to the Gospel by both deeds and words. The medieval imagination did not dichotomize the apostolic and contemplative lives; apostolic preaching was seen to be the natural overflow of prayer. The hermits' zeal to imitate the poverty of Christ led them to a profoundly incarnational spirituality by which they approached the Divine Mystery through the humanity of Christ, a feature that has always remained central in the Carmelite tradition.

Lay hermits came primarily from the new commercial classes that were emerging in Europe with the revival of trade and the expansion of cities after 1100. They represent a reaction to the new urban ethos that was replacing the rural culture that had dominated Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the early Middle Ages. While Europe was enjoying a previously unknown prosperity, some more committed Christians found society becoming unduly competitive, materialistic, and insensitive to the needs of its least members. The Church, for its part, did not have an effective strategy to infuse society with gospel values.

Despite the efforts of the Gregorian Reform to renew clerical life, the secular clergy were very often focused in catering to the whims of their more wealthy and powerful parishioners and the monasteries were focusing on increasing their wealth and power and the large number of rural poor who were flocking to the cities in search of employment and bettering their lives were being left without religious guidance. At the same time, the new urban bourgeoisie were coming into their own politically, economically, and religiously. As people rose along the economic ladder they had more opportunity for education, leisure, and religion. As people became more educated they wanted more than simply to attend mass as mute witnesses to a mystical pageant. They wanted to be able to live their faith in everyday situations. They began to form confraternities in which they gathered for prayer and works of charity. They gave money for the restoration of old churches and construction of new ones. They commissioned books of prayers called "Books of Hours" in which Latin psalms were included along with vernacular prayers and hymns enabling the pious laity to develop a routine of prayer analogous to the offices recited by clergy and religious.

A new form of religious life was needed to provide place for the children of the new urban middle classes. Despite their wealth, there was little opportunity for the new commercial classes to find a place in religious vocations. Abbeys of monks and canons regular had long limited their membership to the sons of the noble and knightly classes. Secular canons—the upper levels of the diocesan clergy—were drawn from the old urban aristocracy. It was in this context that sons of the urban merchant class spontaneously turned to the eremitical life.

Hermits were not a new feature in European society. The Gregorian Reform of the eleventh and twelfth centuries had seen a revival of monastic hermits. New monastic communities emerged. The Camaldolese monks were an eremitical community that followed the Rule of St. Benedict. The Carthusians were an Order of hermits that developed independently of an older monastic Rule. Cistercian and Benedictine monks received permission from their abbots to retire from their abbeys into hermitages. These hermits were all monks, drawn from the aristocracy like other monks, lived in seclusion from society and—to a great extent—from one another, and professed to an established monastic Rule or established Constitutions that highly regulated each aspect of their lives.

The bourgeois idealists who took up an eremitical life were very different from these monastic hermits. They were not canonical religious and, at least initially, they had no Rule. It was a far more spontaneous, even charismatic, way of life. While they were anxious to renounce the materialism and competitive ethos of their society to live in imitation of Christ and the apostles, like Christ and the apostles they did not abandon their contemporaries in the mercantile and urban society of European cities. While they often gathered in small communities living in and around abandoned churches in the countryside, they regularly came into the cities and towns to witness to their faith and encourage their listeners to prayer, penance, and works of charity. In place of a formal Rule, most of these hermits looked simply to the scriptures for guidance in shaping their lives. An axiom cited by several founders was that the only Rule needed was the Gospel. Others found their inspiration in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 2:42-47 they found a pattern for their life of discipleship.

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.

While the early lay hermit movement was very charismatic, the hierarchical Church demanded some measure of accountability. Lay hermits enjoyed certain canonical rights and protections both in ecclesiastical and civil law. Consequently one was not free to simply go off on one's own and become a hermit. Because they often did some spontaneous preaching and often depended on the alms of the faithful for support, the bishops claimed some rights over them. While anyone was free to live a life of retirement and prayer, a man needed to seek the blessing of the local prelate before he could assume the habit of a hermit. Hermits, like canonical pilgrims, wore a tunic that fell somewhat below the knees but was not as long as a clerical gown. They belted this with a leather belt, and wore a short hooded cape. Pilgrims, in addition to this basic habit, added a purse slung from their belts in which to keep food or alms given them for their journey, and they also wore the badge of their pilgrimage such as a scallop shell for those going to the shrine of Saint James at Compostella or a palm for those going to Jerusalem. The pilgrim, like the hermit, had a right to appeal for alms.

Hermits could ask for alms, but they were supposed to live off their labor. Some took up residence at a bridge which they kept in repair. Others might staff a lighthouse. Colonies of hermits might, like the early monks, keep gardens, make baskets and mats, or do simple crafts to support their community. Some would hire themselves out as day-laborers—working in vineyards or farms in exchange for food. Alms were often collected not for themselves but for lepers, for the lame or blind, for elderly people who could not support themselves, or for orphans and widows. Hermits often, indeed almost invariably, had some apostolate among those who had been pushed to the margins of society because of disease, disability, or poverty.

The phenomenon of lay hermits was by no means limited to Italy; they were found throughout the European continent. Moreover, the Latin Crusader kingdom was a particularly fertile ground for those who wished to live like the desert fathers reflecting on and imitating Jesus Christ in both his poverty and solitary union with the Father in prayer. Sometime after 1193 with the peace that concluded the Third Crusade, hermits began to gather in the wadi 'ain es-Siah on the south-western slopes of Mount Carmel within sight of the Mediterranean.

The hermits on Mount Carmel, and at least some other hermit groups in the Holy Land such as those of the Quarantine who, like the hermits on Mount Carmel were mentioned by Jaques de Vitry in his *Historia Orientalis*, differed from their European counterparts in being notably less apostolic than was common for hermits in Europe. According to Nicholas the Frenchman in the *Ignea Sagitta* the Latin Hermits from Mount Carmel did, at least occasionally, have a preaching ministry. Moreover, some today think they may have had a ministry of hospitality to pilgrims on the journey from Acre to Jerusalem. On the other hand, they seem to have very much modeled themselves on the early desert fathers who, laymen like themselves,

had retired to the solitude of the desert to contemplate the Divine Mysteries. There were demands that took them away from the cells but the essence of their vocation seems to have been the constant meditation on the Law of God and unceasing vigilance in prayer.

The names and origins of these hermits have not survived. Some were pilgrims to the Holy Land who decided to stay in the land of Christ as an expression of their religious conversion. Some had probably been hermits before Saladin's victory at Hattin forced the Latin population to evacuate the majority of the kingdom they had held since the First Crusade. Some perhaps were adventurers who had come to the Holy Land and there experienced a conversion. There is no evidence that the hermits living on Mt. Carmel had any sort of organization prior to the time that they chose a leader and approached the Latin Patriarch, Albert of Vercelli (also known as Albert of Avogardo d. 1214), and asked him for a Way of Life (*formula vitae*) sometime between 1206 and 1214. This was not simply the request for a pattern by which they could conduct their lives, it was asking for the patriarch's recognition, constituting them as canonical hermits and placing them under the protection of the Church and empowering them to bear witness to their life of discipleship and to collect alms for their support. Not only in giving them a *formula vitae*, but more important by permitting them to have a church—an oratory—Albert recognized them as being part of the hierarchical structure of the Church.

It is arguable whether Albert gave them their *formula vitae* or whether he ratified a proposal they presented to him. The document shows some evidence of two hands, and perhaps the *formula vitae* was actually a composite of precepts that expressed the simple form

of life which they proposed to lead and Albert's spiritual exhortation to them about living a life of discipleship to Jesus Christ (*in obsequio Ihesu Christi*).

The Way of Life which Albert gave to the hermits is extremely simple with only a minimum of prescriptions. Unlike the Rules that Benedict and Francis left for their followers, there is no mention of a habit in the Rule that Albert prepared for the hermits. Albert mandated perpetual abstinence and a great fast from the Feast of the Holy Cross until Easter. The hermits were to hear mass daily, but pray the psalms alone in their cells. As was characteristic of hermits in the *vita apostolica* tradition, they were to have no private possessions. They were to submit themselves in obedience to their prior whom—Albert reminded them—Christ had placed over them. The prior, on his part, was to remember the scriptural injunction about the one who would be greatest serving the needs of the others. Unless they were legitimately occupied elsewhere, they were to remain in their cells meditating day and night on the Law of the Lord. This last injunction has been seen by many as being at the heart of Carmelite Spirituality, but recent scholarship suggests that perhaps this is too narrow an interpretation. What is certainly central in the spirituality outlined in the Carmelite's *Way of Life* is attentiveness to the Word of God. Albert exhorted them: "Let the Sword of the Spirit, that is the Word of God, dwell in your hearts and on your lips, that all that you do you may do with the Word of the Lord for accompaniment."

Carmelite Spirituality, as laid out by Albert for the Hermits, is a Spirituality of the Word of God. It was this immersion in the Word of God that generated the dynamism of their spirituality. The rhythm of Carmelite life, established by these first hermits, is marked by collective and individual solitude, which creates an atmosphere in which union with God is



achieved through continuous prayer. Specific religious discipline mandates silence, fasting, perpetual abstinence, manual work, vocal recitation of the psalms, the chapter of faults, and hearing mass. They were exhorted, in Albert's paraphrase of Ephesians 6:11-17, to don the spiritual armor of the moral virtues. Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre from 1216 to 1228, testifies to this primitive vision writing that the primitive Carmelite community:

"after the example of the holy prophet, Elijah live on Mount Carmel--on that part of the mountain that is near Haifa, by the fountain of Elijah, close to (The Abbey of) St. Margaret of Cannel. They live as hermits. And there like bees they store their honey, offering the Lord the sweetness of their spirit in their little cells.

### **The Spiritual Path of the Hermits on Mount Carmel**

While there were certain characteristics that fitted each of the many groups of lay hermits that sprung up in the eleventh and twelfth century, there was no one single spirituality. Imitation of Christ is essential to all forms of Christian Spirituality as our baptismal vocation is to be "conformed to Christ." (Romans 8:29, 6:3 ff., 13:14, Gal 2:19-20). The Lay Hermit especially wanted to imitate Christ in his poverty, drawing on the ancient adage of St. Jerome: *nudus nudum Christum sequi* (to naked follow the naked Christ.) An essential part of this imitation of the poor Christ was to be homeless and dependent on the kindness of others for shelter and support. Another was life in community as a living out of the fellowship of the Apostles with their Lord. Yet another was an emphasis on solitary prayer, especially imitating the Christ who withdrew to lonely nights of prayer in deserted and hidden places (Luke 5:16). Lay hermits saw themselves as giving prophetic witness to the Kingdom of God in imitation of those whom

Christ had sent out without purse, or second tunic, or walking stick (Mark 6: 8). And most hermits saw that they had a special mission to the sick, to lepers, and to sinners in imitation of their Master. Beyond these general characteristics, there was a wide variety of spiritual practices. Some Lay Hermits stressed the repetition of aspiratory or ejaculatory prayer, reciting short prayer-phrases over and over again. In this they resembled both the desert fathers and the hesachyst tradition as well as such modern spiritual methods as Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation. Sometimes the repeated aspirations were combined with physical exercise such as prostrations or genuflections. Other Lay Hermits practiced a simple *lectio divina*, using the scriptural texts, especially the psalms, as a means of reflecting on their lives and attuning them to God's call in the concrete situations in which they found themselves. Albert of Vercelli taught the hermits a method of in the *formula vitae* which he composed for them. He told them to reflect on the Law of the Lord by day and by night, and he further instructed them to "let the sword of the Spirit, that is the Word of God, dwell in their minds and hearts so that all that they did they would do in the name of the Lord." But he not only instructed them to do this, he showed them how. His *formula vitae* is a marvelous example of how one weaves the threads of scripture into a well-fitting and strong spiritual garment. Time and time again Albert turns to the Word of God—the psalms, the prophets, the gospels, and above all the epistles of Saint Paul and mines the sacred text for ideas that he locks together into new formulations and insights to guide his hermits into the path of discipleship.

Albert's *Tour de Force* is found in his chapters on Spiritual Welfare (Chapters 18 and 19 of the Rule). Here he identifies the expectation he has for his hermits—that they will wage warfare against their true enemy—not the Arab-Kurdish-Turkish Muslim forces that threatened

the Latin Kingdom, but “the devil (y)our foe” who is “on the prowl like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” Albert echoes St Paul’s command that the hermits “put on the armor of God” and he goes on to elaborate on and paraphrase the sixth chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews to describe just how they are to do this. By interposing other scriptural texts alongside Paul’s, seamlessly weaving them together into a single narrative, Albert shows that the “holy meditation” by which we are to “fortify our breasts” is not an escape into pious thought but a disciplined application of scripture to the situations of every day life in which we find ourselves. Albert makes it clear that the spiritual path of his hermits is scriptural—exclusively scriptural—and directed not to abstractions but to a feet-on-the-ground path of discipleship that will conform us to Christ, whose pledged warriors we are. If that phrase warrior seems too strong or otherwise inappropriate, know that the idea of obsequium (allegiance) which Albert invokes at the beginning of his Rule is a feudal/military term and indicates that the idea of “fighting man” is precisely what Albert meant these hermits to be in the great conflict with humankind’s eternal enemy.

The Latin Hermits on Mount Carmel—and presumably some other Hermit groups in the Holy Land—were distinguished from most European lay hermit groups by being more consciously imitative of the desert tradition of ancient Syria Palestine, being less apostolic in outreach than their European counterparts, more removed from the urban life of the societies in which they lived, and having a spirituality that stood very much more rooted in the tradition of Cassian and the desert Fathers. That tradition would be challenged as they moved to Europe and were tempted to evolve into mendicant friars.

## **Adaptation of the Ideal to the Mendicant Life**

Life for the first generations of Carmelites was not static. Albert's *Formula Vitae* was more a departure point for a long journey into an unforeseen future than it was a definitive plan of life and that unforeseen future was quite different than either Albert or his hermits would ever have imagined. In 1226, with Albert ten years in his tomb, the hermits sought the blessings of the Apostolic See on their project and in his response Honorius III acknowledged that they lived a quasi-religious life as penitents. That was not unusual. Penitents were far more complex—and more optimistic in their spirituality—than what we might think of as a bunch of glum neurotics bemoaning the sins of dissolute past. In fact, many lay hermits were penitents, that is they were men (and far more rarely, women) dedicated to living what today would be called a counter-cultural life in witness against the empty values of the secular society around them. That is not to say that they were precursors of the hippies of the 1960's—but neither were they unlike the young people of that generation in renouncing the crass materialism of a smug and self-satisfied society that had traded the traditional values of community and plain living for a strident individualism and ruthless competition for wealth. Much like the children of the '60's they came from the children of the comfortable professional and middle classes. Unlike the children of the '60's, they didn't fall into vapid self-indulgence and cynicism. They retained their Christian and Catholic faith which gave them ideals beyond the secular values that lay beneath the hypocritically pious conceits of their parents. Francis of Assisi typifies this bourgeois turned hermit youth.

In many ways Francis was a good model for us to understand the Lay Hermit movement but there is no direct historical connection between Francis and the hermits of Mount Carmel. Francis' hermit group was quite different in spirit. Jaques de Vitry testifies in letter he wrote from the papal court in 1216 that Francis and his disciples were men of deep prayer, spending the night in prayer within their hermitages but he also tells us that they spent their days in apostolic work—not uncommon for lay hermits (unlike monastic hermits). Lay hermits had no tradition of a monastic enclosure or cloister. Nevertheless, while the two groups developed independently, Francis's great friend and benefactor, the Cardinal Ugolino, cross-fertilized Francis' zeal for poverty with Carmel's contemplative emphasis when in 1229, as Pope Gregory IX, he imposed a strict Franciscan inspired communal poverty on the hermits of Carmel so that they would be more free of worldly concerns and able to give themselves to contemplation. Various other papal bulls also made modifications in their life until Innocent IV in 1247 named two Dominicans, Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher and Bishop William of Tortosa, to rework Albert's *formula vitae* into a proper Religious Rule. Innocent issued this Rule by the Papal Bull *Quae honorem Conditoris* on Oct. 1, 1247, making Carmel's lay hermits canonical religious. The modifications of Albert's text introduced the common office, common refectory, and other details of conventual life, as well as the canonical requirements of the three vows of religion. At the same time, and with some bending of the text, the Carmelites were able to settle in cities and towns and undertake the ministry of mendicants, especially preaching and the hearing of confessions. The Order quickly clericalized so that Carmelites to perform these ministries, but was slower to move into academics. It became clear to all, however, that if the Carmelites were to preach and undertake the *cura animarum*, they would have to send their men to universities

for proper theological education. By the end of the 13th century they were at the major universities of Europe along with the other mendicant orders.

These changes--ministry, clericalization, and education affected the development of the spirituality of the Order and not always for the better. Nicholas Gallicus, often called Nicholas of Narbonne or Nicholas the Frenchman, Prior General of the Order in the 1260's wrote a circular letter to the Order, the *Ignea Sagitta*, lamenting the spiritual losses which the Order suffered as a result of abandoning the life of rural hermits for urban mendicants. Nicholas's letter is a powerful description of the ideals of Carmelite Spirituality which he was anxious to preserve for future generations and ranks only after the Rule of Saint Albert as the second foundational text for Carmelite Spirituality. The letter extols the silence and solitude of the hermitage and while it speaks of the desert, it does not treat the desert as a dry and arid place, but a lush refuge where nature turns the heart and the mind towards God. The *Ignea Sagitta*, known in English as the *Fiery Arrow*, contains the theme of Bridal mysticism, in which the soul finds union with its Divine Spouse. This theme, which the Carmelite tradition takes from older sources, will flower richly in the *Spiritual Canticle* of Saint John of the Cross. Bede Edwards says that the *Ignea Sagilla* contains almost all the sanjuanist themes. He mentions the absolute transcendence of God, the theological virtues by which the soul comes into union with God, purity of conscience, attention to God alone, prayer, and mortification of the senses and the tongue. To Edward's list should be added the themes of the nuptial spirituality between God and the soul and the importance of self-knowledge in the spiritual life, and the blessedness of solitude. Nicholas also articulates the theme that Christ himself is the Mountain of our ascent to God, a theme which John of the Cross will develop fully in the *Ascent*. Noteworthy also in the *Ignea Sagitta* is the

allegorical and mystical use of scripture interpreted to critique the concrete issues which Nicholas believed his listeners needed to examine. It gives us a valuable insight on how rooted in the Word of God the actual spiritual experience of this outstanding Carmelite was. Nicholas's eloquent testimony to the primitive Carmelite ideal ironically is a masterpiece of academic argument. Strewed with patristic and literary sources, artfully constructed, and elegantly argued, Nicholas clearly demonstrates the potential for spirituality to be articulated from head and heart together. Nicholas was not unique in his call to return to the primitive vision of the founder. Contemporaneous with the *Ignea Sagitta*, the Franciscan Order was experiencing the tension between the Spirituels, a reformist faction who wished to preserve the radical vision of Saint Francis, and the Conventuals, who were anxious to update that vision to contemporary circumstances that would enable them to better serve the Church ministerially.

Among the Carmelites, however, there was to be no established movement to conserve the primitive charism. While some hermit communities continued to exist, Nicholas seems to have found no organized response to his call for the Order itself to return to its eremitical character. Although Nicholas lamented Carmel's undertaking the urban mendicant life, it is doubtful that the Carmelites would have survived suppression at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 had the order not shown some potential for pastoral usefulness. An interesting compromise is that although Carmel embarked full sail on the sea of apostolic ministry, its spirituality has retained the language of the desert.

### **The Elian Character**

Their connection with Carmel, the mountain famous from antiquity for its connection with the proto-prophet, Elijah, made it only natural that the Carmelites would turn to him for inspiration. Jacques de Vitry—who in 1216 had described the followers of Francis at the papal court—visited the Mount Carmel sometime before 1225 and informs us that there was, from the earliest period of development, a clear identification of the hermits on Mount Carmel with the great prophet of that mountain. Sometime prior to the 1281 Constitutions of the Chapter of London, the Carmelites had developed an understanding of themselves as having descended from the "Schools of the Prophets" established by the Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel. They chronicled this descent in the *Rubrica Prima* traditionally affixed to the Constitutions of the Order. This legend did not sound as outrageous to medieval ears as it does to moderns as a tradition going back to Cassian and other early monastic sources called Elijah the *Pater Monachorum* and attributed the development of the monastic life to the Old Testament prophet. The Carmelites, since they came from the Mountain on which the prophet lived, simply asserted that they were the channel by which the monastic charism had passed down from the Hebrew Prophet to the Christian desert-dwellers.

### **The Marian Character**

There also has traditionally been a strong Marian Theme to Carmelite Spirituality. Although Mary is mentioned neither in the Rule nor the *Ignea Sagitta*, Carmelites were devoted to her from the beginning. The original oratory on Mount Carmel was dedicated to her and the hermits themselves known as the Brothers of Saint Mary from Mount Carmel. A very old icon, perhaps dating from the end of the thirteenth century, is preserved in Cyprus and shows the



brothers gathered under Mary's mantle for protection. This iconic conceit was not new or unique to the Carmelites; it has been used by the Cistercians for almost two centuries. The Carmelites espoused devotion to the Immaculate Conception, weighing in to the great theological debates of the Middle Ages on the Franciscan side in favor of the doctrine and opposed to the Dominicans who, following Saint Thomas Aquinas, denied it. By the early fifteenth century the Carmelites had invented a number of legends associating Mary's protection with the scapular of their habit. From the fifteenth century onward they spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary by encouraging the laity to wear a miniscule version of their scapular. The English Carmelite John Baconthorpe (d. 1348) who had studied at Paris and wrote extensively on a wide variety of medieval theological subjects, is the first of the Order's great Marian authors. He is the first to explain the origins of the Order's name being connected to the chapel on Mount Carmel and goes so far as to say that the order was founded for the purpose of venerating Mary. His commentary on the Carmelite Rule seeks to demonstrate that the Rule reflects the life and virtues of the Virgin. The title of the Order, The Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Mount Carmel, creates a curious devotion within the order to Mary as Sister alongside her more traditional title of Mother. In 1479 the Flemish Carmelite, Arnold Bostius, (1445-1499) wrote his work, the *De Patronatu et patrocinio Beatae Virginis Mariae in dicatum sibi Carmeli ordinem* which synthesizes the Order's Marian devotion.

Carmelite mystical writers of the period include Henry of Hane (1299) whose work showed the influence of his contemporary, Meister Eckhardt; The Provençal, Guido Terreni (d. 1342); the Bolognese, Michael Aiguani (d. 1400); and the German, Sibert de Beka (d. 1332).

## **Crystallization of the Spirituality: *the Decem Libri***

Carmel received a third foundational document in the *De Institutione primorum monachorum* which first appeared in the *Decem Libri* of the Catalan Carmelite, Philip Ribot c 1380. This book alleged itself to be the work of a fourth century Bishop of Jerusalem, John XLIV, and chronicles the evolution of the Order from the time of Elijah until the conversion of the mythical proto-Carmelites at the preaching of the apostles on Pentecost. The work, while it draws on a variety of older sources, is a fourteenth century work, presumably compiled by Ribot (d. 1391) himself. Its value, while not historical, is its rich exposition of the Carmelite spiritual tradition, outlining the traditional characteristics of Carmelite Spirituality. It develops a four-step process of growing into union with God based on a mystical interpretation of God's command to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:3-4:

**The Lord God said to Elijah: leave here, go east, and hide in the wadi Cerith, which is across the Jordan. You shall drink of the torrent and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there**

Ribot finds here four steps towards perfection:

1. leave here: turning away from the world
2. go east: turning oneself towards God
3. hide in the wadi Cerith—immersing oneself in charity, (which is seen here as the perfect love of God)
4. which is across the Jordan –representing a state in which one has renounced sin and is restored to original innocence

Once one has attained this purity of heart in which one will is united in love to the Divine Will, one is prepared for the gift of contemplation (you shall drink of the torrent and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there). Once we have been so purified, we are ready to enjoy the Presence of God in contemplation. The numerous printings, editions, and translations of Ribot's work (English by Thomas Bradley; French by Thomas de Lemborch; Spanish, anonymous in the Codex of Avila), in the century after its publication testify to its quick spread and its influence. The stories of Elijah's journey from the solitude of Carith to fulfilling the mission given him by God and of the evangelical role attributed to the mythical Carmelites who heard the preaching of the apostles, also brilliantly reconcile the apostolic life with the contemplative vocation of Carmel.

### **Efforts at Reform**

The Institute of the First Monks can be seen not only as a creative mythology of its past, but as an inspiration for reform and renewal. While most of the other orders were already experiencing the rise of "observant" or reform movements to counteract the laxity of the 14th century, the Carmelites were slow to undertake reform. Their life had been somewhat relaxed with the mitigation of the Rule by Eugene IV in 1432. Ironically, that was the very time that reform began to blossom, originating in the Tuscan convent of LeSelve near Florence and spreading to Mantua which became the center of the first great Reform of the Carmelite Order. Le Selve was the convent of Nicholas Calciuri (d.1466) who wrote the *Vita dei santi e eremiti del Monte Carmelo* and the *Vita Fratrum de Sancto Monte Carmelo* to inspire members and affiliates of the Order to recapture the spiritual vision of the founders. The Mantuan Reform

produced several notables, most especially the great Italian humanist, Blessed Baptist of Mantua (1447-1516). In addition to his elegant Latin poetry, he wrote a number of spiritual texts including *De vita beata* and *De patientia*. Contemplation is not achieved by legislation, only by grace; nevertheless, the Mantuan Reform was effective in refocusing its adherents on the contemplative nature of the Carmelite tradition. The fifteenth century saw several other reforms of the Order in addition to Mantua. In 1456 the General, Blessed John Soreth (1395-1471), promulgated a set of Reform constitutions that eliminated private property, revoked all privileges exempting religious from the common life, restricting access and egress from the house, and imposing minimum ages for the novitiate and for ordination. Houses that chose the reform were given certain rights and privileges to protect the reform from those who did not want to accept its strictures. For those who did not accept the reform, known as the Conventuals, Soreth promulgated a new set of constitutions in 1462. This legislation eliminated the grosser violations of private property and imposed some measure of the common life on all, including academics and officials who had become used to a greater measure of independence. While hardly observant, these constitutions set at least a minimal standard to reinforce against the breakdown of the common life. Soreth instituted a program of regular visitations to make sure that the constitutions were followed.

More serious attempts for reform were made in the sixteenth century. The eremetical life according to the unmitigated Rule was introduced at Monte Oliveto near Genoa in 1516. This was followed by reform legislation proposed by Prior General Nicholas Audet in the *Isagogicon* of 1523 and incorporated into the *Caput Unicum* of the General Chapter of 1524.

The reforms of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were all concerned with the establishment of an evangelical life, a return to the purity of the ideals of the *Vita Apostolica* movement in which the Order had been conceived. They were anxious to correct the many abuses regarding poverty that had crept into religious life. They were also, for the most part, concerned with establishing appropriate boundaries between the religious and the laity, especially regarding a modified form of the monastic enclosure which had been introduced with more or less observance when the hermits made their foundations in Europe and evolved into canonical religious in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century. Overall, reform focused on the structures of religious life; it was more an attempt to create the situations conducive to the spiritual life rather than to teach the spiritual life itself. Reform writing more often concentrated on concrete disciplinary legislation rather than spiritual doctrine. One of the tensions that appeared in the Reform movements was the divergence of opinion as to whether the purpose of reform was to encourage the contemplative life or the ascetical life—the former emphasizing prayer, the latter penitential practices. A second dichotomy that appeared in the various reforms was the dichotomy between the contemplative and the apostolic life. This tension grew much stronger after the Council of Trent when religious orders were increasingly forced to make a choice that would have been foreign to medieval religious and declare themselves either apostolic or contemplative, the latter requiring the full monastic enclosure. As long as this dichotomy was maintained—and that would be into the modern era—Carmel has had a difficult time of keeping the balance that marked its original vision. Just as a note of explanation, the full monastic enclosure prohibited the religious from leaving the conventual precincts—that is to say those bound to the full enclosure did not leave it for apostolic work.

The policies of enclosure followed by the mendicants, including the Carmelites, did not prohibit the religious from going out for apostolic purposes (though they may limit the frequency) but were concerned with admitting seculars, especially women, to the conventual precincts.

### **The *Devotio Moderna* and Carmel**

A marked development of this period is the introduction of specified periods of mental prayer into the daily routine. For the first generations of Carmelites, mental prayer was the reflecting on the Word of God as it came to the Carmelite in the choir, in the refectory, in the chapter-room, and throughout his day. He ruminated on this word as he went about the tasks of the day. By the fifteenth century, however, various provinces, beginning with the Province of Portugal, introduced the custom of one or more daily periods reserved for mental prayer: This was at the same time as the practice of discursive meditation, made popular in the *devotio moderna*, was becoming popular. Meditation was seen to be a good preparation for the grace of contemplative prayer. The mediation methods of the *Devotio Moderna* of the 14th and 15th centuries made popular once more the emphasis on the humanity of Christ, especially as it manifested itself in the Christ's passion and death. While Carmelites were not prominent in this movement, this renewed emphasis had an impact on the whole Church and the work of many of the great Rhineland mystics was to pass down through the Franciscan spiritual writer, Hendrik Herp (d. 1477) to the Spanish mystics, particularly to Saint John of the Cross.

### **The Introduction of Nuns into the Carmelite Order**

It was in the mid-fifteenth century that Carmel received its first nuns. In May 1452 Prior General John Soreth received into the Order the beguines of TenElsen in the Netherlands. Later that same year as the prior of Florence received the Bull *Cum Nulla* from Nicholas V permitting the Prior General or provincials to receive women as Carmelite nuns. It was Soreth's hope that the nuns would be a tremendous boost in encouraging both reform and contemplation among the friars. It was a hope that only realized its potential a century later when a Spanish nun captured the imagination of the Order in a way that no male reformer had been able.

### **Saint Teresa.**

The Reform of Saint Teresa of Avila can only be understood in the context of the Spanish Reformation instituted by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella at the end of the *reconquista*. The Spanish Church anticipated many of the reforms of Council of Trent and most of the religious orders generated observant branches as their members sought to embrace what they understood to be the primitive vision of their founders. The “observants”—those who sought a return to the primitive practices of their particular orders—stressed on poverty, penitential practices, and the contemplative life. Many of these movements, such as the discalced Franciscans of Peter of Alcantara, went barefoot as a sign of their commitment to return to unmitigated religious rules. It was also the common practice of observant groups to have habits made of rougher material and cut less generously, as well as to forego the use of soft beds and abstain from meat. Meditation was often made on the transitory nature of life and skulls were placed about the convent or monastery—in one’s cell, on the tables in the refectory, at the foot of a crucifix—to remind the religious that this world was only a prelude to

another. This strikes us as macabre, but one can see this preoccupation with death ran through the larger society especially after the plagues of the fourteenth century and one has to admit that it never slowed down the energetic and joyfilled life of true saints such as Teresa of Avila.

Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in 1515, the daughter of Alonso de Cepeda, son of a Jewish merchant of Toledo who had been forced to convert to Christianity, and Alonso's second wife, Beatriz de Ahumada. In 1535 she entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. Teresa learned about mental prayer early in her Carmelite life and she was profoundly influenced by Francisco de Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. Although drawn to contemplative prayer, she lacked the discipline to persevere in it through periods of aridity. In 1554 she was profoundly moved by an encounter with a statute of Christ being scourged and this experience proved to be the beginning of her mystical life (*The Book of Her Life*, 9.1,9). From this mystical life came her great spiritual energy that directed the reform of Cannel and the great renewal of Carmelite Spirituality.

When she initiated the reform of Carmel, Aug. 24, 1562, Teresa put before her eyes the model of the holy hermits from whom Carmel took its origin (cf. *Way of Perfection* 11.4), even though the structure she adopted for her nuns was cenobitic in conformity with the requirements of the Council of Trent. Looking back to the early hermits for inspiration, Teresa's contemplative ideal came forth from the atmosphere of solitude, silence, and prayer as demanded by the Carmelite Rule. In her first book written for the instruction of her disalced nuns, she centered the whole observance around mental prayer.

By mental prayer Teresa means an intimate sharing between friends-the soul and God. The mystical life described in her autobiography is based on personal experiences that occurred



only when she committed herself totally to God. The discalced Franciscan, Saint Peter of Alcantara, had a particularly strong effect on shaping her vision of observant life, even as her Jesuit spiritual directors facilitated her interior development. Through the years, Teresa received advice from many confessors and learned men of the secular clergy and of different religious orders. They did not change her Carmelite spirit but rather helped her shape it into a vital part of the renaissance of spirituality that was energizing the whole Church during the Catholic Reformation. Teresa always saw herself as a Daughter of the Church. From its beginning, Teresa's reform of Carmel was marked by long periods of mental prayer each day. Initially, mental prayer was done in solitude. The constitutions of the discalced friars, written in 1567, prescribed three hours of solitary prayer. At least one of them was to be spent reading aloud the point to be meditated on during the mental prayer that followed .

The interest in the contemplative life was not limited to the discalced Reform and spiritual literature; even among the friars following the unmitigated observance, it showed signs of renewal. For example, Fra Juan Sanz excelled as a master of contemplation

### **Saint John of the Cross.**

When the confessors and learned men were Teresa's own discalced friars, their voice was familiar to her and it had the sound of her own traditions and of the doctrines and teachings of the *Institute of the First Monks*. As men, they were inclined to approach and explain the reformed life and Carmelite spirituality in theological, scientific, and historical categories, bringing Carmel from its spiritual isolation into dialogue with both the Church and intellectual circles. Among the scholarly friars, Saint John of the Cross displayed a particular

genius. According to his first biographer, Jose de Jesús Maria (Quiroga, 1562-1629) he had studied the spiritual heritage of Carmel in the light of patrology, history, and Bible in order to articulate the substance of contemplation.

John of the Cross was not the inventor of a new doctrine but a wise man who framed his doctrine in principles so diaphanous that their ultimate consequences are seen at a glance to follow from them. For Saint John the supernatural life pivots on two hinges, the soul and God. God is like a seed infused in the depths of the soul where God dwells and whence God governs the soul and with it the whole body, so that God and the soul constitute in a sense one thing, thus making it possible to say with Saint Paul "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2.20). The will is in charge of this supernatural metabolism. This transforming union takes place when the will submits itself completely 'to God's will. And it is achieved by an absolute turning away from everything that does not come from God. Although this is spoken of as negation, it is positive in its significance, for it is made up of acts of the love of God. The Triune God is not an abstract concept but a spiritual reality implanted in the apex of the human spirit, which, in its turn, is surrounded by many corporal crusts, like a dwarf fan-palm, to use the metaphor of Saint Teresa in the *Interior Castle*.

John of the Cross begins his elaboration of the doctrine of perfect union of the soul with God by analyzing the characteristics of the body and of the spirit or soul, whether intellectual or sensitive. Like many others in the sixteenth century, John drew his underlying philosophical concepts from the lineage of Neo-platonic thought that came down from antiquity through—among others—Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, the Victorines, and Bonaventure to give modes of expression to Christian thought. The abstract concepts of Aristotelian thought,

theologically represented by Thomism, could not adequately convey the clear exposition of the spiritual realities of which John wrote and which he intended to be not so much subjects of theological reflection as guides for the spiritual life. The first fruit of the doctrinal influence of Saint John of the Cross appears in the *Interior Castle* of Saint Teresa. She tells of the opportune intervention of a "learned man," who was, in fact, John (*Interior Castle*. IV, 1. 8). According to Efrén de la Madre de Dios, Teresa's detailed analysis of the soul, pointing out potencies, passions, imaginations, thoughts, soul and spirit, is a superb treatise that shows the influence of John of the Cross.

### **Influence of Saint John of the Cross in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

The first disciples of Saint John of the Cross, unaffected by the scholasticism which was to prevail afterward, follow his Trinitarian schema. Jose de Jesus Maria (Quiroga) wrote *Subida del alma a Dios* (Madrid 1656-59) and Inocencio de San Andres (d. 1620) wrote *Teología mística y espejo de la vida eternal*. The work was not limited to friars, the Carmelite nun, Cecilia del Nacimiento (1570-1646), wrote *De la transformación del alma en Dios*.

There were others who did not depend as closely on John of the Cross but who were nevertheless outstanding and influential in their own right. Among these were Juan de Jesús Maria (Aravalles d. 1609) who redacted the *Instrucción de Novicios* for the Discalced Carmelites. The great mystic Juan de Jesús Maria (Sampedro 1564-1615) played an important role in the spiritual formation in the Italian Discalced Congregation. His three volume *Opera omnia*, was edited by Ildefonso de S. Luis (Florence 1771-74). More eclectic and somewhat influenced by Saint John of the Cross was Tomas de Jesus (Diaz Sanchez de Avila 1564 -1627), author of

numerous and profound mystical treatises, such as *De contemplatione divina libri sex*. Jeronimo Gracian de la Madre de Dios (d. 1614), although without pretensions of being a scholar, was a most effective interpreter of Carmelite spirituality, undoubtedly due to being Teresa's closest friend and favorite disciple among the discalced friars. He was devoted to the eremitical origins of Carmel and fond of the "cave" of Pastrana. To his contemplative fervor he added an indefatigable zeal in preaching and writing. Driven from the Discalced in a dispute with the rigorist General, Nicholas Doria, he spent his final years in the Ancient Observance where, at the request of the Prior General, Enrique Silvio, he wrote *Della disciplina regolare ... della perfezione e spirito con che si ha de osservare la regola ... particolarmente quella sotto la quale vive l'Ordine della gloriosa Vergine del Carmine* (Venice 1600). This work had a wide diffusion among the Italian Carmelites, partly because of the interest Silvio took in it. For many years it was standard reading in the refectory. Saint John of the Cross also had eminent followers in the Ancient Observance, most notably Miguel de la Fuente (1574-1626), who borrowed his psychological structure in *Las tres vidas del hombre: corporal, racional y espiritual* (Toledo 1623). Another Carmelite of the Ancient Observance who showed himself a follower of Saint John of the Cross was Pablo Ezquerro (1626-96), author of *Escuela de perfección, formada de spiritual doctrina de filosofía sagrada y mística theología* (Saragossa 1675).

### **The French School and the Touraine Reform.**

Cardinal de Bérulle and the *parti devout* that gathered in the salon of Madame Acarie were responsible for the revival of French spirituality at the close of the sixteenth century. While this revival extended far beyond Carmel, the Cardinal's introduction to France of the

Discalced Reform with Anne of Saint Bartholomew and Anne of Jesus created a fortuitous blend of Carmel with French spirituality. Of particular note are the nuns Marie de la Incarnation (Barbe Acarie d. 1618) and Madeleine de Saint Joseph (d. 1637). Avoiding the heresies of Jansenism and Quietism, both so prevalent in the French Church at the time, the French tradition put a strong emphasis on the humanity of Christ, consistent with the teachings of Teresa and John.

An important figure in the French Carmel of the period is Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (Nicolas Herman 1614-1691). Lawrence's work, consisting of various letters, maxims, and memories of conversations with him, was edited and published after his death by a French secular priest, Joseph de Beaufort. The doctrine is best summarized by the short treatise *Practice of the Presence of God* which Beaufort drew from Lawrence's letters and conversations. Archbishop Fenelon's recommendation of Lawrence to his quietist followers led many orthodox Catholics to overlook him, but he enjoyed a wide popularity among Protestants from the very beginning. The Protestant pastor Pierre Poiret (1646-1719) published Lawrence's works in a French edition later translated into German where it was popular among the Pietists. Various English translations were well known in 18th century Anglican circles and no one did more to popularize Lawrence than John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. It has only been in the second half of the twentieth century that Catholics have rediscovered Brother Lawrence and claimed him for their own.

Due in no small part to the example of the Discalced, reform and renewal was to develop in the ancient branch of Cannel in France as well, producing a rich harvest of mystical writings. At Rennes, Philip Thibault (1572-1638) led a new and powerful revival of interest in a

stricter observance. Thibault avoided using the word "reform" to prevent a schism, such as had occurred in Spain. The best exponent of the mysticism that accompanied this revival of Carmelite ideals in France was the lay-brother, John of Saint-Samson (1571-1636). His principal works are: *Les Contemplations sur les mysterieux effets de l'amour divin; De l'effusion de l'homme hors de Dieu, et de sa refusion en Dieu par voye mystique; La Vraye spirit du Carmel; Le Miroir et les flames de l'amour divin; De la souverain consummation de l'âme en Dieu par amour* (*Les Oeuvres spirituelles et mystiques du divin contemplatif fr. Jean de St. Samson*, Rennes 1658). He treated the classic themes of the presence of the Trinity in the soul and the human form of God in Jesus Christ. Union with God is achieved through introversion, beginning by mastering the senses, until one gets to the spiritual potencies, whose vertex is God's dwelling place. Tournaine provided other important writers. Dominique de Saint-Albert (1596-1634), wrote *Théologie mystique, Traicte de l'oraison mentale*, and *Formulaire de l'oraison unitive*. Leon de Saint-Jean (1600- 71), wrote a work called *Théologie mystique* (Paris 1654) as well as *L'ouverture des trois cieux de S. Paul* (Paris 1633). Pierre de la Resurrection, master of novices, authored *Le manuel des religieux profez pour server à la conduite des seminaires et etudes des religieux de la province de Tournaine* (4 v. Nantes 1666), *De l'amour et de la connaissance de Jésus el de Marie* (2 v. Rennes 1664), and *Le gouvernement des passions* (Nantes 1662). Maur de l'Enfant Jesus (1618-90) wrote *L'Entré à la divine sagesse* (Bordeaux 1652), *Théologie chretienne et mystique* (Bordeaux 1651); and *Le Royaume interieur de Jésus-Christ dans les âmes* (Paris 1668). Daniel de la Vierge Marie (1615-1678) while primarily remembered for his historical writings, made notable contributions to the spiritual literature of the Order; his *Art of Arts* (Antwerp, 1646) is a treatise on prayer according to Saint Teresa. But

the most outstanding of all, with the exception of John of Saint-Samson, is the Venerable Michael of St. Augustine (1621-84) for his *Institutionum mysticarum libri quatuor*, (ed. Antwerp 1671) containing his *Mary-form and the Marian Life in Mary* which anticipates the Marian spirituality of St. Louis Grignon de Montfort. Michael's emphasis on a spirituality that very much has Mary as its center and organizing principle marks a strong departure from the classically Christocentric Carmelite mystical doctrine.

### **Influence of Scholasticism**

Meanwhile, in the discalced Carmel there emerged a powerful school of Carmelite mysticism reshaped by scholastic influences. Defending St. John of the Cross and crediting him with the doctrine of St. Thomas, who after the Council of Trent was the oracle of Catholic doctrine, the Discalced Carmelites built up their master's mystical doctrine with the stones of Thomism. At the same time, they formed the three great *cursus*: the *Complutensis* (University of Alcalá de Henares) in philosophy and the *Salmanticenses* (University of Salamanca) in dogmatic and moral theology. Diego de Jesus (Salamanca, 1570-1621) edited the works of St. John of the Cross with luminous *Apuntamientos* (explanatory notes) justifying his doctrine. Nicolas de Jesus Maria (Centurion d. 1655) defended it also in 1631 with his *Elucidatio theologica I circa aliquas phrases et propositiones theologicae mysticae, in particulari V. P. N. Joannis a Cruce*. In a more positive form the Portuguese Jose del Espiritu Santo (Baroso 1609-74) wrote *Cadena mystica: Eucleatio mysticae theologiae S. Dionysii, Primera parte del camino espiritual de oración y contemplación*. Antonio del Espiritu Santo, also a Portuguese, wrote *Directorium mysticum*, published in 1677, three years after its author's death. Antonio de la

Anunciación (d. 1713) wrote *Manual de padres espirituales para almas que tratan de oración* (Alcala 1679); *Disceptatio mystica de oratione et contemplatione* (1683); and *Quodlibeta mystica* (1712). In France Philippe de la Trinité published his *Summa theologiae mysticae* (1656), and Cyprien de La Nativité de la Vierge (1605-80), his *Traité de l'oraison mentale* (1650). Honorée de Sainte-Marie (1651-1729), a learned and polemic writer, defended his mystical school with *Tradition des pères et des auteurs ecclésiastiques sur la contemplation*. In Italy Baldassaro di S. Catarina di Siena (d. 1673.) wrote an excellent commentary on the *Interior Castle*, illuminated with the doctrine of St. Thomas: *Splendori riflessi di sapienza celeste vibrati dà gloriosi gerarchi Tommaso d'Aquino e Teresa di Gesù* (Bologna 1671). In Spain Francisco de San Tomás (1707) made a summary of Carmelite mysticism in his *Médula mystica, sacada de las divinas letras, de los santos padres y de los mas clásicos doctors míticos escolásticos* (1691). But the summit of this scholarly ascent was achieved by the eminent Andalusian José del Espíritu Santo (d. 1736) with his *Cursus theologiae mystico-scholasticae*, which remained incomplete because of its author's death. This work put an end to the scholastic cycle of the Carmelite mysticism. At this point, mystical writing had arrived at so insipid a conceptualistic analysis that it was necessary to abandon it and look for new horizons of greater relevance.

### **Postscholastic Development.**

Once the scholastic influence had run its course, Carmelites were left with two possibilities: either to defend the past, selecting texts and writing new commentaries, or to reopen the psychological route, which had been abandoned when the second generation of discalced mystics turned from the methodology of St. John of the Cross toward Thomistic



scholasticism. Confronted with this dilemma, Carmelite spirituality both in the Ancient Observance and the Discalced Reform suffered a crisis of indecision, almost of sterility. Fortunately the modern era has seen the Carmelite heritage break free of the strictures of scholasticism and recover the vitality of its 16th and 17th century pinnacle.

### **Intermezzo**

The later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were disastrous for Carmel with a series of suppressions that brought both branches of the Order to the brink of extinction. Not only in Revolutionary France but throughout the Napoleonic empire the religious orders were suppressed and it was only in the 1830's and 40's that the Carmelites were allowed to regain their monasteries and take novices. This was not an environment that fostered the study or writing of Spirituality. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Carmel once more blossomed and with Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus it bloomed with all the vigor of its halcyon days of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Mystics.

### **St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (Thérèse of Lisieux)**

The publication of the journal of Thérèse Martin, known as Thérèse of the Child Jesus or Thérèse of Lisieux, (1873- 1897), marks a revitalization of the Carmelite Tradition and its advancement into the modern era, recognized when John Paul II declared her Doctor of the Church and referred to her as the Doctor of the Science of Love. Born in Alençon Normandy, the youngest child of a large family in which several siblings had died in infancy, Thérèse was surrounded with an extraordinary familial love from her birth. She was deeply affected by the

death of her mother when she was four years old and it seems to have opened a wound in her psyche that only God could salve. That hurt provided the path of entry for an extraordinary grace that would transform Thérèse and through her touch countless people in the century after her death. She had a profound awareness of the tender mercy of God, a tenderness and forgiveness that seems to be related to her memories of her mother. A precocious child, she received permission to enter Carmel at the extraordinarily youthful age of 15. She was described by the prioress as: "Tall and robust with a childlike face, and with a tone of voice and expression that hide a wisdom, a perfection, and a perspicacity of a woman of fifty .... She is a little innocent thing to whom one would give Holy Communion without previous confession, but whose head is filled with tricks to be played on anyone she pleases. A mystic, a comedienne, she is everything. She can make you shed tears of devotion, and she can as easily make you split your side with laughter during recreation." Two of her sisters had preceded her into the monastery, and a third followed after the death of her father. By all outward signs, there was nothing that should have marked her for the extraordinary impact she made in her brief life. Her spirituality, deeply rooted in expressing the Love of God through concrete acts of love towards neighbor, led her to a Christocentricity in which she lived out the death and resurrection of Christ in the midst of life's every-day occurrences. She recognized that true asceticism is not a matter of ferocious penance, but the far more difficult surrender of self-will. She instinctively practiced the prayer of the Presence of God, declaring that not three minutes could go by without her thinking of her beloved Lord. Diagnosed with tuberculosis at the age of 23, she entered into a period of great spiritual darkness for the last seventeen months of her life. This was a great trial of faith in which she confessed she was in such spiritual darkness that

she well understood the unbelief of the atheist. Despite the inner turmoil, her exterior manner was so cheerful and loving that not even her closest intimates knew the purgation through which she was going.

Thérèse would most likely have been forgotten to history except that her sisters had asked her to write down her memories of their childhood. Far from producing a collection of anecdotes, Thérèse related her memories as a narrative of the extraordinary grace that God had worked throughout her life. The journal, originally written in three different sections, was published the year after her death as *Histoire d'une âme (The Story of a Soul)* and became an outstanding spiritual classic of the twentieth century. Thérèse herself became the object of great popular devotion up until the time of the Second Vatican Council but just at the time that her popular devotion seemed to be waning, theologians began to look anew at Thérèse 's writings and interpret them as serious contributions to the literature of mystical theology. Modern editions of her autobiography, as well as her letters, poetry, and several short plays have been edited and published, along with the records of her conversations in the final months of her life. Today both Thérèse and her writings seem to be more popular than ever.

### **Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity**

Elizabeth of the Trinity (Catez) (1880-1906) was born in the district of Farges-en Septaine (Cher), France where her father, Joseph Catez, was stationed as a captain in the army. After her father's death 1887, Elizabeth's mother, Marie Rolland Catez, took Elizabeth and her sister to Dijon where the family lived in modestly genteel circumstances. Elizabeth was an accomplished pianist but chose to enter the Carmel of Dijon rather than pursue a career in music. Her choice

of vocation did not delight her mother who would have preferred to arrange a prestigious marriage. In accordance with her mother's wishes, Elizabeth delayed entering the religious life until she was 21. In Cannel she took the title: "of the Trinity" because the indwelling of the Trinity in the individual soul was a very important theme for her, a spiritual gift that she was already conscious of experiencing. Elizabeth would later write, "our soul is indeed heaven where God dwells, where we must seek him and where we must remain." Her time in Cannel was brief, she developed Addison's Disease and died in 1906. In the months before she died she wrote several small treatises: *Heaven in Faith*, *Last Retreat*, *The Greatness of our Vocation*, and *Let Yourself be Loved* (all 1906). Although written as private reflections, one for her sister, one for a friend, and two for her superior in Carmel, they provide a spirituality as uniquely profound as it is compact. Her letters, her diary, and her poetry has also been edited and published. Elizabeth had read Thérèse of Lisieux's *Story of A Soul* even before entering Carmel, and while she approaches many of the same topics, she does so from a distinct perspective and with a significantly different style. Elizabeth's work is marked by strong Pauline themes, at times having an almost evangelical flavor, indeed such an evangelical fervor that her writing has served as a bridge for many Protestants to enter the Catholic Church. Elizabeth understood the need for conformity to Christ in his suffering and death—a particularly poignant theme in a young woman who was herself terminally ill. In its silent surrender the soul is subject to the touch of the Holy Spirit so that consecrated to God's love it may become a "*Laudem Gloriam*" (Praise of Glory: Ephesians 1 :12). Elizabeth saw that to be such a "Praise of Glory" was her vocation.

## **Saint Edith (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) Stein**

Edith Stein (1891-1942) was born the youngest child in a large, prosperous, and orthodox Jewish family in Breslau Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland). Her father died when she was a toddler. An unusually gifted child, she briefly dropped out of school, but returned not only to finish basic studies, but to go on into academic levels that had previously been restricted to men. She began her studies in psychology, but switched to philosophy under the influence of Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, whose leading student and academic assistant she became. In 1916 she submitted her Doctoral thesis, *Zum problem der Einfühlung* (in English, *On the Problem of Empathy*). While still an adolescent, Edith had ceased believing in the faith of her family, but a series of experiences cause the young phenomenologist to move beyond agnosticism and reexamine religious ideas with her keen philosophical insight. She converted to Catholicism after reading the *Vida* of Saint Teresa of Avila. She desired to enter Carmel, but under the influence of her spiritual directors she instead took an active role as a Catholic intellectual and feminist in between-the-wars Germany. Her research explored the possibilities of a dialogue between phenomenology and Thomism. While she taught at a teacher-training college run by Dominican nuns in Speyer, she traveled extensively lecturing on Catholicism and modern philosophy as well as on the role of Christian women in the world. When the racial laws of the Third Reich made it impossible for her to teach or lecture, she finally received permission to enter Carmel. She entered the Cologne monastery in 1933. By her own admission, not being much good for housework, she was encouraged to continue her research and writing which she now applied to Carmelite themes, particularly undertaking a contemporary analysis of John of the Cross. In 1938 Edith and her sister Rosa, a convert to

Catholicism, fled to the Carmelite convent in Echt, Holland. This escape from danger proved only temporary and in August 1942 they were arrested along with monks, nuns, and other religious of Jewish blood and deported. Edith lived out her science of the Cross during her brief imprisonment, transport, and death in Auschwitz. Calm and recollected to the end, she spent her energy comforting the women and children targeted for extinction because they, like her, belonged to the race of the Messiah. Although Edith had lectured for years before entering the Carmel and had done considerable research and writing after entering, very little of her work was published before her death .. In addition to her dissertation, the most important of her works are, *Endliches und Ewiges Sein (Finite and Eternal Being)* and *Kreuzeswissenschaft (The Science of the Cross)* both published in 1950. Editions of her collected works have been produced in most modern languages in the final decades of the twentieth century. There seems to be a growing interest in her work and a real synthesis of her mystical theology is yet to be done.

### **Blessed Titus Brandsma**

Titus Brandsma (1881-1942) has been less studied than Edith Stein or Elizabeth of the Trinity because much of his writing has yet to be translated from the Dutch. Brandsma, a Carmelite friar of the Ancient Observance, mixed careers in academics and journalism. It was in the later role that he took a stance against Nazism that led to his arrest and eventual death at Dachau in 1942. However, it was in his distinctive academic career—he was on the founding faculty of the Catholic University of the Netherlands at Nijmegen in 1923 and later served as its *rector magnificus*—that he wrote and lectured extensively in mysticism, specializing both in the Lowlands and the Carmelite Traditions. Although he wrote extensively for both popular and academic audiences, he produced no comprehensive synthesis of his spiritual doctrine. Touring

the United States in 1935 he gave a series of lectures that, while intended to be more popular than scholarly, was the first attempt to present a historical synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality. It was published the following year as *Carmelite Mysticism: Historical Sketches*. Much of his work has only been edited and published since his death, and even more awaits translation to be more accessible to the world beyond the Netherlands.

### **Other Twentieth Century Carmelite Figures**

The rich spiritual treasures represented by Thérèse, Elizabeth, Edith, and Titus mark a definite advance of the tradition beyond its 16th and 17th century heritage. Their writings are only now being synthesized into a 20th century school of Carmelite Spirituality. Among other authors that should not be overlooked in that process is the American poet Jessica Powers (Miriam of the Holy Spirit, 1905-1988). There were many other Carmelites of the modern era whose lives testify to the depth of their spirituality as they served God by serving their neighbor in the midst of daily, but often extraordinary, lives. Most did not leave much in the way of written sources, but their biographies will be rich examples of the applied spiritual theologies-Pere Jacques Bunel, the Admiral Georges (Louis de la Trinite) Thierry d'Argenlieu, Bl. Raphael Kalinkowski, Bl. Hilary Januszewski, Bl. Teresa of the Andes, the Carmelites of the Mexican Revolution, the Carmelites of the Spanish Civil War, Bishop Donal Lamont and the Carmelites of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe. These are only the most famous. The modern era will provide as rich sources for Carmelite Spirituality as any era in the Order's past.