

**"Carmelite Mysticism Historical Sketches"** by Titus Brandsma, O.Carm. The Carmelite Press, Darien, Illinois, 1986.

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## Foreword to Mystical Sketches

by Blessed Titus Brandsma, O. Carm.

Titus Brandsma (1881-1942) earned his doctorate in philosophy at the Gregorian University of Rome in 1909. On his return to his province in the Netherlands, he taught his specialty to the Carmelite students at Oss. When the Catholic University of Nijmegen was founded in 1923, Titus was invited to join the faculty. Besides teaching his subject, he also lectured on mysticism, especially of the Low Countries. He initiated a photographic collection of manuscripts of medieval mystics which today constitutes a precious aid to students in the Titus Brandsma Institute of the University of Nijmegen. In 1932 Titus was elected *rector magnificus* of the University. His inaugural address, "*Godsbegrip*" (the concept of God), struck his audience as an experienced insight rather than a mere academic exercise and continues to appeal today.

Brandsma wrote extensively in newspapers and popular magazines as well as in learned journals, but produced no comprehensive works of organized reasoning. A lecture tour in the United States, in 1935, resulted in this modest volume of no scholarly pretensions. Nevertheless, it was the first attempt at an historical synthesis of Carmelite spirituality. Titus' interests were many and included Marian devotion, ecumenism, Frisian culture, education, and journalism. The last preoccupation was to prove the occasion of his death.

Of the attitude of the Dutch Carmelites to Nazism and its local variety, the Dutch Nazi party, there remains no doubt. All equally rejected the political tenets of the oppressors and some paid for their convictions with imprisonment and death.

The Dutch Carmelites in general reacted to the rigors of the occupation and war with humor and courage. In Titus Brandsma suffering blossomed into the perfection of Christian love. Among his Carmelite brothers Titus was universally admired for his tireless and varied activities, but even more he was loved for his cheerful spirit, willing helpfulness, and unassuming charity. That these qualities were evidence of a profound Christian maturity was proven by the dramatic ending of his life.

After the invasion of the Netherlands by the Germans on May 10, 1940, the Dutch hierarchy under Archbishop John de Jong soon came into open conflict with National Socialism. Catholics were forbidden under pain of excommunication to participate in party activities which violated Catholic principles. When the Catholic press was ordered to publish news releases and advertisements emanating from the Nazi public relations bureau, de Jong moved to counteract the directive. He asked Titus as spiritual director of the Catholic press to visit editors with instructions to resist Nazi propaganda. In making his request, the archbishop made no secret of the danger of the mission, which Titus equally understood. Shadowed by the Gestapo, he had visited fourteen newspapers before he was taken into custody on January 19, 1942. In prison at Scheveningen he replied to questioning candidly and calmly, openly admitting that he opposed National Socialism because it was irreconcilable with his Catholic faith. At the request of Captain Paul Hardegen, in charge of his interrogation, Brandsma put into writing why the Dutch people, and specifically Catholics, objected to Nazism. As a result of his questioning Hardegen reported to his superiors that Brandsma was dangerous to the cause and should be confined for the duration of the war.

At Scheveningen Brandsma's contemplative spirit turned his solitary cell into a haven of peace and joy. Happy to be alone with Christ, he spent the time praying and writing. To the long tradition of prison literature he contributed *Mim Gel en dagorde van een gengene* (My

Cell), and he even began a biography of St. Teresa of Avila, writing between the lines of a book. His often printed and translated "Prayer Before a Picture of Christ" [which] speaks the simple and humble language of a lover:

O Jesus, when I look on you  
My love for you starts up anew,  
And tells me that your heart loves me  
And you my special friend would be.

More courage I will need for sure,  
But any pain I will endure,  
Because it makes me like to you  
And leads unto your kingdom too.

In sorrow do I find my bliss,  
For sorrow now no more is this:  
Rather the path that must be trod,  
That makes me one with you, my God.

Oh, leave me here alone and still,  
And all around the cold and chill.  
To enter here I will have none;  
I weary not when I'm alone.

For, Jesus you are at my side;  
Never so close did we abide.  
Stay with me, Jesus, my delight,  
Your presence near makes all things right.

On March 12, 1942, Titus was transferred out of Scheveningen, ending on June 19 in the dreaded concentration camp of Dachau. In that hell the frail sixty-one year old Carmelite lasted little more than a month, being dispatched with a lethal injection on July 26. This is not the place to describe his heroic suffering; suffice to record his prayerful calm, his cheerful optimism, his support of his fellow sufferers, his genuine love of his hateful tormentors.

Survivors of those brutal years would become witnesses of Titus Brandsma's heroic virtue. On November 3, 1985, in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the Church honored Titus Brandsma with the titles of Blessed and Martyr.

*Joachim Smet, O. Carm.*

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Foreword and translation of Titus Brandsma's "Prayer" are excerpted from *The Carmelites: A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Vol. IV, The Modern Period 1750-1950*, by Joachim Smet, O. Carm. Carmelite Press, Darien, IL.1985.

## INTRODUCTION

The lectures on the development and progress of Carmelite mysticism written by the Rev. Titus Brandsma, O. Carm., Ph.D., formerly rector of the Catholic University of Holland and professor of the history of mysticism and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in the same school, will be doubly welcome. First, authoritative works on Carmelite life and history written in English are somewhat rare; second, the author by his many years of research and lecture in the matter discussed is eminently qualified to speak. The lectures are a development of the lecture given at the Catholic University in Washington on July 26, 1935.

It seems well to single out for comment a few points from the many important conclusions drawn by Father Brandsma. The first concerns the foundation of the Carmelite Order. Father Brandsma together with the early Fathers of the Church assumes that the Prophet Elias was the founder and inspiration of all eremitical and religious life. Whatever ideal other orders and religious may have added to those offered by the great Prophet of Carmel, the Carmelites have chosen to retain Elias for their ideal and teacher and have always striven to realise in their own lives the example set by him. They have never recognized any other teacher. They alone of all those who in the beginning strove to imitate the great Prophet, remain faithful to their first ideal and so have every right to claim the Prophet Elias as their Founder.

The second point refers to the spirit of prayer and contemplation of the Order of Carmel. The learned author points out that it is a mistake to point to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross at the beginnings of the Carmelite school of mysticism. These two saints were trained in the spiritual life and made their religious profession under the mitigated Rule of Carmel. They were, therefore, only continuing the tradition of the Order in which they had made their religious profession and were transmitting to posterity the spirit of Carmel imbibed from their parent Order. Thus the spirit of prayer and mysticism is not different in the two Orders of Carmel; rather it is the same, since one spring gives rise to the two streams flowing side by side.

The third point deals with the Marian character of the writings of St. John of the Cross, the Mystical Doctor. Some have criticised St. John of the Cross and have tried to show that he has neglected the Virgin Mother of Carmel in his writing whereas as a Carmelite he should have made much of her. Our author shows how St. John assumes devotion to Mary as common Carmelite heritage. It was as useless to enlarge on what was taken for granted as to enlarge on the fact that one breathes. He shows that St. John's doctrine cannot be conceived without devotion to Mary the Mother of God.

## LECTURE 1: IN THE SPIRIT AND STRENGTH OF ELIJAH

### Mount Carmel, Retreat of Contemplative Life, Characterised in Elias

As in daily life, so also in spiritual life, it is of the greatest importance to have a model of inspiration, an exemplar for imitation. Carmelite spirituality has such a model.

The Carmelite Order derives its name from the holy mountain of its beginning. In that eastern land where every mountain has its own great memories Mount Carmel has some of the most holy. Carmel is a name which is familiar in every part of the Catholic world; it is intimately known as no other, and its natural beauty seems to be exactly in keeping with its gracious associations. Its quiet outline may be seen rising above the waters of the Mediterranean and from its summit one may see the great plain of Esdraelon stretching away into the distance, where the contemplative soul looks down on the mystery of Nazareth.

Carmel is the natural retreat of the contemplative, and it is not unfitting that on its slopes should stand the Cloister of Carmel, the cradle of the Order. It stands above the turmoil of life, above the world's stormy sea; its solitude is beyond the reach of "life's fitful fever"; it is wrapped in the peace of God. Such a peace we naturally associate with Carmel, but it has other associations more stirring and more turbulent. The memory of the great spiritual warfare of Elias still clings to it. It was here he gathered together all Israel and flung reproach at their heads. "How long do you halt between two sides? If the Lord be God, follow Him." Here Israel heard his challenge in words of flame, as a burning torch. But here he was more than the Prophet of the sword, here he was also the first of a long line of those who would worship God in spirit and in truth. In his lifetime disciples gathered round him and learned from him the deep secrets of his prayer and communion with God. His double spirit passed to Eliseus, and from him to the school of Prophets, and so down through the ages, the life of Elias has been continued in these hermits who ever sought inspiration in their great exemplar.

When Europe was full of the battle cry of the Crusaders, "God wills it," and the Crusaders set out to recapture the holy places, Carmel was one of the first places to be won back. There they found the ruins of the old sanctuaries, and we are told some of them remained to restore the old life. From the narrative of John Phocas, a Greek monk, 1177, we know that one of the Crusaders of the West, St. Berthold, was instructed by the holy Prophet to collect together on Mount Carmel, those who were living the eremitical life there, and to unite them in community life; the year may be 1155. So the Prophet stands at the Order's beginning. For proof of this we rely not so much on historical research, as on the fact that his memory and life has left their stamp upon the Order's life. He has ever been the Order's great exemplar. Indeed, so permanent has been his influence that St. Jerome calls him "the father of all the hermits and monks." In his epistle to Paulinus (Ep. 58: Ed. Migne, P.L. t. 22, p.583), he makes reference to Elias, *Noster princeps Elias, nostri duces, filii Prophetarum*. Likewise, Cassian in his conferences points to him as the great example of all monks. Similarly the testimony of Phocas, already mentioned, is completed by that of James de Vitry who was Bishop of Jean d'Acre, and well known to the hermits. It was written in 1221. He tells us that many Crusaders remained in the Holy Land for the sake of their devotion, to sacrifice their lives to God in places sanctified by His life. Some of those, he says, after the example of the Prophet Elias, dwelt in the caves of Carmel near the fountain of the Prophet and the sanctuary of Saint Margarita. Is it not providential that the first

monks of the Order of Carmel, symbolising the imitation of Elias, drank the water from the fountain that bears his name?

Also we may mention here an old manuscript, the *Institutio Primorum Monachorum*, which contains the oldest traditions of the Order. It was probably written late in the 13th or at the beginning of the 14th century after the dispersion of the monks to the West, but was formerly ascribed to a much earlier date. It is a record of traditions much older than itself, and was meant to be a definite and permanent guide for the monks. In it we read that the guidance which the Holy Ghost gave to Elias and the promises made to him, must be the guiding principles in the life of the hermits on Carmel. The monastic life must follow the lines indicated by his life and experience. It must reflect his double spirit, the life of activity and the exercise of virtue in individual or social activity. This double spirit has a three-fold sense.

### **Double Spirit**

The first is the double portion of the inheritance of the Father, the portion of the first-born son, the portion of the privileged children. The Carmelites are the privileged children of the great prophet and ask from him the portion of the primogenitus. But only he who has the intention of maintaining the noble traditions of the house may ask this privileged portion. If we ask his double spirit in this sense, we have to be his first sons and to follow him as well as possible. Another sense is given to this double spirit: namely, the marvelous mixture of contemplative and active life in the great prophet. He was, above all, the great contemplative, but God called him many times from his contemplation to the active life and his place in the history of Israel is as one of its most untiring laborers. *Abiit autem inde in montem Carmeli*. He always returned to the solitude of the life of contemplation. So the Carmelites must be contemplatives, who from their active life always return to the contemplative as to the higher and better part of their vocation.

However, the double spirit of the prophet is spoken of in a third sense as the harmonious union of the human exercise of virtue and the divine infusion of mystical life; the union of the *via purgativa* and *illuminativa* with the *via unitiva*. It is in this third sense that the old institution of the Order has taken the double spirit of Elias and this double spirit we must ask of Heaven. Our institution must reflect his double spirit; the life of the exercise of virtue in individual or social activity, founded on a life of prayer, and the life of continual practise of meditation, crowned by active contemplation or prayer of simplicity and that other spirit unspeakably more exalted: the mystical, real experience of God, even in this life. It must be the union of active and passive contemplation, the union of human endeavour and the infusion of the mystical life by God. Our sufferings and sacrifices, our labours and exercises in prayer and virtue will be rewarded by God with the beatifying vision of His love and greatness.

So we may truly say that "the life of Elias is the shortest summary of the Order's life." But we immediately have to ask: What are the characteristics of this prophetic life?

### **Three-fold Basis of Elias' Life of Prayer**

When Elias was being taken away from the earth in a fiery chariot, Eliseus, his faithful disciple, begged of him the inheritance of his double spirit. In the mantle which he received and with which he covered his shoulders, Eliseus received the inheritance he had asked for. The Prophet's mantle was to him a symbol of an assurance, and through the miracles worked by this mantle his disciples understood that the spirit of Elias had descended on

Eliseus. And just as Eliseus walked in the spirit and strength of Elias, so his disciples followed him. It is the same spirit the Order has ever striven to continue in its members. It ever sets before them the ideal of the double spirit and gives the promise of a double crown.

### **Exercise of Living in the Presence of God**

To what degree of contemplation Elias was raised on Horeb, is an academic question. There are some who say he saw the Lord face to face as we hope to see Him in Heaven. All spiritual writers number Elias among the most favoured mystic seers. His experience on Horeb was a reflection of what he was to witness on Thabor, when the Saviour was transfigured and Moses and Elias were seen associated in His blinding glory. The Holy Scriptures say of Moses that when he descended from Sinai after his conversation with God, on his face was spread the brightness and glory of divine light, so that the Jews dared not look at his face. The same is not said of Elias, but we see him coming to the Jews, as if from another world, from the courts of Heaven, and declaring at his appearance, *Vivit Deus, in culus conspectu sto*. This is the foundation of his life of prayer.

This living in the presence of God, this placing himself before the face of God, is a characteristic which the children of Carmel have inherited from the great Prophet: *Conversatio nostra in coelis est* "Our conversation is in heaven." Elias was not taken up to heaven, but here on earth lived in heaven and stood with a pious heart before God's throne: "God lives, I am standing before His face." The words of the Archangel Raphael spoken to Tobias are reminiscent of the words of Elias. After he had accompanied Tobias under the name of Azarias and brought him safely on his journey, he revealed himself as an Angel of God. "One of the seven who stood before God." "I seemed indeed to eat and drink with you, but I use an invisible meat and drink which cannot be seen by men." This realisation of the presence of God is of the very greatest significance in the religious life.

We need not say that this practice of the presence of God is not confined entirely to the Order of Carmel. It is at the root of all spiritual life and though methods may differ, all spiritual writers lay it down as an essential element in religious development. But in Carmel it takes a special place. It is significant that one of the most widely known works on the practice of the presence of God was written by a simple lay brother of the Parisian Carmel. He was born in 1866 and died at the age of twenty-five. The book is a slight work containing four dialogues and sixteen letters of great importance. It was published a year after his death and soon afterwards translated into English. It has since been translated into nearly every language, including Esperanto.

In our own times Little Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is the great example of this exercise of the presence of God, expressing itself in her devotion to the Holy Face. This devotion was also always characteristic of her sister, St. Teresa of Avila. In many of our old churches we may yet see traces of this Carmelite devotion to the Holy Face. The picture is painted on the big keystone of the gable of the sanctuary of our old churches at Mainz and Frankfort-on-the-Main, looking down on the choir and surrounded by appropriate texts, reminding those in prayer that the eyes of God are always upon them and that they must look upwards to the Holy Face.

### **Love of Solitude**

But if Elias is the great type of contemplation, set deep in the heart of the ancient law, he is also a great ascetic. And in this characteristic we find a second foundation of his life of

prayer, which is his love of solitude, to which he always returns and to which he is sent by God. But before endowing him so abundantly God required great renunciations. "The great hermit," says St. Jerome, "the lover of solitude, is led into the wilderness by the spirit of God." There he understands the words of the Psalmist, *Sedebit solftarius et tacebit et levabit se super se*. "The desolate sets himself down there and holds his peace and lifts himself above himself."

We may see a third foundation of his life of prayer in his detachment from the world. If he is lifted up to God, it is at the price of sacrifice. "The Lord called him from his birthplace and from his own people." And as Our Lord after him, he tastes the bitterness of the lonely world.

God tried His servant in many and difficult ways. He demanded his cooperation, but above all he asked an unquestioning faith, absolute trust in God's Providence.

Detachment from the World, Including Mortification, Abstinence and Poverty

We may truly say that the life of high contemplation of the Prophet was not only founded on the practice of all virtues, but that this practice and exercise of prayer and virtue -- heroic virtue -- accompany and follow his visions and mystical graces. These mystical graces are a free gift of God, but God did not grant them without asking great and heroic virtue as a human disposition and preparation.

### **Combination of Liturgical and Contemplative Prayer**

But after all, prayer is the chief characteristic of the great Prophet. His life is steeped in it. So St. James teaches that he is the great example of continual prayer. And we see in the prayer of Elias a providential union of oral and liturgical prayer with the prayer of meditation and contemplation -- contemplation in its double sense, active and passive.

We may see in him an example of liturgical prayer, for the singing of God's praises was an important item in the school of Prophets. The word, "Prophet," in the ancient law had a wider meaning than we attach to it now. It was used to describe not only one who prophesied, one who had been given that special gift of God, but also one who sang the praise of God together with others, usually seven times a day. At an earlier period of Israel's history, we are told, Saul was among the prophets, not in the sense that he had the gift of prophecy, but that he joined in the singing of the praises of God in these distinct groups. Elias was the Prophet in all the meanings of the term. He had a school and disciples not in one place, but in many, and most probably led them in prayer at fixed times.

So we may say that liturgical prayer comes to us from a very ancient tradition, even though it is secondary to the deeper prayer of meditation and contemplation.

Our Order is not an Order of liturgical prayer, like the old Eastern Order of the Basilians or the Western Order of the Benedictines, but liturgical prayer has a special confirmation in our own Rite and must always hold a high place in our living with God. The Rule calls us together to the choir to say the Office in community, liturgically.

St. Teresa, in her love for liturgical prayer, would so impregnate it with holy thoughts, that it, too, in a sense, would become contemplative prayer, prayer of active contemplation. The



influence and attraction of simple and devout Carmelite liturgical life has always been great. More than one Carmel on the continent has been founded because of it.

### **Growth of Contemplative Life in the Desert by Eucharistic Food**

Very characteristic of Carmelite spirituality is its conception of spiritual life as a growing thing; and here the life of the Prophet gives another remarkable lesson. Like the natural, our spiritual life demands food. Holy Scripture tells us how Elias, on the strength of the mystical food ministered to him by the Angel, walked forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb. Here he was allowed to see God. Our spiritual life, and our mystical life desire the holy Food given to us by God in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

In the school of Carmel the mystical contemplative life is the fruit of the Eucharistic life. For the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the fountain of our life of prayer, the life of Elias provides us with a most striking type. The miraculous bread ministered to him is a perfect image of that Eucharistic food, in the strength of which we walk in life's journey here below.

The special cult of the Holy Sacrament has not been confined to Carmel, but we can say that it has always been a constant and important part of our Carmelite tradition. Our Carmelite Convents have in many instances been centres of Eucharistic worship. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was attracted to the Carmel of Florence by the fact that the Sisters received Holy Communion every day, a custom not usual in those days. To St. Teresa there was no greater joy than the opening of a new church or chapel as a dwelling for the Lord. It is prescribed by the Rule that all members of a Carmelite Community attend the Holy Sacrifice daily and that the chapel be in the centre of the cloister, easy of access at all times, and that the Canonical Hours be recited in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Being a mendicant Order, its churches and cloisters are plain and simple in their architecture, but in the adornment of their churches and altars poverty is not prescribed. This is a notable departure from the custom of other mendicant Orders -- from that of the Capuchins, for instance, whose rule of poverty extends even to the sanctuary.

Such in brief outline is the Eucharistic tradition of Carmel; with Elias we walk in the strength of that divine bread and since we would draw near to the life of God in prayer, we must be ever mindful of the Saviour's command, "Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you cannot have life in you." Just as the communion of Elias in the miraculous bread of the desert led him in his journey to the contemplation of God on Horeb, so too, the Holy Eucharist must lead us to the contemplation of His Holy Face. In the caves of Horeb God spoke to the Prophet by the voice of the gentle, whispering wind. The Lord was not in the storm nor in the earthquake, but in the gentle wind. So after Communion we must contemplate under the Eucharistic species and in the depths of our spirit; for now God passes.

### **Vision of the Mother of God Governing Carmel's Life of Prayer**

Special attention must be called to the vision of Elias on Carmel. This vision is the foundation of the Marian character of Carmelite spirituality

It was on Carmel's summit that the Prophet after sevenfold prayer saw a little cloud-bearer of the rain which would deliver the parched earth. It is not necessary to give an authentic explanation of this vision. Still I may say that many commentators of the Holy Scriptures have seen in this cloud a prototype of the Holy Virgin, who bore in her womb the Redeemer of the world. It is not the first time that a cloud was used as a symbol. In the wilderness a cloud covering the Ark of the Covenant was the sign of the presence of God. Numerous

circumstances in which this type of cloud is mentioned are applied to God's descent on earth and His dwelling among the sons of men. From the circumstances in which the Prophet, after his sevenfold prayer, saw the cloud rise above the sea, we may conclude that to see in it a prototype of the Mother of God -- a type of the mystery of the Incarnation -- would be in entire agreement with the prototypal character of the Old Testament; the more so, since Holy Scripture expressly mentions this vision in the life of a prophet who would be raised to such a high degree of contemplation. At all events this much is sure--and this settles the question for the definition of the guiding principles of the Carmelite life of prayer that in the Order this vision of Elias has always been seen as a prototype of the Mystery of the Incarnation and a distant veneration of the Mother of God. And it was because of this belief, according to the tradition of Carmel, that the old sanctuary dedicated to the Holy Maid was built on the mountain in the midst of the hermits' caves. In the devotion of the Order, in the school of Carmel, this vision has its own place, and it has been looked upon for ages as the favourite image by which the Order looks to her. We need only read the Canonical Hours of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to see the importance of this vision for the spiritual life of Carmel. In a special lecture we will say more about the Marian character of Carmelite spirituality.

### **Harmony of Intellectual and Affective Prayer -- Happy Mean**

Finally, we must note the providential combination of the two great visions of the Prophet on Carmel and on Horeb. These two visions are intimately connected. The last is the crown of the first and supplies what was not yet given in the first. While we admire Elias as he soars aloft in contemplation on Carmel, we must not forget that he had a human side as well and on this side he is accessible to the very least among us. He had called down fire on Carmel and rain on the parched land, yet Jezabel, unrelenting in her evil, held Achab and his people in her thrall. She was all powerful and eager for revenge. And Elias, overcome with fear and disappointment, poured out all the misery of his soul to God: "It is enough, Lord, I pray You, take away my life." In this connection we can hardly exaggerate the profound importance of God's revelation to Elias on Horeb. We should like to remark that the vision of Elias on Carmel bears the character of an enlightenment of the mind, an intellectual revelation, the disclosing of a mystery, the mystery of the Incarnation. It is true that in this vision on Carmel there is not wanting a certain affection or attraction of the will, for we see the Prophet, under its impulse, borne before Achab to the capital town of Samaria. But this attraction, this affection of will, is of little importance in this vision. Above all, it is the communication of a mystery. In the vision of Horeb, however, the Prophet felt the spirit of God. The first vision was, in the strict sense of the term, intellectual, the second the breathing of the spirit of God. The latter completes the former. After the first, the Prophet, even though his mind was illumined from on high, was still subject to weakness and despondency, and prayed that he might die. In the second, he is strengthened and consoled and at peace. These visions are intimately connected. So in the school of Carmel there is harmony between the intellectual illumination of the mind and the affective love of the heart.

While the schools of St. Bernard and St. Francis are schools of love, seraphic love, and the Dominican, intellectual, the school of Carmel achieves a happy mean, a harmony of both. Surely those who dwell in Carmel would have caught from the flame a spark of the love and zeal which burned in the great Prophet. Fire is the most expressive symbol of love. "I am come to cast fire on the earth." It is this fire which enveloped Elias when, according to the witness of Scripture, he was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Wrapped in that seraphic flame he is taken from earth. Carmel must ever feel that glow of its founder's zeal. It is the mark of the true follower of Elias. It burns in all Carmelite saints. Especially do we see it in

the soul of seraphic St. Teresa of Avila. The smouldering fires that burned in the soul of "this undaunted daughter of desires" is Carmel's greatest witness to the spirit of Elias. In these great souls have been fulfilled the Prophet's words which encircle the Order's escutcheon "With zeal I have been zealous for the Lord God of Hosts."

But the school of Carmel warns us, in its leading figures, even in the Prophet Elias, that we must never forget the great importance of the intellectual foundation of the contemplative life: the enlightenment of the mind, the exercise of all mental faculties. By the imaginative and intellectual meditation and contemplation we have to climb to the affection of love and to be set in fire and flame. Even the Mystical Doctor -- as we shall see later in a following lecture -- recalls the necessity of imaginative and intellectual meditation, because we cannot always soar into the higher regions of mystical life. And St. Teresa, insisting on the affection of love, leads her sisters on the way of imaginative and intellectual vision and meditation.

We should like to speak also about the apostolic character of the life of the great prophet, but his position in the Old Testament is clear enough to illustrate the zealous apostolic spirit by which he was led. Following this spirit also Carmelite life has always been apostolic. We will see in the next lecture and especially in the last the apostolic character of Carmelite spirituality. We mention this apostolate here to indicate that also in this life the life of the prophet of Carmel was stimulating and inspiring even to the highest ideal of the apostolate.

### **The Deep-Red Rose Clustering Over Carmel Symbolic of Elias**

In conclusion, we should like to see the great Prophet Elias in Carmel's garden like a red rose, and not only the great Prophet but also those who follow him, climbing (symbol of the exercise of virtue) along the mountain, through the caves and grottos of Carmel, interlacing it with a girdle of fire. These red roses are the symbol of ardent love that burns in Elias and his disciples. It is the most remarkable characteristic of their spiritual life. It is the fire by which, like the Prophet and St. Teresa of Avila, the disciples became seraphim. Yet, we choose that symbol of the rose -- the deep-red rambler-rose. I see it spreading over the whole mountain and setting it all aflame. The last flower we shall gather during these lectures in the garden of Carmel will be none other than the rose that bloomed in our own times and which trails around the mountain. That last flower will be the "Little Flower" who, shedding her petals far and wide, has developed to the utmost the symbol of the red rose.

May you all be like the red rambler-roses climbing along Carmel, burning in the fire of love like our great exemplar, Elias, scattering the petals of the flowers of your virtue, like the Little Flower, over those who live with you.

## LECTURE 2: THE HERMITS OF CARMEL

### Carmelite Crusaders

ACCORDING to the travel story of the Greek monk, Phocas, St. Berthold, "a monk white with age and invested with priestly dignity, came to Carmel in 1155, built a small chapel and collected ten brothers." He did not, however, give them a Rule, being unwilling to interfere with the customs of the hermits which among them had the force of an unwritten law. It is difficult to determine in what these customs consisted; we may see, however, a broad outline in two documents which doubtless embody these customs. The first is the Rule drawn up by St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem (fifty years afterwards), and given to St. Brocard, the successor of St. Berthold. It begins by declaring that it is building on foundations already laid and declares as its object the setting down in writing of traditions of life already long established. The second document is the already-mentioned *Institutio Primorum Monachorum*, which is a summary of the spirit and principles of life which obtained among the hermits. It is not less valuable even though it was written as late as the 13th century.

### Ordering to Contemplative Life in Solitude and Detachment

These two documents are remarkably alike in spirit and in the points they emphasize. Both would regard prayer as the essential life of the Order and they agree in the provisions they lay down for its preservation. The ideal they place before the early monks is one of solitude and detachment from the world, as a condition and safeguard for the life of prayer. Their dwelling places are to be in the deserts, apart from the busy life of the world. These places are recommended as most fitting to their seclusion, but aloofness from the world may also be achieved in conditions less remote from the world's busy life. But the Rule demands that the cloister must ever be a cloister and its provisions guarantee that atmosphere of peace and quiet in which the spirit may commune with God. Each one must have a separate cell, which the Rule regards as the individual's own particular sanctuary and others may not enter except for grave reasons. The cell is regarded as a place for personal devotion and intimate prayer. All the constitutions drawn up at different times have laid definite and particular emphasis on the cell as the sanctuary of the individual soul. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to kiss the walls of her cell, while she repeated the words ascribed to St. Bernard: "O blessed solitude, O only salvation," *Obeata solitudo, O sola beatitudo*. In Carmel there are no common dormitories and work is not done in common when it is possible to do it alone. When necessary, there is a common workshop, but the Rule insists that the work be done in silence. On the other hand, there are places where community life prevails. There is a common refectory and a common room for recreation. With these exceptions, life is lived as far as possible in the retirement of the cell. He who would attain to holiness and more fervent communion with God according to the spirit of Carmel, must love solitude and aloofness from the world. It is a peculiarity of the Carmelite Order that although one of the Mendicant Orders, living amongst people in the world and engaged in active life, it retains the greatest love for solitude and aloofness from the world and considers solitude and contemplation as the better part of its spiritual life.

### Necessity of Active Life

But the Order of Carmel is not only contemplative. The active life of the apostolate is not alien to the spirit of Carmel. There are times when the priests of Carmel must engage in the

active life of the church; when God must be forsaken for the sake of God. This was implied when the Order was given the status of a Mendicant Order. Henceforth its life must be mixed. Even the fiercest advocate of the contemplate life, Father General Nicholas Gallus, successor of St. Simon Stock, avows in his "*Ignea Sagitta*" that not only then (about 1275) but even before that time the hermits of Carmel, as circumstances demanded, left not only their cells but their cloisters also and descended from the mountain to devote themselves to the work of the active Apostolate. However, this was an exception, since the rule laid down that "The monks should remain in their cells or near them, day and night meditating on the law of the Lord." *Maneant singuli in cellulis suis... die ac nocte in lege Domini meditantes, vel in orationibus vigilantes, nisi aliis iustis occasionibus occupantur*, "unless they are engaged in other legitimate works."

### **The Dominican and the Carmelite Ideal**

In the mystical life, this appears as a contradiction of the ideal of the Friars Preachers: *Contemplata aliis tradere*: which according to the interpretation of St. Thomas represents the highest ideal of the spiritual life, the imparting the fruit of contemplation to others by active life. We must not regard these two ideals as contradictory. both ways lead to God and from both the faithful derive the greatest graces. These different religious ideals only manifest the more the superabundant variety of the Church's life.

"Mary hath chosen the better part which shall not be taken from her." So said the Lord to Martha -- Martha who was troubled with much serving, and who complained that her sister had left her to serve alone. Holy Church applies these words to Mary, the Mother of God; and the Order of Carmel, so dear to its heavenly Mother, vindicates for itself Mary's part in the spiritual life of the Church. We may truly say that the Contemplative Orders have ever had to meet the most serious hindrances in the life of prayer. Carmel, notwithstanding, has ever borne witness to the pre-eminence of contemplation. Inevitably, in almost all circumstances of modern life, the active apostolate makes its great demands on Carmel and then the Carmelite priests gladly adopt the motto of the Dominican Friars. They must root this activity deep in contemplation, for them its only source and warrant of fruitfulness. When this is necessary, Carmel will be honoured and blessed by such an apostolate. But it must never forget that the better part is contemplation-the active life must always take a second place. The first hermits of Carmel loved solitude. After the noise and tumult of battle, they withdrew from the world into the quiet of Carmel's caves, henceforward to devote their lives entirely to God. With Elias they had known the perils of the wilderness and hoped to find God on the Holy Mountain. But almost immediately we find them scattering over the world, founding cloisters and engaging in apostolic work. Nicholas Gallus might safely say they did it rarely, but they did concern themselves with work of this kind under the stress of necessity and it was not regarded as being contrary to the Rule.

### **Difficulty of Drawing Dividing Line**

It is difficult to say when that necessity arises, but the Rule does suggest limitations when it speaks of *justa occupatio* as a reason for deserting the life of solitude for a time. There have been times, especially in the first centuries of the establishment of the Order in the West, when urgent needs of the Church were neglected for the sake of the contemplative ideal. At other times the spirit of contemplation has been lost in too great activity. The combination of these two lives has presented a difficult problem even to St. Teresa, who in her reform finds it difficult to draw a dividing line. We find St. John of the Cross frequently leaving his cell to preach the Gospel to the poor. At the very beginning of the Reform, we find a majority of the reformed Order considering the work of the missions so urgent that

missioners were sent out to establish cloisters in the lands where the practice of the contemplative life was impossible. To those who were opposed to the missionary work. St. Teresa in her Book of the Foundation says: "In solitude, some may say there are fewer occasions for offending God and purity is more easily kept. But when obedience or charity bids us run the risk of occasions, love comes out far more clearly than it does in the recesses of solitude . . . Believe me, we make much greater gain and that beyond comparison, even if we commit more faults and suffer some slight losses" (St. Teresa, Foundations, Chap. V; Pourrat, 178).

### **Apostolate of the Contemplative Life**

But the principal point to remember is that the school of Carmel, while rating at its highest the cure of souls in the world, cannot forget that it is called to a higher vocation. Elias was called to a life of prayer in the midst of a life of intense activity, yet he is one of the greatest Prophets of the Old Testament. His life and prayer tell us that his prayer was the strength of his life. so the contemplative prayer of the Carmelite is also the strength of the active apostolate. The influence of the contemplative soul is not withheld from the apostolate. In the mystical Body of Christ -- we shall see that more clearly in the last lecture -- the prayers and sacrifices of the contemplatives represent an organ of high value. So there is no opposition of the contemplative life to the active. The former is the great support of the latter. The mystical life is in the highest sense apostolic. Without activity it has the greatest influence. St. Teresa of Avila, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi and especially the little St. Therese of Lisieux teach us the apostolate of prayer. Many Carmels are considered the real centres of missionary work, not because of their activity but because of their contemplative life.

### **Love for Mystic Life Characteristic**

It is remarkable that even in the first century of the foundation of the Order in the West we find the mystic life, as already explained, very clearly outlined and with it this distinction. Carmel thus takes her own peculiar place in the Church. Perhaps we may see in this special grace which the Order received in view of its mystical life, an affirmation of its vocation. The Order is privileged to honour as a model and example the great Prophet of the Old Testament and to regard his life as the expression of the life lived in Carmel's school. Upon this model Carmel built its own school which sees in contemplation the highest ideal. "All of us who wear the holy habit of Mount Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation; there is the place of our first institution, we belong to the race of the holy Fathers of Mount Carmel who in such deep solitude and in such entire contempt of the world, sought for the treasure, the precious pearl of which we are speaking. And nevertheless, I declare to you that very few among us prepare themselves to see the Saviour reveal it to them" (Interior Castle, Fifth Mansion, Chap. I).

The *Mater Spiritualium* and the *Doctor Mysticus*, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, are the great masters in the spiritual life of this school. They are the great examples of Carmel's mystic life and the most widely known. But beside these great outstanding personages, there is such a large body of mystical writers, men and women, that Carmel takes a front rank among the writers and leaders of spiritual life. The ancient history of the Order shows us that this special election to the mystical life revealed itself from the beginning and was the constant ideal of the Order long before St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross accomplished the reform which brought contemplation into such prominence.

## **Double End of Contemplative Life: Ascetical and Mystical**

In this school the mystic life properly so called is without reserve a pure gift of God. None-the-less, it is set forth as the aim of Carmelite life, as the glory with which God may crown our lives here below. This carries with it the implication that Carmelite spirituality must be concerned to produce these exalted dispositions of soul with which alone this free gift of God is compatible. It is true, however, that no dispositions, however perfect, may demand this gift as a right. It ever remains a free gift of God. On this particular aspect of the mystical life, there has been much discussion among the theologians and it is closely connected with the question, which has been answered in different ways, as to a special election or vocation to the mystical life. On this question we have widely differing opinions. Some lay great stress on the mystical life as a special gift from God and as such not the object of vocation. Others go further and say we may not even desire such a grace, nor pray to obtain it. In such a view there can be no preparation for the mystical state, nor any question of suitable dispositions; and although this school admits of "receptivity," still it declares that this receptivity weighs as nothing in the balance because God grants His gifts as He wills, nor can human effort increase or augment that receptivity. This is the school of the *Oratio Infusa*, in which the principal emphasis is on the mystical grace as a free gift. Holding a contrary position is the school of the *Oratio Acquisita*, which rather puts human activity into the forefront and sometimes in such terms as to imply that God, Who is not to be sur-passed in generosity, would be obliged to grant this grace to those who use every effort to make themselves worthy of it. This grace being the legitimate crown of the spiritual life, the fact that it is not granted to all is not a proof that He does not wish to share it with all men. but only that few have made themselves worthy of it.

## **Combination of Oratio Infusa and Acquisita: Happy Mean**

The school of Carmel, at least in its representative members, observes the happy mean between these two extremes. According to the ancient document concerning the Order's spirit, the attainment of this high state of mystical communion is put forward as the aim of all Carmelites and all are obliged to conform their lives to this lofty ideal, but at the same time the free character of the mystical grace is insisted upon. St. Teresa in her own masterly way describes how the life of grace is built on natural foundations. The life of grace even in its highest degree is ingrafted into the natural and under its impulse the whole human personality grows to its fullest maturity. She shows how human nature is created by God with a "susceptibility" for these exalted states of grace, but on the other hand the practice of the virtues and the active contemplation must precede, accompany and follow the mystical experience. That is why, after giving glory to God as the giver of all gifts, she lays particular emphasis on the practice of prayer and virtue. May I say how gratifying it is to me to put before you this idea of the spiritual life of the Order? It has been the constant tradition of Carmel. We find it in the beginning. It is the spirituality of the "Institution of the First Monks." The Carmelite life has a twofold end. We obtain the first by our toil and virtuous efforts, aided by divine grace. It consists in offering to God a holy heart, free from actual stain of sin, the other is communicated to us by a free gift of God, *ex mero Dei dono*, not only after death but even in this life, and consists in tasting in some way in the heart and experiencing in the mind the strength of the Divine presence and the sweetness of the glory from on high.

Carmel, unlike the children of our day, is not afraid of the mystical life. The spirit of the Order does not regard it as doing violence to nature but knows that nature in the last analysis is destined for such perfection. Nor is the mystical way the only way. Great sanctity may be achieved without mystical graces and favours. This is apparent from the lives of

many saints. It is enough for those on Carmel to live in God's presence, in loving humility, content with what the good God may send. Time and place are of little importance. Sometimes on earth the flower blooms in all its glory in the garden of God but most often comes only to bud. But in heaven all God's flowers will open in the glory of the Sun. If the good God, like a good gardener, brings some to perfection here, others hereafter, that is His own mysterious choice.

So again let us insist that the school of Carmel demands preparation, the exercise of the greatest virtue. Our lives must be ordered, oriented in the direction of the Order's aim.

### **Common Way: Characteristic Virtues**

In order to appreciate better in what this training consists, let us consider in brief three points emphasized by our Rule. The introduction reminds us that many of the things in the Rule are common to all who bind themselves by the three vows, to lead a life of perfection.

#### **Purity**

But it brings the Vow of Purity into special prominence. It is true that in the beginning, the Vow of Obedience was understood to contain the other two. Obedience is a virtue that implicitly contains all others. But among these virtues there is one which has a particular glory and the Rule singles out that of Purity to emphasize its excellence. Our service of God should be characterised, it says, by a pure conscience and a pure heart. The Order sees as its good exemplar the Mother of God, the Virgin of Virgins. In the clothing ceremony of the Carmelites, the white mantle is put on with the admonition that it should ever be a reminder of the following of the Lamb without spot.

#### **Recollection**

A second point emphasised by the Rule is silence and recollection as a necessary condition for a life of prayer. Active recollection, by which we put ourselves and keep ourselves in the presence of God, has always been regarded as the essential preparation for communion with God in the mystic life. Just as the Prophet did not hear the voice of God in the storm, but in the gentle breeze, so the heart of the spiritual man must not be shaken by the storm but must listen for God's voice in the silence of its own interior. The constitutions of the Order have always stressed this. To recover recollection of spirit has ever been the first step of all reform.

#### **Spiritual Armour**

Thirdly, let me remind you of a third chapter of the Rule, which recalls so vividly the crusading spirit. That particular chapter is full of the noise of battle. But it is no longer the battle against the Saracens, but against a more terrible enemy of the holy land of our own souls. It bids us buckle on a spiritual armour of six pieces. The first is the cincture of chastity, which must be put on in penance and mortification. By mortification is meant not only corporal penances but also the bending of our will to the will of God as the most direct way to purity of heart. In His Will, says Dante, is our peace. To unite our will with God's means a continual effort at self-conquest. So the Ritual speaks of the girdle as a chain which binds us and causes us to be led by another.



The second piece of spiritual armour, the breastplate, protects the most vital part of the combatant. Your breast must be protected with holy thoughts. They must fill your heart and strengthen it inwardly and defend it as with impenetrable armour. The cuirass of righteousness is the third piece we put on. It is difficult to walk in armour but facility comes with practice. We must wear our armour as true knights of Christ, not bring dishonour on our arms. We must wear our habit with the understanding that it marks us out as following Him, Who is God.

Then the shield of faith. Only a living faith can sustain us against attack. Without a living faith, our vocation is meaningless. Our faith is the source of all our power. It is the faith which gives us our life's purpose and direction. Half-faith can accomplish little. But a living faith is a creative and an unfailing source of strength and energy.

The fifth piece is the helmet of salvation, symbol of hope and confidence. The helmet protects the head -- with it we can walk with head erect and no fear can overcome us.

But armour is to protect us; we need weapons for the warfare. For a sword we have, sixthly, the word of God. It must be in our hearts and on our lips. All is to be done in His name. God's holy name is the watchword given to us by our Rule.

Through the parable of the two standards, St. Ignatius taught his disciples to see life in terms of battle; the following of the great leader for the greatest of all causes. The same idea is contained in the chapter of the Rule we have been considering. For if the spirit of the Order is characterised by modesty and simplicity, it also inherits the high and spirited chivalry of the Crusaders. In this there is nothing harsh and militaristic but it is the gracious gallantry of the true knight who lays his sword on the altar of his Lady to undertake in love and simplicity the most lowly services she may demand.

### **Carmelites, Busy Bees**

James of Vitry has compared the contemplatives of Carmel to busy bees. Over the great moors they fly in their quest for honey. Away from the dust and grime of life, in the cool and open spaces, they collect their honey-store. For worldlings it is an arid place and uninviting, but for them the desert blooms as the rose. In early autumn every little sprig of heather on these moors puts on its royal livery and the rough places glow from end to end in the purple symbol of penance. Deep in those tiny bells the honey lies. Is not this a perfect image of our lives? All the myriad sprigs, the simple duties of our daily round, done in the spirit of love and penance, bloom along the autumn moorland of our lives. They are rich with honey. So like the busy bees, let us build up our spiritual store from the actions of our daily routine.

## LECTURE 3: THE ORDER FLOURISHING IN THE HOLY LAND

### **Menaced by Mussulmen**

The attempts of the Crusaders to win back the holy places for the faith were begun with much enthusiasm. At first their attempts were successful but with the weakening of the first great impulse, the Arabs returned to the places from which they had been driven and only with difficulty were the principal places kept in the hands of Christians for two centuries.

In the 12th and in the beginning of the 13th century, the new Order of Friars of the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel had spread throughout the Holy Land and Syria.

It is impossible in this short review to give in any detail the history of the Order in the land of its origin, but from its rapid growth we may conclude that its beginnings were characterized by intense spiritual activity. The holiness of the principal figures stands out in bold relief and although we know only a few details of their lives, tradition records the veneration they inspired.

But difficulties were to come and some of the monasteries were threatened with extinction. Under the third General, St. Cyril, troubles increased and matters went from bad to worse. St. Cyril, a man of great faith and personal sanctity, saw the breaking of the storm of persecution. He was not dismayed and it is recorded that God granted him reassuring visions of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and of the future triumph of the Order and of the Church. So despite material ruin and desolation the Saint could still look with glad confidence to the Lord and be the support of his brethren in their time of trial.

### **Difficult Position**

But with the growing dangers and the ever increasing attacks of the Mussulmen, such confidence was not easy. One by one the monasteries were burned and the monks driven out or murdered. Very soon those Friars, many of whom had come from the West, were forced to consider returning to their native land. Some of them had already departed, for in the beginning of the 13th century we find foundations of Carmelite Friars in Cologne and other places. These were composed of the early fugitives who had been forced to abandon the East before the General Chapter on Carmel in 1237 finally decided that it was impossible to remain there.

### **Marvellous Transplantation of the Order to Europe**

The prophecy of St. Cyril was wonderfully fulfilled. In a short time, let us say within a space of ten years, the main body of the Order was transplanted from the East to the West. How quickly this change was brought about may be seen from the fact that although the great Mother House of the Order was still on Carmel -- the cradle of the Order's most venerable traditions -- it is at Aylesford in Kent that the General Chapter is held in 1245. This was the first General Chapter of the Order held in the West. At that Chapter, a General was elected who was to have a profound influence on the development of the Order in the West.

## **St. Simon Stock Raised Up by Providence**

This was St. Simon Stock. The magnitude of his achievements places him in the ranks of the great. In his lifetime the enormous work of adaptation to new conditions was accomplished and the Order given a form and direction which needed little alteration during the succeeding centuries. Providentially, need called him forth. His accomplishments were such as to demand not only energy but great sanctity. He was endowed with a capacity not only for extension but what is more important, for consolidation. We find him leaving England to take part in the foundation of cloisters in Cologne, Haarlem, Brussels and in several of the towns of France. He made many journeys to consult the Holy See concerning the affairs of the Order. After a life which was truly crowded with achievement he died in 1265 at Bordeaux. He had ruled the Order for twenty years. It is to his lasting merit to have established discipline and order in that difficult time and to have inspired an activity which did not do violence to the life of prayer and the original spirit of the Order. The adaptation of the Rule sanctioned by Innocent IV was so perfectly in harmony with the traditional spirit of Carmel, that St. Teresa accepted it as the embodiment of the true life of the order. It is this mitigated Rule and not the earlier one that St. Teresa uses in her reform. That in itself is a great tribute to the spiritual genius of St. Simon.

The coming of the Carmelites to Europe at this particular time was opportune. It was in the beginning of a new awakening which they were in great measure to share and influence. They brought with them an original element in this, that through adopting the status of a mendicant Order, they yet retained their deeply contemplative character. It is at this time that the apostolic character of the mystical life appears more and more. The example of the great contemplatives leaving the shelter of their monasteries to preach to the people is already familiar. Peter of Amiens is a notable example of this and later St. Bernard. Also the two great founders of religious Orders, St. Francis and St. Dominic, were soon to prove that the life of contemplation does not exclude the active life.

The contemplative element in the tradition of Carmel increased the difficulties of adaptation to the new environment. Hoping to pursue their old ideals, their first hermitages were founded mostly in solitary places, far from towns. But very soon the active apostolate called them out of isolation.

## **Mitigation of Solitude, Abstinence and Poverty**

When St. Simon petitioned Pope Innocent IV for a mitigation of the original Rule, the Pope appointed as advisers, two Dominicans, one of whom was the famous Hugo of St. Cher, the other William, Titular Bishop of Andorra. Two representatives were also appointed by the Order. It is probable one of these was Fr. Peter Swanyngton, the secretary of St. Simon Stock, and the saint's most trusted friend, whose name is involved in the history of the holy Scapular. The outcome of these negotiations was the permission to have their houses in towns and the admission of the Friars to apostolic work. Community life remained enjoined in the retaining of a common refectory and common liturgical prayer. Although still insisting on the strict observance of poverty, the Rule was slightly modified in conformity to the observance of the other Mendicant Orders, but more in the direction of the Dominican observance than the Franciscan. No individual may possess property and the superior may only administer it for the common good. The Franciscan Rule goes further, in this that their property is administered for them by others.

## **Form of Abstinence Discussed**

On the question of abstinence some interesting points were raised before the final decision was effected. From the report of the discussions, all were in agreement of the importance and necessity of abstinence as an essential of the Rule, but the representatives of the Order advocated abstinence from wine in place of abstinence from meat. It seems the same question had arisen between St. Brocard and St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in the drafting of the original Rule. The Carmelites confessed a prejudice in favour of abstinence from wine, as being more in keeping with the old Testament traditions of the Order. They, as St. Brocard before them, urged the customs of the Rechabites and Essenes, the prescriptions for the Nazarenes and for some of the Prophets of the ancient law. These ancient sects did not abstain from meat, nor could they do so, since they were obliged to eat the Paschal Lamb. St. Albert had chosen the form of abstinence from meat for his Rule with a qualified permission in case of grave illness or weak health. He based his contention on this that just as in the Old Testament the eating of meat was not forbidden because of the Paschal Lamb, neither should the drinking of wine in the New Testament be forbidden because of the wine of the Holy Eucharist. Still the Friars saw great difficulties in the practice of this rule. It was difficult to observe since a too benevolent indulgence to sickness or ill health might easily lead to laxity of observance. Abstinence from wine did not seem to involve such difficulties. Meat was regarded as an important element in the diet of those engaged in the active apostolate. But both the Dominican advisers and the Pope favoured the abstinence from meat and so it was reaffirmed in the Rule. But the very fact that such an alternative was proposed is an indication of the fresh initiative which characterised these early Fathers of Carmel and especially of their love for abstinence in a form that could be strictly observed.

## **Struggle to Maintain Contemplative Life**

The mitigation of the Rule did not accomplish all that was expected. In theory the double life seems to have been provided for; in practice, however, after a period of fervent progress, the active life seemed to destroy the contemplative. In the succeeding century this discrepancy gave rise to grave misgivings among the more contemplative souls. So serious had their doubts become that Nicholas, the Frenchman, the seventh General and successor of St. Simon Stock, and Theodoric, his successor, finding the responsibility too great, retired from their high office to live lives of solitaries. Nicholas was a true contemplative and gave expression to his ideals in language intense and impassioned. For him contemplation was the high and inalienable ideal of the Order and he warns his brethren against the active life. He saw only too well that many would lose their spirit of union with God by an activity not always necessary. With deep regret he saw that many, betrayed by a too absorbing activity, were wandering far from the spirit of the first Fathers on Mount Carmel. Yet although this may be true, the life of many Saints in the Order proves that the true spirit of the Order could still live and flourish under the new conditions.

## **Five Great Figures**

For predominant figures in the history of Carmel in the West, I need only point to five great saints who summarise in themselves the Order's life. Three are from the 13th century and two from the 14th. The great Saints, Berthold, Brocard and Cyril, are deeply contemplative souls, as one would expect of those who dwelt on Carmel. St. Simon Stock stands at the beginning of the Order's history in the West. In the 13th century, it is Sts. Angelus and Albert; while in the 14th appear Sts. Andrew Corsini and Peter Thomas. These are living proofs that the life of Carmel could still flourish in the West and it is remarkable that these

saints of the West are examples of the perfect harmony of the active and contemplative life. We are inclined to judge this transition period by the sharp denunciations of Nicholas Gallus. But this judgment is not just, as this period also had its shining stars.

### **School of St. Simon Stock**

The lives of these Carmelite Saints are a proof that contemplative and active life can be successfully combined and can lead to sanctity. They show us that religious were not unmindful of what constitutes the great essential character of our life in Carmel. It is because of this life especially that so many have asked admission to the Order. We must again emphasize the predominance of the double spirit in the period of transition. St. Simon Stock was great enough to be the founder of a tradition. He was founder of a school and his spirit continued in his disciples. I would here state my conviction that St. Teresa was not the founder of the school of Carmel, as is very often taken for granted. A study of her life shows that she built on ancient foundations. Contemporaneous with St. Simon Stock we find a mystical teaching which is in harmony with what St. Teresa was afterwards afraid to develop. It takes in her a more complete form, it is true, due to the outstanding religious genius of this great Saint, but it is not essentially new.

One of the great figures on whom St. Simon relied for the building up of Carmel in the West was Henry de Hanna or Henry Hane, an Englishman. He was a man who achieved fame not only in England but also on the Continent. He was St. Simon's great collaborator, and his influence was tremendous. In an ancient manuscript at Oxford, three sermons are preserved which in my opinion cannot be ascribed to anyone but Henry Hane. They are in a collection of Sermons of Eckhart and his school. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the mysticism of Eckhart was predominant in the German lands and the mysticism of Carmel especially in these lands came under its influence. In his works, however, Henry Hane avoids the tendency to excessive subtlety which characterises the works of Eckhart. He ever takes a middle position between the intellectual school of the Dominicans and the school of the Franciscans emphasizing more the affective method and the importance of the will. Just as in the mysticism of St. John of the Cross, the influence of pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite, is clearly seen, so also in the system of Hane we find the six degrees of the soul's ascent to God taken from the same source.

### **The Six Degrees**

The first degree is the opening of the soul to God: "Open to me, my beloved," says the Bridegroom in Solomon's Canticle. The second degree is reached when God -- and here is meant the Holy Trinity -- draws the soul up to himself and comes to dwell therein. God is born in the soul. Quoting from St. Augustine, Hane says that there is a re-birth when love and desire are united. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is light, love, joy and peace. Here there is already a departure from the intellectualism of Eckhart, in the insistence on the element of love as the means through which God is born in us. The third degree is the transformation of the soul in God. This takes place through the indwelling of light. In this light the soul sins no more and the beauty of God is seen in such a way that the darkness of sin no longer appears. The soul becomes oblivious of everything which is not God. It walks in the light as a child of light. *Gustate et videte*, "Taste and see": first. the mystical experience of God, and in its wake-illumination. First light breaks in the soul and then in this light the soul sees the source of light. But the soul must have this light before it can see. In this connection, Hane uses a figure, afterwards used by St. Teresa. "The soul must not try to fly before its wings are fledged." It must bear the yoke of Christ and feel how sweet it is, before it knows who it is who has laid the yoke upon it.

In the fourth degree God releases enormous energies in the soul and the natural faculties of the soul are elevated and become super-natural and deified. In the effulgence of its new light the soul becomes keenly aware of its own natural infirmities, but God draws it above itself and in the realization of its own infirmities, the soul understands ever more perfectly the omnipotence of God and His condescending love. In this way, to use St. Paul's words, the soul goes from light to light.

In the fifth degree there is complete union of the soul with God. God takes the form of the soul and the soul takes the form of God and is transformed in God. The heavenly light penetrates the soul entirely and in this heavenly light it sees itself. Air in the light of the sun appears no longer air but only light.

In the sixth degree not only does the light shine in the soul, but the soul is wrapped in the light. In the midst of this effulgence, the soul, like a precious stone, is pierced through and through with the brightness of the light and reflects itself in it and this light beams forth from all its facets. Now it is all light. The soul becomes translucent and a mirror of divinity, as Dionysius says of the Angels.

### **Ideas of Hane Familiar to St. Teresa**

Thus does Hane explain the coming of the Lord into the soul. He exclaims with St. Paul: "Rejoice, the Lord is at hand." St. Teresa is in remarkable agreement with Hane in many of the images which he uses; so much so that it would seem as if Teresa were familiar with his works. Like him, she insists in the first instance that we should open our souls to God. Acknowledging our sins, we should betake ourselves to God and being consumed in God, we should be cleansed from our sins and imperfections and be free to advance to His love. She also knows the image of the Bridegroom knocking at the door of our souls and waiting for admission. Remarkable also is the stress laid on the necessity of practising the virtues as a preparation, accompaniment and fruit of mystical life. They have in common the image of flying before the wings are fledged. By her also love is emphasised as a means of union with God. St. Teresa especially loves the image of the sun and its light and the image of the precious stone, the diamond, in whose inmost heart the light dwells, shining forth on all sides. Not only in the deepest meaning of the metaphorical language is there agreement but also in the description of the successive degrees of the mystical life. Henry Hane's description and St. Teresa's are almost identical. Also it is most interesting to note how both teach that the supernatural is built upon natural foundations and that the supernatural is the development of the natural potentialities.

### **Old Tree Flourishing Again**

So we see that the old tree, transplanted to new ground, maintained its growth. That growth was influenced, of course, by new conditions but it survived the storms and winters of its new environment. By its inner vitality and the care of the Heavenly Gardener, it struck its roots deep into the new soil. At times the storms tore off a branch here and there, and its life was threatened, but the old trunk could not be destroyed. It put forth new shoots and its branches spread wider than ever before. And now it stands, not the least among the noble trees in the great garden of the Church.

## LECTURE 4: THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY

### **Cloud Seen by Elias, Symbol of the Mother of God**

WE have already mentioned the pious tradition in the Order of Carmel that the Prophet Elias saw in the little cloud bearing the redeeming rain for the parched land of Israel a prototype of Our Lady, the Mother of the Redeemer, a revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Long before the Order became definitely established under St. Berthold, there was a sanctuary in honour of Our Lady on Mount Carmel. This sanctuary became the centre of the Order in its new form and the first members of the Order were called after it "the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel."

### **Name, "Brothers of Mary," Inspires to Devotion**

This gave ample scope to their piety and while they daily hurried to Our Lady's Chapel and before her altar performed their divine Office and meditation; while they led their lives of prayer under the very eye of their heavenly Mother, so to say, their devotion to Mary became more and more fervent and earnest. It was a wonderful dispensation of Providence that the first monastery of the Order should be built round a little chapel which had long been a centre of devotion to Mary. That dispensation of Providence enjoined on the Brothers the devotion to Mary as something intimately allied to their institution, and the name with which the neighbouring population called them after this sanctuary, stamped the former crusaders, who had laid down their swords on the altar of Mary, as Knights of Our Lady.

When the second General of the Order, St. Brocard, lay on his death-bed, he gathered the hermits about him to address them with some parting words of farewell and exhortation. The words he spoke to them excited the Brothers to honour Mary by deeds tried in virtue, "You are called," he said, "Brothers of Our Lady. Take care that after my death you prove worthy of that name." Evidently he had during his life, more especially during the twenty-five years of his office as General, always insisted on this. He had even looked to it that they should remain worthy of that name. His generalship, therefore, must have especially fortified and confirmed that devo-tion in the hearts of his brethren.

### **Devotion to Mary Confirmed in Europe**

When Pope Innocent IV admits the Order to the West and adapts its Rule to fit the changed circumstances, he retains the name, Order of the Brothers of Our Lady, and confirms it officially. With the expansion of the Order in Europe this special devotion to Mary will be its beloved characteristic, a title of which the Brothers are proud and which they put forward time and time again when they have to defend their rights.

Pope and Bishops, even in that first century, affix indulgences to the use of that name and moreover endeavor to grant to the Order a distinction by which it may more easily be recognized. In Northern Europe, we see this being done by the Bishop of Cologne in 1271.

The tradition of the first Generals was splendidly maintained by the man of divine election, St. Simon Stock, who figured so largely in the Order's removal to Europe. The Order has preserved two fine prayers of his which he is said to have recited many times each day. Our

Order still recites them daily in imitation of the Saint. The first is the Ave Stella Matutina ; the second is the beautiful Flos Carmel i. This latter was his favourite prayer.

He realised that devotion to Mary was a feature of highest value to the Order, that the title must render the Order loved by the People, and that if Our Lady should confirm the title by special privileges the future of the Order would be assured. The Pope had already favoured the Order, but their authority had not succeeded in breaking entirely the resistance the Order experienced when settling in Europe. However much the Saint appreciated the privileges of the Popes, having recourse again and again to the Holy See, he nevertheless appealed incessantly to the Holy Virgin with unswerving faith, convinced that she would not withhold her special help and protection from the Order which, with the Pope's approval, was called the Order of her Brothers and which tried to live in accordance with this title.

Times were hard. We are told so not only in the life of St. Simon Stock, but also an account of William de Sanvico written at the end of the 13th century emphatically confirms this. Not only the local clergy, but even the bishops did not realise the necessity of a new Mendicant Order and did not see in what respects this Order was distinguished from the Orders already approved. The foundation of new monasteries in the various countries was everywhere attended with serious difficulties. Not only was the Order threatened from within by the loss of her vital, original power through the difficulty of attuning itself to new circumstances and through the increasing demands of the active life, but from the outside also there were enemies who had to be taken into account and whose resistance was not so easily broken, even though the Brothers presented commendations of the Pope and of Bishops and Prelates who were kindly disposed towards them.

In that distress the Saint again had recourse to Mary and his confidence was not betrayed. How could it be otherwise? In the night of the 16th of July, 1251, Mary appeared to the General of the Order, who was in Cambridge at that time. He was kneeling, as was his wont, far into the night before the statue of Our Lady; from his lips flowed again the devoutly insistent Flos Carmeli. He begged privileges for the Order. In answer to his fervent prayer, Our Lady appeared in the habit of the Order and pointed to it as a pledge of her special protection. Whosoever should die in that habit should not suffer the eternal fire.

This apparition left the Saint enraptured with joy. The Order's habit, hitherto a token of devotion to Mary, now became likewise a pledge of her special protection. The disclosure of this motherly promise in a short time modified the attitude towards the Order. People vied with each other to beg the Order's habit, either to live or to die in it. In receiving the habit of the Order they secured Our Lady's motherly help in those times which were so rich in devotion to Mary. A stronger confirmation of the Marian character of the Order was hardly imaginable and very soon, therefore, it was regarded pre-eminently as the Marian Order.

It is quite certain that the title became more and more known and recognized, and especially in the Netherlands, where the stock-title of the Order became "Our Lady's Brethren." By that name the Carmelites are usually, nay, nearly always called. This quite outstanding name of Brothers of Our Lady led to a rapid extension of the Order, while at the same time many people living in the world received the habit of the Order to participate in its privileges. In the Order of Carmel, the Scapular supplied the whole habit. Hence, the stamp of Mary was put more and more on the Order.



## **Our Lady Especially Venerated as Mother of God**

We ought, however, to discuss for a moment the character of the devotion to Mary. This devotion has marks and traits of its own in the Order of Carmel. Whereas in the Order of St. Francis of Assisi Mary's Immaculate Conception is especially regarded, in our own Order attention is focused upon Mary as Mother of God. As such she had already been foreshadowed in the little cloud above Carmel; as such she was honoured on Carmel; and as such she has ever been invoked in our Order. When the first members of the Order looked out from their high mountain towards the country, their looks met first of all Nazareth, and this little town recalled to their minds the coming of the Angel to Mary and the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation in the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. The contemplation of this mystery has led to a twofold devotion to Mary, which we had better describe as an imitation of Mary, gradually deepening into a closer union with her. We may see the same in the Imitation of Christ in the 14th and 15th centuries, which matured in the 16th century into a close union with Christ. One should not think of the imitation without thinking of the union, nor of the union without the thought of the imitation. Both flow into each other, but in one period the former is more prominent, in another more attention is paid to the latter. One should rather see both trends blended together into one harmonious whole.

### **Mary Before Us as our Example**

The imitation of Mary, the most elevated of all creatures, set as an example before us by God Himself, shows Mary as the pattern of all virtues. She is the mirror in which we should ever watch ourselves, the Mother whom her children ought to resemble ever more.

A remarkable treatise on this has come down to us in the collection of old manuscripts of the first part of our Order's history, collected by the Spanish Carmelite, Philippus Riboti, and printed in the beginning of the 16th century. How old this utterance of devotion towards Mary may be cannot be solved satisfactorily. At any rate, it is older than the end of the 14th century, when it already belonged to old manuscripts. Father Gabriel Wessels ascribes it without any hesitation to the famous English Carmelite, John Baconthorpe, who lived in the early part of the 14th century.

The author gives a brief outline of the Rule of the Order and concludes that the Carmelite, in order to observe this Rule, has only to look at the example of Our Lady. He thinks that our Order is fully entitled to bear the name, Order of Brothers of Our Lady, seeing that Mary already practised before us everything that is prescribed in the Rule. Then he praises her obedience, purity and apostolic poverty. Just as the Order's Rule commanded, she had chosen her places of residence far from the turmoil of the world: in the loneliness of the little house of Nazareth, in the solitary cave of Bethlehem, in the poverty of Egypt. As to the observance of silence, he points out how few words spoken by Mary have been noted down in the Scripture. And thus he goes on with his examples. Sometimes his parallels are somewhat farfetched, but on the whole his explanations are in keeping with the words and intentions of the Rule. All these facts of Mary's life are pictured to the Carmelite in order to show him how he follows Mary's life closely by observing his Rule.

### **Mary in Us as Living Through Us**

There is, however, yet another profounder idea in the devotion to Mary on Carmel. It is based on the former indeed, and we cannot say that it was unknown in the first stages of our Order's history, even though it was more prominent in later times. I have called it the

union with Mary. If we wish to conform ourselves to Mary in order to enjoy more fully the intercourse with God, by following her example, we should obviously be other Marys. We ought to let Mary live in us. Mary should not stand outside the Carmelite, but he should live a life so similar to Mary that he should live with, in, through, and for Mary.

Even in the Middle Ages, in the first period of the Order's history, the idea was propagated that we should be serfs of Mary; in those days, even a stronger term, "slave," was used. In the 18th century, Blessed Grignon de Montfort drew attention again to this most vigorous Marian devotion. He wrote a work on True Devotion to Mary but it remained hidden during his lifetime and even for years after his death. It was not until 1842 that it was discovered, published and spread to all countries. It is a glorious utterance of Marian life. However, it is not new. Not only did the idea exist even in the Middle Ages, but also in later times it was brilliantly elaborated in the mystic school of Carmel. The admirers of the True Devotion to Mary by Blessed Grignon de Montfort admit willingly that the Saint had a remarkable prototype in the mystic writings of one of the dominant figures of later Carmelite mysticism, the Provincial of the Dutch Calced Carmelites, Michael of St. Augustine (Ballaert), in the middle of the 17th century. His treatise on Devotion to Mary was printed two years before Blessed Grignon de Montfort was born and was reprinted during the latter's life in Latin and Dutch.

As he sees in Mary the Mediatrix of all graces, he says that just as the grace of God or of the Holy Ghost, communicated to those who are susceptible of it, makes them active and excites divine life in them, so all graces, received through Mary and the spirit of Mary, will excite in us a truly Marian life. He wants the spirit of Mary to dwell in us so that we all may live in that spirit. As we should live in God, work and labour in Him, live and die in Him, so we can live in Mary because of the intimate union of Mary with God and because of her election to the office of Mediatrix of all graces.

### **Carmelite Another Mary**

However beautiful the description of the devotion to Mary in the works of Fr. Michael of St. Augustine may be, there is yet another representation of that devotion living in the tradition of Carmel, which in the abovementioned work is indeed touched upon but not elaborated. Still, in order to sound the deepest depths of the school of Carmel, it is necessary to see its characteristic features. We should attain similarity to Mary, especially in that we recognise her as the highest perfection which human power by the grace of God has attained. This perfection can also be developed in us to a considerable extent, if we reflect ourselves in Mary and unite ourselves to her. This ought to be the aim of our devotion to Mary, that we be another mother of God, that God should be conceived in us also, and brought forth by us. The mystery of the Incarnation has revealed to us how valuable man is to God, how intimately God wants to be united to man. This mystery draws the attention of our minds to the eternal birth of the Son from the Father as the deepest reason for this mystery of Love. In the celebration of the three Holy Masses on Christmas, the birth from the Father is first celebrated, secondly from the Holy Virgin Mary, thirdly God's birth in ourselves. This is not done without significance and this threefold birth must be understood to be a revelation of one eternal Love. It should be ever Christmas to us and we should always remember that threefold birth as phases of one great process of love. Mary is the daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son and Spouse of God the Holy Ghost. In her that threefold birth has been realised. We also have been chosen by the Holy Trinity for a dwelling, to share the privileges which we admire in Mary, but which God is willing to bestow on us also. Seen in this way, I should like to say that "the mystery of the Incarnation is another summary of Carmelite mysticism, Carmelite spiritual life."

## **Sunflowers in the Garden of Carmel**

The devotion to Mary is one of the most delightful flowers in Carmel's garden. I should like to call it a sunflower. This flower rises up high above the other flowers. Borne aloft on a tall stem, rich in green leaves, the flower is raised yet higher from among the green foliage.

It is characteristic of this flower to turn itself towards the sun and moreover it is an image of the sun. It is a simple flower; it can grow in all gardens and it is an ornament to all. It is tall and firm and has deep roots like a tree. In the same way, no devotion is firmer than that to Mary. The fresh foliage, the green leaves point to the abundance of virtues, with which the devotion to Mary is surrounded. The flower itself represents the soul created after God's image in order to absorb the sunlight of God's bounty. Two suns shining into each other, one radiant with an unfathomable light, the other absorbing that light, basking in that light and glowing like another sun, but so enraptured by the beams of the Sun which shines on it, that it cannot turn itself away from Him, but can only live for Him and through Him. Such a flower was Mary. Like her, so may we, flowers from her seed, raise our flower-buds to the Sun, Who infused Himself into her, and will transmit to us also the beams of His light and warmth.

## LECTURE 5: A NEW DAWN

### Foundation of Carmelite Nuns Increasing Number of Contemplatives

The Benedictine Abbot, Trithemius, calls Blessed John Soreth, "a mirror of monastic life, an honour and glory for the Order of Mount Carmel, a reformer such as the future will seldom see, absolutely bound to God and the furthering of his Order, in contemplation and prayer."

The Dominican, Magister Rolandus Briso, praises him at his election as General, 1451, as the most worthy priest of God's church, and Father Brugman, a Franciscan, although loving his own Order, exclaimed: "Father Soreth, firm leader, light and prop not only for his own Order but for all mendicants. O immortal God, how I wish the Order of Friars Minors had received from Thy bounty such a governor. How our affairs would prosper, how my beloved Order would grow and flourish."

Indeed, he was God's man for our Order in this difficult age, and above all things, elected to give life to so elevated an institution as the Order of Carmelite Sisters. St. Teresa says that God always grants special grace to the founders of an Order. They have to give so much that unless they themselves have richness and affluence of spiritual goods, they cannot share with those whom they have to lead and support.

Was there still another intention, besides that of letting a new group of souls partake in all the gracious privileges of the Order of Mount Carmel? I will have to answer this question in the negative and history confirms my statement. No, the object was not merely to swell the numbers, but to let thousands of women share in what thousands of men enjoyed in the Order.

It cannot be denied that through contact with the world the Order had lost much of its original fervour, in spite of having as its head a man who had no peer in his age and in spite of the fact that the Order numbered among its ranks several hidden saints, whose holiness time has revealed and the Church confirmed. Portugal had a Blessed Nonius, the father of the royal house of Braganza, who became a lay brother in the Carmel of Lisbon. Italy had an Angelus Augustinus Mazzinghi, the chief instrument of the Italian reformation; a Blessed Bartholomaeus Fanti and a Blessed Baptista Mantuanus, chief actors in another North-Italian reformation; the blessed Avertanus and Romaeus, pious pilgrims dying on the way from home and revered as saints in Luca; Blessed Jacobinus, a lay brother, a miraculous example of obedience. But the list would grow to an inordinate length if I called to mind the names of all those of this age whose memory is blessed for the sanctity of their lives.

We may say that on the one hand the sanctity of many of its members earned for the Order new graces and favours from God: on the other, that the institution of the Sisters was a free and entirely voluntary gift conferred by God on the Order. Blessed John Soreth put a high value on this institution as the Sisters through their stricter contemplative life could supply in the Order what the Fathers, because of their growing activity in the world, not precisely forgot, but put more or less into the background, in spite of the fact that it was a salient characteristic of the Order.

Not only was the Community of the Order increased by the access of new members, so essential to its being, but the mystical God-bound life received at once a great number of new aspirants to its delights. A large number of saintly women joined the Fathers to

emphasize yet more the contemplative element in the Carmelite vocation. Yet we should not conclude that by this displacement the Fathers left contemplation and its joys to the sisters entirely -- the life of the Bl. John Soreth himself shows the contrary. As before, the contemplation of the Law of God remained the chief aim of the Order, but there is no room for doubt that the increasing active life often left the Fathers little time to devote to contemplation and the fullness of a mystic life and that it distracted them from this high ideal.

The institution of the Carmelite Sisters as a second Order in an organization that from then onwards should contain both men and women gave the assurance that the first and highest aim of the Order was henceforth to be worthily striven after. The Sisters were not only called upon to supply what the Fathers in the stress and trouble of pastoral duties in the world were likely to forget, but they are called upon to do even more. Their service was to strengthen and confirm the mystical character, to make it more brilliant than ever.

Being much stricter in their seclusion from the world, they could easily occupy themselves with more intensity with God and God accordingly rewarded their intercessory efforts. They were, so to speak, the crown and glory of the Order. They proved that the most blessed thing on this earth, the contemplation of God, was again Carmel's own. They were an untiring group of women who considered it their vocation to be a Mary in the solitude of their convent, a Mary who chose the better part, which should not be taken from her.

Thus, not only was a formidable shortcoming made good, a telling want filled, but there was also a positive gain to be set down because the Order now again fulfilled its calling in the greater part of its members. It is best to try to see all things in a positive light and the surety of the attainment of its set purpose, be it only in a restricted number of its members, must be called an inestimable gain.

So we welcome the Carmelite Sisters of Geldern and of all con-vents that came after, with unmitigated joy. We see with our mind's eye the interminable procession of Sisters as so many fellow soldiers, and successful ones, for the ideal of our Order. Together we feel stronger and safer; with them we may go through the world sharing the same ideal. Generally, the Fathers are called upon to keep the memory of this ideal green in the souls and hearts of the Sisters; conversely, the example of the Sisters will stimulate the Fathers to a more complete striving after their mutual ideal. When Holy Scripture says that brother aided by brother is strong, like a fortified town, how strong is the Order, how strong the brothers, now that they see at their side, since the founding of Geldern, this numberless host of Sisters. It is as if the vision of the prophet Eliseus displays itself before my eyes, as if I see the Order surrounded and enclosed by a numberless armed host who banish the fear from my heart that the spirit of this world will one day drag them down.

#### **Frances d'Amboise and Her House. Example of Observance.**

The convent of Geldern did not long remain the only one. The foundation of many convents and religious houses in Belgium, in the Northern provinces of Holland and the Northern part of France followed after. A little later they sprang up in Italy and Spain as well. A very favourable circumstance, such as Our Lord often allows to happen at the beginning of an Order, occurred in the north of France. It was the entrance into the Order of a saint who drew much attention to the new Order and made it known in wider circles. I refer to Frances d'Amboise, Duchess of Brittany, who scorned all earthly love after the early death of her husband, and completely dedicated herself to Our Lord. God had intended the ways of Blessed John Soreth and Frances d'Amboise to cross and the two saintly souls at once

understood each other. Notwithstanding all opposition, even of the royal house, Frances entered the Order and received the veil at the hands of John Soreth. Her example attracted many followers and soon the community where she had been received had grown so large that a second house had to be founded. This house, Les Couets, near Nantes, came under her direction only because the Pope commanded her under Obedience -- on no other account could she be moved to accept the leadership. Under her direction this place became known for its heroic virtue and God rewarded it by many a mystical experience. For long years it was looked upon as the prototype of Carmelite convents. Not only during her lifetime, but many years after, it maintained its splendid reputation. When in later times St. Teresa, contemplating a stricter observance of her Rule, as she writes in one of her books, thought of going to a convent in the North where the Rule was better observed and which flourished in an exceptional way, it is thought that she meant the convent of Nantes, set on this path of virtue by Blessed Frances d'Amboise.

### **Explanation of the Rule. Solitude in Interior and Exterior Cell**

Blessed John Soreth, also wrote, as an aid to his attempts at reformation, an exposition of the Rule after its new mitigation in 1431. It is worthy of note that Bl. John Soreth founded the Carmelite Nuns under this mitigated Rule and that the observance of this Rule brought the Sisters to the highest heights of mystical life and the greatest perfection. We can in some chapters see what was foremost in his mind when he founded the Carmelite Nuns. It strikes us at once that he is lavish in his praise of solitude and the high value in sanctifying the appointed cell. He makes a play on the Latin word, *coelum*, and points out how the fervent intercourse with God in the silent cell is found to life the mind to God. But he at once distinguishes between an internal and an external cell. The latter is the means of communing as much as possible with God; to know Him as present. Besides he indicates that the cell must be a positive good, not only to keep us free from the world and its shortcomings, but above all to bring us nearer to God, to give us peace and quiet of heart and total surrender.

### **Threefold Subject of Meditation**

This treatment of contemplation, to which the life in the cell must be primarily devoted, is especially noteworthy. He distinguishes a threefold meditation and calls special attention to all three forms.

In the first place, he proposes the admiration of Nature, then the reading of the Sacred Scriptures and finally an introspection of our own lives. These three kinds of contemplation he does not regard as necessarily connected but rather as subjects deserving a separate treatment in various hours of meditation. Only now and then they will have to be retarded in their relation to each other.

Admiration for the wonderful works of God is the very first thing to which he calls our attention. If we call up these feelings of admiration, the question as to the secret designs of God, why He created all this, forces itself upon our minds and from this problem we shall deduct and understand the intention and the meaning of all creation.

### **Six Steps of Meditation on Holy Scripture and Books**

The second form of meditation is reading the Sacred Scriptures and spiritual books. Here as well, he distinguishes various steps by which we can mount upwards: (1) Primarily we must read to get to know truth and to extend our knowledge of heavenly things. Love for this

knowledge must urge us to take up Holy Writ and edifying books. (2) Not only must we read to know, we must let ourselves be caught by truth, we must invite it to work its influence upon our minds by mentally pondering the words. Only then will our reading be not a barren knowledge but a power to lift us up and support us. (3) Truth should not be something that only illumines our mind and satisfies our craving for knowledge; it should be a motive power lifting us above ourselves, not keeping us shut up in our own minds. (4) The fourth step is not to remain inactive, but to turn that which we have read over and over in our minds, to combine it with what has been read or heard before, that it may grow into a living whole, giving a certain direction to our acts. (5) After we have assimilated it, we must again make it the subject of our contemplation so as to find joy in the possession of truth. (8) This contemplation should vivify our love for God's laws, should deepen our sense of that same law and our sense of God's grace, so that we may be inclined to do those things that, though not obligatory, yet tend to God's honour and glory and which we ought to do if we truly love God.

This love for the divine law and the glory of God will in the end bridle our passions and, ever freer and less hampered by our evil inclinations, we shall cleave to God and serve only Him.

### **Six Steps of Meditation on Ourselves**

The third form of meditation, the inspection of our own life, also calls for a six-fold explanation.

It has, to start with, always a double aspect, an inner and outer way of approach. We must keep our conscience spotless so that we always can account for our acts before God. Yet externally we must ever think of leading an exemplary life in the eyes of our neighbours. We have been placed here among our brethren by God to strive together toward the high ideals which He placed before our mind's eye but unless we guard jealously the purity of our conscience, we cannot gather merits internally.

The second point is a most perfect knowledge of ourselves. We must not only know what we are doing but we must also account for the motives which prompt our deeds, the inclinations to which we are subject when acting and try to find out where they are able to lead us. Secret inclinations are to be revealed before our own minds and above all the end to which they tend should be distinguished. This knowledge of ourselves, of our deepest being, though it is difficult, is absolutely necessary.

This will give, in the third place, a fixed direction to our life and show us the road along which we can most easily make progress. Our successes, as well as our defeats, should be subjects of meditation, so as to evolve at the end the most perfect schemes for success in the campaign of life. What we intend to do should not be left to the inspiration of the moment but our whole life should be planned beforehand in such a way that we are sure of victory. Many people work and labour and achieve many things which perhaps appear meritorious in the sight of others, whereas they are not keen on searching out what is asked of them for their own welfare and improvement.

A fourth introspection makes us see over and over again what we have undertaken in choosing this life which we live by our vows and by the orders of our superiors. The obligatory acts should always have precedence over such deeds as we perform of our own free will. Naturally we should not restrict ourselves to meeting only the obligations; charity should urge us to go beyond this; but never should such free acts be undertaken at the cost of duty.

The fifth point is more or less a warning. It goes without saying that in those meditations which are the result of the review of our life we should neither undervalue ourselves so that we too easily despair of attaining our goal, nor overrate ourselves and attempt too much. There are hazards on both sides and we are to keep on the middle of the road.

Blessed John Soreth concludes with a sixth consideration which forces us to shut our eyes to everything except what the moment demands, so that we may not break off what we are doing under the pretext of doing some other good work.

### **Methodical Spiritual Life**

From what I cited here from the exposition on the Rule, it is evident that Bl. John Soreth had a very systematic way of practising virtue and using prayer; this is in perfect keeping with the time in which he lived and the school which he represented. The question has been raised whether St. Teresa in her wonderful writings about the Way of Perfection and the Interior Castle has not undergone in some degree the influence of the Dutch school of the Devotio Moderna which brings methodical prayer and systematic practice of virtue strongly to the fore in its Exercitia. I am inclined to see some influence but should like to look farther than the works of Thomas à Kempis, Zerboldt van Zutphen and Garcia de Cisneros and look to Bl. John Soreth and the influence which he has had in the Order. His mysticism is doubtless very firmly bound up with that of the Devotio Moderna. He lays great stress on active holiness and the exercise of virtues and in this he proves himself a child of his time and of the country in which he laboured for the benefit of the Order. But in this case, the connection which is found between the demand for a more methodical mode of prayer and the school of St. Teresa is at the same time an indication that St. Teresa built on the foundations of John Soreth, on what he had stressed so particularly in his reformation and his institution of the Carmelite Sisters.

### **Position of Prayer in Life**

He inserts a whole chapter to recommend both the practice of virtue as well as the preparation for prayer, followed by the practice of prayer. He speaks of a very slow and deliberate raising up of the building of our spiritual life and of the lasting influence of its foundations. He rejects the idea that the hours of prayer should be like oases in the desert of life but affirms strongly that prayer should be woven into our lives, grafted into it, so that our prayer is proof of our life and conversely our life proves the sincerity of our prayer. Before we begin to pray, we should first get into such a mental state as we should wish to be found in while praying. Therefore, the Rule says that we are first to contemplate the Laws of God and our own life in order to obtain the required state before beginning to pray. That which is to dominate our prayer should first be evoked by meditation. Speaking later about the spiritual armour, he reverts to this image. He points to David, who had to take off the armour which Saul had given him because he had not practised in it. That is the reason, he says, why our Rule demands a never-ending activity, both of body and soul. We must exercise all our faculties and in this connection he points out to us the two sublime examples which should be ever in the mind of a perfect Carmelite; Our Lady and Elias the Prophet.

### **The Precious Pearl**

Blessed John Soreth compares the practice of the Rule, in the section about the weekly chapter, with the precious pearl of the gospel which keeps its value in spite of its being despised by some. The wise merchant sells everything he possesses in order to buy the field



in which the treasure is hidden. Then the treasure must be dug for. I should like to apply this image here, to explain how we are to draw ever farther back into ourselves to find Christ and live with Him. Bl. John Soreth has made the Rule known to us like the pearl of the Gospels and has taught us to sell everything to obtain it, but at the same time he has taught us how to dig up the treasure by living a life of the greatest possible piety. Therefore, this life has to be aided, borne upward and nourished through a never flagging exercise of virtue. In the shining of these virtues the glory of the pearl will be set off.

## LECTURE 6: SAINT TERESA

### THE GROWTH OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

#### The Doctrine of St. Teresa

On the occasion of the third centenary of St. Teresa's passing to the heavenly life, the General of the Jesuits, Father Martin, at that time professor at Salamanca, gave a really magnificent eulogy, not only to glorify the great saint of Avila, the glory and praise of Spain, but also to classify her doctrine. This speech has been translated into several languages. In the German translation it is called: "An elaborated treatise of the mystic doctrine of St. Teresa and at the same time a charming picture of a great soul." That eulogy is inserted in the new edition of the standard work on the life of St. Teresa, Ribera's *Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesus*, edited at Barcelona in 1908, as an introduction to the mystical life and the mystical doctrine of the saint. In his opinion the first three mansions of the Interior Castle are of a more ascetic character. Then he paints the last four degrees of the mystical life in the following words: "In the prayer of recollection, by the gentle invitation of the Divine Shepherd, the powers or faculties feel themselves drawn, as it were, to the very centre of the soul; in this state they can and must answer to that divine call; in the prayer of quiet they are elevated to the Lord and so great is the enjoyment they taste in the presence of their Beloved, that they are elevated to an ecstatic state by which their natural activity is stunned. This union with God makes the soul sleep the sleep of peace and love and, brought into that state, it is no longer able to think of any means to tear itself from this mystical suspension and dissolution in God. The soul thus dissolved in God dies to the world and to itself in the spiritual marriage which is celebrated in the sixth mansion and in the seventh mansion it rises to a new life. In this state it devotes itself fully to the services of its heavenly Bridegroom with Whom it is united with an unbreakable tie of love." Let us explain these four degrees a little more.

#### The Law Four Degrees of the Mystical Life

First, in the fourth mansion of the Castle, St. Teresa speaks of recollection, of the necessity of finding God in the centre of the soul: God Who dwells in us. A most perfect union with Him must be attained. For St. Teresa, that recollection leads to a state of quiet and satisfaction, of enthrallment by that which the soul, after the recollection, sees in itself as the greatest good, namely, its Beloved, Who dwells in the soul and Who should not be sought elsewhere. The knowledge of possessing the Beloved, of being in His Presence, gives the soul a quiet pleasure, enthralls the powers of the soul, carries all its attention to God.

In the fifth mansion, the faculties of the soul dare, as it were, inaccessible to the impressions other things should like to make. It seems that they are blunted to the external life and are carried away in the contemplation of Him Who rises high above all others and claims all contemplation. They seem as in a spiritual sleep, the soul dreams of its Beloved and although the different impressions from the external world still try to influence us and to disturb and to interrupt this sleep and although the soul sometimes awakes from this dream, still it is little accessible to all those impressions and it does its best to subside into that gentle slumber and to devote itself entirely to the contemplation of its Beloved. Often that spiritual sleep overcomes it and it is no longer able to occupy itself with earthly things or to tear itself from this slumber.

In the sixth mansion, the soul is altogether immersed in the con-templation and the enjoyment of the object of its love and to the world, it is as though dead and forlorn. It flings itself, as it were, in the arms of its Beloved and becomes engaged to Him. It should like to stay with Him. The world no longer appeals to it, it has no eye nor ear for the world. God is its only good, in Him it will rest. In the knowledge of its union with Him, the soul is so happy that never more should it like to be separated from him. Its faithfulness in that state being tried, the Beloved cements it in His love and celebrates with the soul the spiritual marriage of unbreakable union and of the most intimate intercourse.

In the seventh mansion, the soul is living only in and through the Beloved. The soul has devoted itself entirely to its Bridegroom and is a ready tool in God's hands, Whose hands it does not leave and from Whose espousal it is not drawn away, even by contact with the world. It has risen to a new life, a life in which the natural and the supernatural are merged in a wonderful way. Nothing is able to separate the soul from the contemplation of its Beloved, Whom it worships within itself and embraces with expressions of its love; Whom it sees in all things; Whose will it adores and glorifies; with Whom, in a word, it lives in an intimate union and to Whom it has not only devoted itself, but is also lovingly drawn, never to escape again.

Recollection and quiet, slumber and spiritual sleep, passage and death, resurrection and new life infused by God -- these are the four degrees of the mystical life described by St. Teresa in four successive psychological states, each of more intimate intercourse with God.

### **The Necessity of Recollection for Finding God in the Soul**

St. Teresa paints the mystical life as something which develops in the soul, according to the latter's natural ability, as the ultimate realisation of man's powers. These have been implanted by God in man's nature and will be realised when the soul is aware of its possibility to reach that high degree of perfection and therefore gives up itself wholly into the hands of the Lord Who alone is able to carry it to the highest of elevations. For all this, nothing else is asked of the soul than that it accomplish God's wishes and desires, put its trust in Him and in Him only finds its happiness. He likes to have an ordered love and He Himself will order that love in the soul. He forbids not the love of created things but wills that the soul love Him above all, and all else only in Him, through Him and with Him. Because its love is too unsettled, God in the first place asks of the soul to turn into itself and to contemplate Him as living in the centre of its heart. He is standing at the door of that innermost mansion, knocking and asking the soul to come to Him and not to wander about in the external mansions as if He, its Host, were not yet at hand. It must forsake and abandon all it has and join itself to Him in its innermost part. Once admitted into that inner circle, it may inspect all and pass thence through the whole castle. Then all belongs to the soul just as all belongs to God.

So the mystical life is a methodical way, an accommodation of the faculties of the soul to the object of knowledge and love. Because God, Who gives happiness and joy, is the highest and most satisfying object of that knowledge and love, so in the method of love, He must rank first. That God must rank first follows not only from the surpassingly infinite perfection of the character and nature of the Divine Being in Himself, but also from the dependence upon God of all we know and love. God is the Creator and Conservator of all beings and in His workings His finger touches us. But nowhere else is God so near as in ourselves. There is the first place we must try to find and to see Him.

## **Harmony Resulting Between Natural and Supernatural**

Here also there is a marvelous harmony between nature and supernature, between the life of grace and the mystic, superabundant influx of grace. God, so to say, enlarges His creature and raises it to its highest perfection. There is such a gradual development that it should not be too arduous for nature; but at the same time there is such a supreme rise above all powers of nature that only divine grace is able to lift it to those lofty heights, to lead nature to the ideal established by God. Yet no matter how much this high perfection goes beyond the power of nature, it is, nonetheless, a true accomplishment of that nature, a realisation of that which is placed in it by God as a possibility, although it can be realised only by His immediate intervention.

### **The Diamond Castle**

In her diamond castle of the soul, St. Teresa places the sun as a source of light in the inmost mansion and has it shoot its rays to the numberless neighboring mansions. In the most external the solar rays pierce only dimly because all sorts of hindrances restrain that radiation. But that light shining out from the centre forces us to open our eyes and to approach the inner mansions, there to contemplate the light in all its limpidity and to be illumined by its splendour. Here, Teresa had the image of the light beaming from the bottom of the soul as well as that of the knocking and calling of the Lord. Who calls the soul to come to the innermost mansion. In the external circle of those mansions the call sounds dim, but happy the man who, hear-ing that voice, answers the call. That first grace is the messenger of an ever greater influx of grace. As the first grace St. Teresa men-tions the ability of the soul to see the "approach" of the Bridegroom, and to understand His voice. In no other way can the soul reach this grace than along the way of recollection. And though it may be true that the first hearing, the first seeing, is to be regarded as a grace of God, Who all at once shines His light into the soul and suddenly makes His voice be heard, yet an answer must be given to that invitation of love and the soul must release itself from that which enthralled it till now. The eyes must be rubbed to see clearer and better what God, already in the external mansions, shows to them who have eyes to see and ears to hear. God can and will enthrall and bind the soul. He delights it to rest and slumber in Him but only then when the soul has succeeded in tearing itself away from that which binds it to the world in the external mansions and in placing itself under the mighty rays of the sun which is described as being able to pervade all things coming within its rays.

### **The Indescribable Beauty of the Soul and Our Lamentable Indifference to It**

St. Teresa informs her untrained sisters of this image in the simplest way: "Let us regard our souls as a castle," she writes, "which is made wholly of a single diamond or a pure crystal and in which there are many mansions. Indeed, my sisters, thinking over this, the soul is nothing else than a paradise in which God, as He Himself says, has His delight. There is nothing with which I can compare the great beauty and marvelous receptivity of a soul. Indeed, no matter how keen our sense may be, we shall hardly be able to understand it, any more than we are able to know God. He Himself says that we are created to His image and to His likeness. And this being so, and so it is, it is in vain to wish to fathom the beauty of this castle. For us the fact that the divine Majesty says the soul is created to His image is enough to inform us of its great dignity and beauty. For us it is no little grief and no little shame that by our own fault we do not understand ourselves and do not know who we are. Seldom we regard the treasures the soul may possess or who is living in it or the value it has. Picture this castle, as I have said, as having many mansions, some upstairs, some

downstairs, others at the sides. In the centre, in the inner part of all these mansions, is the most important, the place where the most secret things between God and the soul happen. It is necessary that you call all your attention to this."

Some pages further on, she writes: "Return to our beautiful and magnificent castle and consider in what manner we may enter. What I may say now seems to be absurd, for if the castle is the soul, then it is plain that it is not necessary for the soul to enter because soul and castle are one and the same. For it would be absurd to invite a person who is already in a room to enter it. But know that there is a great difference between being present and being present. Many souls are only behind the outer walls, where the waiters are; they do not try to enter the castle itself. They do not know what is hidden in that precious place, nor who is dwelling there, nor what the mansions are which the castle contains. No doubt, in some spiritual books dealing with prayer, you have already read that they advise the soul to recollect. Well, then, what I have said is the same -- Recollection."

So I could go on, but these examples from the first chapter of the Interior Castle of St. Teresa show plainly that her thesis on the mystical life are built on the base that God created the soul and maintains it to His image and likeness, that He Himself dwells in the inner mansion of the soul and that consequently the soul should take the first steps along the road of recollection to meet Him, Who, in the innermost part of the soul, is inviting it to His embrace and to the union with Himself.

### **Affective Prayer Based on Exercise of Intellect**

On opening her book, one reads what a high value she sets on imaginative and intellectual meditation, though she likes to see it interrupted and alternated with acts of love and gratitude. She admits that there can be a time in which the soul is so filled with love that it is no longer necessary to awaken love by the effects of imaginative and intellectual meditation. She expressly warns also that when God has filled the soul with acts of love and gratitude, of admiration and joy, imaginative and intellectual meditation and active contemplation cannot be neglected, because they are the general way of moving the will to which we have to return.

### **Her Whole Philosophy: Effort Essential**

For the rest, one should read the works of St. Teresa to see that reasoning and logical evolution take a high place in her doctrine. How many comparisons she has given to impart to her sisters the idea of the most sublime things! Indeed, she admits and declares her inability to make understood the gifts of God in the mystical influx of grace. Full of gratitude, she says that in one moment of elucidation given by God the soul learns more than years of study and active contemplation can reveal. But she never neglects contemplative prayer, meditation and active contemplation. She also appreciates at its highest the guidance of a specific director. Her doctrine is not that of Quietism. She ever insists on the practice of virtues even in the highest states of mystical contemplation and in the most intimate union with God. The first three degrees of our approach to God are not only strides on the way of the exercise of virtue but she will have this effort continued to the end and looks at it, first, as the best preparation and as a proof of our receptivity, and secondly, as a required adornment of the soul that has had the privilege of being chosen as the Bride of the Lord and thirdly as the promised fruit of our intercourse with God. True, there is also mention here of the infused virtues; of acting under the irresistible pressure of God's grace; but more than once St. Teresa warns against delusion and she expressly says that no virtue may be named true as long as it is not tried and proved by voluntary acts.

She desires no abolition of the natural order through the divine residence but an ever-increasing refinement, to be evidenced also in the effects of the different faculties. Indeed, here and there the effects of imagination and remembrance, even those of sense and will are painted as annoying; they are compared with the wild flutterings of the bats, the jumping of wild animals, by which we are waylaid and threatened in entering the mysterious castle, but here it is a question of the unbridled effects of these faculties, among which harmony should be established. Therefore, recollection is the first necessity. Even in the highest states of the mystical life we meet human nature in all the splendour of a harmonious development. Even in heaven, body and soul will be in harmonious union. In the highest states of mystical life, in this unbreakable union, in this common life, in which there is the most perfect harmony between the Divine and the human, ecstasy, rapture and visions are only accidental. Truly these latter are a revelation of union with God and of the seizure of the soul, but they are not the first requirement, nor the essential. Essential is the life of union, the new life after our resurrection from the death of the old life.

### **Positive View of Spiritual Life: Resurrection Must Follow Death**

To reach this life of union a long way must be traversed. In the beginning, one striving for recollection will see that a heavy fight against nature is necessary; much must die in us in order that God may live in us free and unhindered. There is a life that in its first degrees might rather be called passing away. But Teresa will not see the way to the union with God as a mere negative one; death must be a passing to a new life. While all that is a hindrance to the kingdom of God in us is killed, at the same time the divine Gardener must strew the seed of virtues and we should plant and look after the garden of our hearts, because by and by when the sun is high, the flowers will shoot up in that garden as a revelation of a new spring time. For a great part, that care, that watering is put in our own hands. Not only should we weed, but also plant and water.

### **The Solitude of God: Spiritual Chess**

But the great Gardener is our Helper; or, to use the image of St. Teresa, He leads the water of His grace along different brooks and canals to the garden of our heart and sends down His abundant rain at the right time, thus taking out of our hands the work of watering. St. Teresa illustrates this by the ancient, medieval treatise on "Spiritual Chess." She says we should play a spiritual chess game with the Beloved of our heart and that we should checkmate Him. And she adds that He cannot escape our moves and moreover would not even wish to escape. By this she gives us to understand that although we must do our best by playing well, the whole play is so calculated that at last the king is checkmated. The more play the queen, that is, our Modesty, has, the sooner will the king be captured.

Consequently, the mysticism of Teresa, no matter how sublime in the description of the sweet intercourse with God, is on the other hand real and practical.

### **Mary Our Model in Attaining First Degree of Mystic Life: God's Birth in Us**

And now a final idea. God, acting in us and dwelling in us, is the starting point of the mystical life. In the activity of God we should see the continuation of the creation, just as this activity is the continuation and the further revelation of the eternal birth of the Son from the Father and of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son. The knowledge of the presence of God in us, the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, should again be awakened in our lives. God should again dwell in us, should be born again in us. God's Son has taken on

human nature, so that we could realise again the union of our nature with the divine. We should unite ourselves with Christ and in, with and through Him, with the Holy Trinity.

No creature shared that grace in a higher degree than Mary. She, our Mother, is our example of the manner in which God must be born again in us. On the one hand, we should recognise ourselves as her children, because her son is our Brother. On the other, she will also teach us how to conceive Christ and bear Him and how to bear Him.

Let us say after Mary, with St. Teresa: *Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* -- "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word."

## CHAPTER 7: THE MARIAN "DOCTOR MYSTICUS"

### **No Sign of Opposition, but of Union**

It is a great joy for me, a Carmelite of the mitigated branch, to be allowed to take part in the choir of praise sung in honour of St. John of the Cross, who has been, together with St. Teresa, the reformer of our Order. It gives me pleasure to have occasion here to tender my small mite of glory; to be the interpreter of what I am sure all Carmelites of the mitigated observance see with me in this hero of Carmel, called by God, to restore its ancient glory, to make that glory, the glory of his mystical gifts of grace, glow more brightly.

Indeed, we do not look upon him as the prior of the monastery of the Old Observance of Segovia did, as a sign of opposition, but rather as a bond of unity, binding us all together. The fact that we call ourselves Calced Carmelites of the Old Observance might create the impression that we despite his lessons, that we do not intend to follow him. It is a pity that we are so apt to place contradiction above agreement. Even during St. John's lifetime many unreformed friars admired and imitated him in a way which gained them praise from himself.

Up to a certain point the papal dispensations of the old Rule have given occasion for a certain deviation from the spirit of the Order, yet they do not touch this spirit in any vital point. Saintly, blessed and venerable men and women have proved that with these dispensations the spirit of the Carmelite Order can live on. Not the letter, but the spirit vivifies. To strengthen that spirit we welcome the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross with filial affection. We, even more than the reformed branch, need to study and absorb their works, and let them blossom forth in life and deeds. We love them and we follow their footsteps in the cold snow of this world; to warm ourselves where our own heat is insufficient to keep us from freezing in the cutting North wind of earthly troubles.

### **A Marian Mystic: His Life Was Truly Marian**

I think it is a favour to have occasion to speak here about Our Lady in the mystical system of St. John of the Cross, and to show how this mystical doctrine fits into the frame of the school of the Brothers of Our Lady of Carmel.

St. John of the Cross, together with St. Teresa, has reformed the Order of Mount Carmel, has called it back to its pristine state. I do not hesitate to say that they should not be entitled to this name of reformers, had not Our Lady impressed her hallmark on their life and doctrine.

### **Mary, Ideal of the Soul**

For St. John of the Cross, Our Lady is the ideal of the soul that strives upward toward God, and is drawn by God towards Himself. But she is so under more than one aspect. Not always does he express himself with equal force.

Particularly does he praise in her the fact that she, who is indeed called by the angel "full of the Holy Ghost," always let herself be led by the Holy Spirit, an ideal which we must strive after in our intercourse with God, however, difficult it may be and however few will be found who know and follow up the counsels of the Holy Ghost.



As an example of a soul that always followed the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he cites in the same chapter the example of Our Lady "la gloriosa," the glorious one, Mother of God. From her earliest existence she was raised to this state. Never was the image of any creature impressed in her mind, which could withdraw her from God and consequently she was never moved by any matter of this kind. Her motive was always the Holy Ghost.

Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, also quotes these words in his essay *L'Union Transformante*, in the fine periodical dedicated to mysticism, *La Vie Spirituelle*, in which he treats of the new Doctor of the Church:

"Indeed, she is for him, as is truly reasonable, the ideal of a soul aspiring to the summit of Mount Carmel. He has not dedicated many words to her, but the few which he has written about her show that he regarded her as the archetype of a soul aspiring to the enjoyment of that unity, to the teaching of which he seems to have dedicated his life as an author. Other souls approach this ideal only in a lesser degree."

### **Marian Images: Window Through Which Sunlight Passes**

How often does the saint employ imagery that can generally be applied to Our Lady. It is next to impossible that he has not thought of His Holy Mother in this connection. But even if this should not be the case, nevertheless the use, and therefore the suitability, of these images stamp his mysticism as a mysticism of a Marian character. It is impossible to sum up all these imageries in this short space. I want only to draw your attention to a few outstanding ones.

A much loved comparison of the saint which he employs to express the necessity of our being susceptible and pure in order to partake of the grace of God, and even share the divine nature, is the image of the window through which the sunlight passes. The painters of the Flemish country, the land of Memling, of Quinten Matsys made a plentiful use of this image through their wonderful miniatures. No creature absorbed more purely the divine light that came into this world; no creature gave it back with less blemish or spot and grew more one with God than Our Lady. In the cherished metaphor of St. John of the Cross, Mary appears before our mind's eye as the greatest example of all; nay more, as the first pane of glass without spot, who gave us the light of the world. To her, more than to anyone else, may be applied the words of St. John of the Cross explaining the divine communing of the mystic life: "So close is the created communion, if God grants it this excellent and elevated favour, that the soul and everything that is proper to God are united by a participating re-creation. The soul seems more God than soul, even is God, through this participation, although its natural being, in spite of its re-creation, remains as distinct from God's being as before; just as the pane of glass, however lit up by the sun's beams yet retains its proper essence, different from the beam that passes into it." He further explains the image in a way that more directly concerns Our Blessed Lady. If the pane of glass be clean and spotless, the sunbeam will light it up and change it in such a way that it seems to be the light itself and gives out light itself. That is the reason why Our Lady deserved to become the Mother of God; because she offered not the slightest hinderance to the divine indwelling. Like Our Lady we must absorb the divine light.

To be sure, this is divine election. St. John says so elsewhere: The pane of glass cannot prevent the light from lighting it. Prepared by its purity, it is passively lit up without any cooperation. But he adds that although we cannot force God, nor prevent His doing certain

things, it is the soul's duty to bring itself into the right condition, to cleanse itself of all blemishes.

### **The Overshadowing**

In his explanation of another metaphor, the Living Flame of love, St. John draws Our Lady as closely as possible into the circle of his imagery. In speaking about the glittering and shining of the lamps of God in us, about our absorption of that divine light like the pane of glass, about our participation in God's qualities and works, he says that this figure has yet another aspect: to overshadow. For a clear understanding it must be understood, he says, that overshadow means to cover with a shadow, or to protect, favour, pour full of grace. For to say that one covers another with his shadow means to say that he whose shadow covers the other is ready to protect him and intercede for him. That is the reason why the Archangel Gabriel called the excessive favour conferred on Mary at the conception of the Divine Son an overshadowing, when he said "The Holy Ghost will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

To understand what this spreading of God's shadow, or over-shadowing, means, it must be borne in mind that every object throws a shadow according to its own particular shape and outline. So will the shadow thrown by the lamp of God's beauty be another beauty, according to the kind and quality of God's beauty; and so will the shadow spread by the lamp of God's strength be another strength, etc. Or in other and perhaps better words, all these shadows will be God's beauty, God's strength, etc., themselves, but in shadow, because the soul cannot understand perfectly here on earth. But because this shadow so well accords with the essence and the real being of God, indeed because it is God Himself, therefore the soul knows in shadow the exquisite loveliness of God. In this way we may say the soul equals Our Lady, upon whom the Holy Ghost descended in all His fullness and whom the strength of the All-High over-shadowed in the most perfect way. The Incarnation Again.

Towards the end of this commentary St. John approaches the image of the Incarnation in Our Lady to express the most close communion of God with the soul, when he explains the words spoken by the loving soul to God: "Where thou dwellest in secret." By this the soul means, says St. John, that God secretly dwells in it because this oversweet embrace takes place in the very depths of its substance.

It is here that the Holy Ghost, as it were, brings His Bride to meet the Bridegroom, that they may embrace. In that clasp He slumbers in her. He is not there unknown to the soul itself, but he dwells there hidden from the devil who cannot penetrate the scene of this embrace, and from man who cannot understand, whose mind can-not grasp its meaning. O how happy is the soul who always feels God living in her, and resting in her. She is bound to separate herself from everything, to fly all intercourse with men and to live in the deepest silence so as not to disturb by the least movement or sound, the rest of the Beloved. Generally He will lie there, as asleep, clasped by His bride in the substance of the soul, and she is well aware of Him, and usually joyfully so. If He were always awake, and continually showering His light and love upon her, that would already be a dwelling in glory for her. And seeing that only a state of half-awakening, in which the Bridegroom only partially opens His eyes, already transports the soul so violently, what would happen to her if in her and for her He were always perfectly awake? In reality we have here a double image. The image of the Incarnation of the Son of God in us, and of His divine slumbering in us merge into each other. The image of the overshadowing, placed side by side with this, leaves no doubt that

the outward image of the sleep is nothing but a new metaphor of the still more intimate indwelling.

### **The Field with the Precious Pearl**

This becomes still more clear when in the commentary on the Spiritual Canticle we see, placed over against each other, the hiding of the Bridegroom in the Bosom of His Father and His discovery by the Bride, when He sleeps in her own lap by virtue of her over-shadowing. "Beloved," the bride cries to her loved, one, "Beloved, where dost Thou hide Thyself?" "O Bride," says St. John of the Cross, "Your Bridegroom is the treasure hid in the field of your own soul, a treasure for the obtaining of which the wise merchant gave all his possessions."

It is reasonable to renounce all your private interests if you receive this treasure; to withdraw from all created things and to hide, secrete yourself in the innermost hiding place of your soul. There you will shut the door, that is, withdraw you will from all created things and pray to your Father in secret. Thus hidden with your Bridegroom you will feel His presence in secret, enjoy and caress Him in secret and rejoice with Him in being secret, i.e., beyond everything the senses can reach and tongue can express. Now then, lovely soul, now you know that the lover you seek is hidden in your soul; be diligent to remain in secret with Him and you will feel Him and embrace Him with the most tender love. It arouses no surprise that St. John, where he speaks of the bounties of God -- He dispenses thousands, he says -- should lay particular stress on the Incarnation of God. That is the ground, there shines the ideal of our mystic union with God. And our example, nay our Mother, in this is Mary.

All other things, says St. John, God did in passing, as it were. In His Son, however, He saw all things and bestowed on them His beauty and His love. Through the Incarnation He gave these a supernatural existence and lifted them up, together with man, to the glory of God. Through the glory of the Incarnation of His Son and His resurrection according to the flesh the Father has not only ennobled all creatures, but clothed them also with beauty and dignity. Contemplating this secret, the soul is wounded by love.

### **Spiritual Marriage**

Here St. John clearly expresses that the Bridegroom, resting in His bride, there celebrates the mystery of His Incarnation. Is it possible without mentioning her name to refer to Our Lady more clearly as the most favoured one of all the mystically blessed, the example of all who seek union with God? He applies to the bride what we so eagerly apply to Our Lady: She is the enclosed garden, reserved for the Bridegroom only. *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa*. There she will embrace only Him; she will be united intimately with Him, with His nature without any meditation. This takes place only in the spiritual marriage, which is an embrace between God and the soul.

In this union, the saint proceeds, that which is communicated is God Himself, Who gives Himself to the soul, at the same time restoring her to a peerless loveliness. Both have grown into one, just as--here note the return of the metaphor -- just as the pane of glass and sunbeam passing through it are one.

## Great Happiness of Our Knowledge of the Incarnation

Let us not forget it. Ever and again St. John returns to the inexhaustible mystery of the Incarnation. "This knowledge," he says, is not the least part of the heavenly bliss." And he quotes God's own words: "This is the life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, together with Thy Son, Whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ." It would be tempting to relate the manner in which St. John further describes the re-creating of the soul in God; she in God and God in her, taking His efficiency from Hers.

If anyone still has doubts as to whether the connection which we have traced between all these quotations is correct; whether St. John really saw Our Lady in his mystical ideas as the image of our souls in her most intimate union with God, let him open the book of his poetry in which the Mystic Doctor sings of the mystery of the Incarnation. There Mary rises before us as the mediatrix, for whom and in whom the Son of God Himself as the Bridegroom contracts the marriage with His bride, man, whom He permits to partake of His nature. Not only He alone, but the Holy Trinity as a whole, comes to dwell with the Son in the heart of man that opens itself for God and is opened for him. A more complete and beautiful confirmation of the Marian character of the mysticism of St. John of the Cross we cannot desire. Let us, especially the Carmelites, not underrate this. Mary, our Mother, our glory, is our example, our prototype, when God selects us also for His divine favours. Her resplendent majesty is drawn by St. John of the Cross in an inimitable way even when he hardly ever names her. Illumined by him she shines for us as the mystical rose, whose sweet odours waft through the garden of the Church, so that we can repeat what we often chant in our Office-that we draw near her by the odour of her sweetness. Like bees we fly towards this mystical flower to behold in it the fairness of mystical life in its highest bloom, namely God, become man in her, so that He can also be born in us who belong to her.

Let us not always look at the dark night to which St. John introduces us. Light gleams afar and is already breaking through the blackness. With him we chant the words of the Bride: *Flores apparuerunt*, "The flowers are already coming up." We cannot always, nay we may even seldom, stay in the contemplation of the unimaginable, the imageless; so God Who wishes to purify us and free us from everything that might separate us from Him, purifies and uproots us, even in a painful manner. The cross stands on the clouds as a sign of victory. The Bridegroom opens His arms to fold us to His breast and give Himself completely to us. At His side stands Mary our Mother with the cry of exultation on her lips "Behold He Who is mighty, has done great things in me. What He 'did in me' and bestowed on me, He will likewise bestow on you and do for you if you follow my lead, if you will be my children."

Perhaps it will be a struggle, it may cost dearly. St. John says that that is exactly the reason why he and his brethren must follow Jesus with His cross, stripped of everything and of themselves because they are called to be the Brothers of Our Lady of Carmel, that is, called to be among those who are named in a special way after her, and are especially numbered among her children.

When St. John reminds us that especially at the beginning one cannot constantly be in contemplation, he says that the soul should then ever in all its thoughts, acts, good deeds and undertakings have recourse to holy thoughts and meditations, from which it will draw more fervent piety and greater advantage. But above all, should it resort to the life, the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ, to teach itself to imitate Jesus' life; to yield in everything, in all its acts and deeds, in life and death. Who can be better company than Mary, who kept all Jesus' words in her heart and stood, when He died, under the rood-tree? St. John points this out himself when he says that the soul that strives after nothing but the

perfect fulfillment of the law of God and the carrying of Christ's cross will be a true Tabernacle, which will contain the veritable Manna, Christ Himself. Can we not alter these words thus: He will be another Mary, called daily and aptly the Ark of the New Covenant?

In other places in his works as well, St. John of the Cross reminds us that we cannot always soar into the highest regions of the mystical life, but it is again Our Lady who is the image of our union in those regions. She also stands at our side, telling us what we ought to do when we sink lower. "When the contemplation ceases," says the sainted teacher (and he adds that this will necessarily happen often, for not one single saint was granted permanent contemplation and prayer) "it will not harm us to have recourse to Christ once more. On the contrary, it will be advantageous to learn to imitate Christ's virtues and to drink in His spirit. In that lies the aim of prayer." He warns us against wishing to be so devoid of all imagery as to overlook the Incarnation as well.

The union with God brings forth fruit and demands certain dispositions. I think it extraordinarily remarkable that St. John of the Cross who evidently always saw Our Lady on the loftiest heights, never reveals her on her way to Mystical union, but only in the glory of her love; in the effect so to say, of her union with God, in her likeness to Him.

### **The Example of Mary's Life: Four Incidents**

She gives us God, or God's image, or the fruit of His Redemption. Four incidents in Our Lady's life are pointed out by St. John in this connection. First he remarks on the visit of Our Lady to her cousin Elizabeth, the first act of love after the conception of God's Son, the first radiation of her union with Him, the first practice of her active life.

Another time he represents Our Lady at the marriage feast of Cana where, urged by love, she merely makes known to Jesus what is lacking and leaves the rest to Him. Here likewise, is again a revelation of love, a radiation of her union with Him. Let her also make the wine to be poured out for us, the wine that makes us brides.

Again St. John sets Our Lady before us as the Mother of Sorrows, taking part in the sufferings of Our Lord. He thinks this will need justification, because in his whole plan he imagines Our Lady to be made by the re-creating love equal to the Angels who, he says, know sorrowful things perfectly, but do not feel sorrow on that account. But he adds that God sometimes makes an exception in this and allows souls truly to suffer, in order to increase their merits, or fire their love, or for some other reason. Thus he acted with Our Lady, the Virgin Mother, as he desired Mary to share in His copious work of Redemption for our benefit and for our example.

At length he conducts us-how could it be otherwise?-to the Supper-room, where the Apostles and Mary were together and where the result of their prayer with her is that the Holy Ghost descended upon them in the form of tongues of fire. He refers to the Apostles in the Supper-room, moreover, as praying and persisting in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus: Let us also pray with Mary for that Spirit. May she not only protect and guide us on our way through life, as she did St. John: may she not only live in our minds as she did in St. John's, but may she make us understand what St. John has told us regarding her: that she is for us, even in the most close union with God, an example and a Mediatrix who can procure for us the grace of having God become man in our souls also, one with us, the eternal Son of the Father, through the wonderful indwelling of the Holy Trinity, a source of vision and love.

## **Living Lanterns in a Murky Night**

St. John of the Cross has tried to conduct us to the heights of the mystical life through the dark night, the night of absence of imagery of all created things, and stripping of all created things to let shine in us only the light of which the indwelling of God makes us full.

He had made darkness around us and at the same time kindled the clearest light in us. We are under his guidance, his pupils. To borrow a metaphor from Ruysbroeck, we have become living lanterns in a murky night. God's light fills us and illumines us, and at the same time makes us shine. We are "bearers of Christ." Would that we saw all lights of the world as darkness, to recognise the eternal true light and make it shine through us.

## LECTURE 8: NEW BLOOMING OF THE OLD STOCK

### John of St. Samson, a New Mystic of the Old Observance

AFTER the division of the Order into two branches at the end of the 16th century some differences naturally sprang up between the two branches and each life developed along separate lines. But as early as the 17th century we find this divergence already reduced to the smallest compass through an internal reformation in the Calced Carmelites which quickened the old spirit in a splendid way and proved that even with some mitigations of the Rule the spirit of Carmel can live and flourish. It is a remarkable dispensation of Providence that shortly after the splitting up of the Order, a man was raised up in the branch of the Old Observance who became the soul of a new reform and who was elevated by God so high in the mystical life of Carmel that he ranks with the Great St. Teresa and the *Doctor Mysticus*, St. John of the Cross, as a mystical writer. His first biographer, Father Donatianus, writes: "God has predestined him in matters of the inner life to be one of the brightest flames of our small observance."

A Carmelite of the Old Observance, Hieronymus a Matre Dei, who recently edited a selection from the mystic's works, calls him a *temoin autorisé*, a weighty exponent of the mysticism of Carmel. Besides, Henry Brémond who dedicates to him some splendid pages of his extensive work, *Le Sentiment Religieux en France*, calls him un de nos mystiques les plus sublimes, "one of our most exalted mystics."

Within certain bounds we may say that he was in this respect the St. John of the Cross of the Old Observance. Perhaps one of the finest works produced by the school of Mount Carmel is one of his numerous writings, a treatise concerning the true spirit of Carmel.

It was indeed a remarkable triumvirate that God had brought together at the beginning of the 17th century in the convent of Rennes in order to infuse a new life into the old Order. It was really Prior Peter Behourt who initiated the reformation, 1604. Later under the name of *strictior observantia* it spread rapidly. Father Philip Thibault, first subprior and afterwards Behourt's successor as prior of Rennes, gave him his whole-hearted support. But the soul of the movement was actually the blind brother, John of St. Samson, who entered the convent of Rennes in 1612, and died there in 1636.

John of St. Samson or rather Jean du Moulin had been blinded in infancy by an illness. He had grown up in poverty and at length found an asylum in the Carmel of Paris. In return, he often played the organ and grew so skilled that people loved to hear him. He was intensely pious but it never occurred to anyone to admit him into the Order. He was already 35 years old before he confessed his desire to receive the habit of the Order to Father Matthew Pinault, a young father who had finished his studies in Paris and was about to return to the monastery of Dol in Brittany. He was received at Dol in 1606 and from there arrived in 1612 at Rennes.

Prior Philip Thibault had heard a great deal about the virtuous life and exalted prayer of this lay brother and therefore desired him to be in the centre of the new reformation that the love of God and the Order might be increased. Yet Brother Samson was not quite at ease. It was so very unusual that a lay brother should take the lead in spiritual matters. Besides, he was only imperfectly formed and his blindness made it difficult for him to draw information from books. Something had been read to him now and then; but much guidance had not

been his, unless God Himself had guided him. To test the spirit that led him, the prior ordered him to describe his manner of prayer. The answer was as sublime as St. Teresa's to a similar question, written in the book of her life. The very title tells us how exalted was his idea of prayer, "On the loss of the subject in the object" ("Of Absorption").

### **Stricter Observance Spread Over Many Provinces**

He had a special gift of firing the young novices and fathers with enthusiasm for the splendid ideals of the Order and of teaching them to pray and meditate. The circle of interested hearers grew and grew. Superiors of other religious houses, eminent clergymen, as well as prominent laymen, took pleasure in conversing about spiritual matters with the pious brother; they even came to visit the house for no other purpose. His presence in the house, above all his intense occupation with God, had a wonderful influence and in a short time the convent of Rennes was a model of strict observance. The influence and reputation of this house spread the reformation to other houses, first in France, then in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Ireland and Poland, so that almost the whole Order was set on the way of reformation. But the reason why we mention him is less to speak about his life than to hear what he regards as the spirit of the Order and what, according to his teaching, should be looked upon as its ideal.

### **All Called to Mystical Life**

It strikes us immediately that the blind brother, with all possible stress, maintains that we are called to the mystical life, all of us; that the mystical life, the familiar intercourse with God, the experiencing God, the enjoyment of God, is something God will grant man on earth, nay, grants it to many if only they make themselves susceptible to it and place no limit or hindrance to His love. Those who have entered the Order of Mount Carmel should keep in mind that God calls them to the enjoyment of His presence even in this life; that He wills us to contemplate Him, to lose ourselves in Him; that we should regard this as the first and highest obligation and never allow either study, work or pastoral duties to push it into the background.

He is very emphatic in this. On the other hand, he acknowledges the necessity of study, of preaching and of other pastoral duties. But these should be grounded on a more elevated contemplation. That was the reason why he wished the younger members of the Order to be set on the road of contemplation so that, grown up and confirmed in this, they could never really lose that habit of contemplation. Thus all their work would be supported by the most intimate intercourse with God.

As emphatically as possible he rejects the idea that the mystical life which does not consist essentially in sights and visions, stigmata and levitations, but simply in seeing God before us and with us and in us, being consumed through love for Him, knowing the divine fire within us and only wishing with God that it burn and consume us -- that this mystical life is not for us, for every one of us. Naturally, he leaves the disposition of this grace and its degrees to the good pleasure of God. He does not want us to look upon mystical life as something we can rouse in ourselves. It is and ever remains a gift of God, but God has made our nature susceptible to it. He does not want us to disregard this susceptibility, to neglect developing in and freeing it from such hindrances as lessen its working in us. To this negatively directed preparation he adds the more positive one of the steady practice of virtue. Here it is clearly evident how nearly he is related, on the one hand to St. Teresa and on the other to Ruysbroeck; evidently both have influenced him. The *Devotio Moderna* taken by Geerte Groote in its pristine and noblest conception from Ruysbroeck has in this



respect been also adopted by St. Teresa. This is especially true of the idea that man should not remain inactive and leave everything to God but that a steady activity in practising virtue and holiness is the first and indispensable preparation for the higher grades of mystical life.

### **The Order Is a School; a Family**

Our Order resembles a classroom in which we acquire this practice of virtue, or a large family in which the members strive together toward a common goal with greater facility than is possible to individual effort. In the spiritual life, no more than in ordinary life, can we dispense with education, with teachers and with guidance. It is an exception when God does not call in the human aid of a community or of an Order to lift His elect to the heights of sanctity. That is why it is so significant that there are schools of mysticism in the Church each with its own traditions, each following a different road, but all emanating from one central point, which is God Himself, and leading to one goal, again not distinct with God. God has willed in Nature a great richness and diversity. In the spiritual life He also wills a variety, adapted to the diversity of talents and the richness of forms under which He communicates His graces. So also in His prescience He called the Order of Mount Carmel into being and over-whelmed it with graces. Its function would be to form a school of mystical life, with a very personal stamp which the leaders of the Order would preserve in order that the Order would answer its peculiar vocation. When God transplants into the garden of Carmel the young seedlings that will open for Him like flowers; when He calls to the Order so many fresh young souls, glowing with zeal, then He desires that the Order care for these souls.

### **Splendour of God's Wisdom**

Next Brother John acknowledges openly that he fervently wishes to make known the splendour of God's wisdom which wishes to do immensely more in man than it does, but is hampered by the hindrances offered by man and his frequent unworthiness. However, to him who pays due respect, God's Wisdom is lovely. It will fill all its elect with its treasures, its loveliness, its gifts. It will overwhelm them and reward them with the full enjoyment of itself. The less they are intent upon it, the more they shall partake of it. Mostly they do not think of it, or they would give their life a thousand times for God. In fact, they almost live beyond themselves already, quite wrapped in God. And their body is subject to their spirit.

### **Special Form of Prayer, "Aspiration."**

To attain this the Venerable brother insists moreover on prayer and meditation, on a form of prayer which might be called the continuation and permanent fruit of prayer. Hendrik Herp, the Franciscan pupil of Ruysbroeck, first employed the word which John of St. Samson has taken over in his school, not as something new in itself, but never before emphasized from this point of view. John of St. Sampson has taken over this form of prayer which is so perfectly in accordance with the traditions of the old monks and also of the hermits of Carmel. In his conference with the Abbot Isaac, Cassian speaks about the use of ejaculations and aspirations. Ven. John of St. Sampson further developed this practice in a way that might truly be called masterly. He has taught us the full beauty of this form of prayer and brought it into use. He calls it with Hendrik Herp, *toegeesting*, uplifting, or "aspiration" and attaches to the latter word a peculiar meaning. It is an exercise on our part and at the same time it is thought to be extremely effective in making us share the infusion of the abundance of divine grace because it so greatly develops our receptiveness for grace and absolutely opens our hearts to God. It is not simply a loving dialogue; that is only the

beginning and start. It is a soaring to God, the bursting forth of a flame out of our loving and glowing hearts. It is an attempt, repeated again and again, to unite ourselves as closely as possible to God, or rather, to reform ourselves in God and conform ourselves to Him. It is an impulse, a desire to lose ourselves in God and God does not repulse us. He takes us to Him and we grow into one spirit, we are filled with His spirit, we live his life. How remarkable! We long for God because we are filled with His spirit, with Himself. And because we are filled with Him, we desire ever more to be filled; we seek Him and so He fills us ever more. This practice transcends all understanding, it transcends all display of affection, it strives immediately to God and aims at nothing else than being one with Him. Since intellect and love are at the bottom of this "aspiration," or "uplifting," it takes its stand there, yet one thinks neither of intellect nor love, but only to gather its fruit, the union. Nevertheless, in its growth it is an exercise and many various steps may be distinguished in it.

### **Four Steps to Aspiration**

The first step is the sacrifice of oneself and all creation to God. In doing this it is best to focus the offering all in one idea; that all is His, without drawing special attention to one particular work of His hands. We are to see God, not the creature; the creature only in so far as is needed to mount up to God. The second step is a request for His gifts; that He Who is able to give them may give them; that He Who is rich and mighty may diffuse this splendour. The third step is the making of oneself similar to God, by loving Him fervently and by desiring all to accept this love and incite it in themselves. The last step is the union of oneself perfectly to God. This includes all the previous steps, but on a higher plane.

All this is far from easy, therefore the brother quite understands that success does not come at once, but he wishes us to take great pains. Gradually we shall succeed. The exercise can, as it were, be ever more intensified, till at length it grows into something like an immediate seeing or grasping of God and grows so familiar that it becomes second nature. All images disappear; we pass above everything immediately to God. Only we should not push this so far that we should want to exclude Christ's humanity from our upward flight to God. He is ever to remain our Intercessor, our Mediator.

### **Knowing by Not-Knowing**

Relative to the union with God in the innermost parts of our souls, the Venerable John loves to speak most of an all-surpassing, all-exceeding, all-overreaching contemplation, which according to his expression draws the subject quite into the object, perfectly unites the subject with the loved object and so entralls the subject with the object that one is absolutely possessed by the other. In this he sees a wonderful interchange. The soul loses itself in God. Its understanding, its total bewilderment is its richest idea. It realises that it will know the Highest by not understanding what it knows. It often cannot talk about it, nor find words to express what it should want to say if it had to, or were to, communicate anything of the Unspeakable. Thus it is for the soul both light and darkness at the same time. So they, to whom God has given the highest understanding, speak in an incomprehensible language, only to be understood by those who have been uplifted to an equal height. Besides, men of this kind should not like to speak differently with others, unless God would desire it.

### **The *Scintilla Animae***

The true pupils of the school of Carmel should be in a high degree wrapped up in themselves, to find and meet God in the innermost recesses of their souls. There God goes to meet them. He grows by the meditations they devote to Him and the love they dedicate to Him. He grows in the innermost depths of their being till they cannot hide Him any longer and He does not want to remain hidden in them any longer. John of St. Samson renews here the old theory of the *scintilla animae*, the spark of the soul, of the synderesis or summing up of everything in the first and simplest terms, from which everything develops and which is gradually known in its richness, but which should ever be kept in mind as the ground and the first summary. In the innermost, deepest, most essential part of us God is the being of our being, life of our life, the reason of our existence and of everything we do and are able to do. There God is like a spark in our soul. He has kindled fire in us -- fire that imparts light and warmth, fire that must flame up.

### **The Breach Spanned**

When we listen to John of St. Samson in the school of Carmel and discover the spirit of the second reformation, we are filled with pleasure. Then we venture to cross the abyss which seems to widen and does widen, according to some, between the two observances. Then we hear that on either side of the chasm the wood has its charms, that birds sing on both sides and their songs speak to us of God. We see trees bend towards each other across the chasm and their branches intermingle. From above there is no abyss, only a terrestrial pedestrian halts a moment before the division. The higher he mounts, the narrower the chasm appears to his sight. And when his wings are grown, then he springs from branch to branch till he is across the chasm and for him it is one and the same lovely wood, in which the birds sing one and the same hymn in honour of God.

With a teacher like John of St. Samson in a reformation of which he was the soul, and still is, we are not branches that have lost the true nature of the old stem, but in us the old stem can put forth new bloom, as it did in him.

The blind singer of Rennes, John of St. Samson, sings as the illuminated singer, St. John of the Cross, sang in the darkness of Toledo.

## LECTURE 9: THE APOSTOLATE OF CARMELITE MYSTICISM

### **St. Thérèse Draws the World to Carmel**

Now, as never before, the eyes of the world are turned toward Carmel. In its garden a flower has opened its petals, of such ravishing beauty that countless numbers have directed their step hither, wishing to remain in the pleasance where such lovely flowers bloom. They examine anew the secrets of this beauty and once more ask themselves of what the loveliness of Carmel consists. This one flower has in turn drawn attention to so many others that the world has been filled with admiration for life in Carmel and on all sides new convents have been founded in order to fill the world with those sanctuaries in which one may live so saintly a life.

I refer to the flower of Lisieux, Little St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, whose name has flown over the world, whose life's story has been translated into all languages, who is called by God to add new lustre to the glory of Carmel.

### **Characteristics of Her Life**

To describe in a few minutes a life so filled with proofs of intercourse with God, with virtue and abundant infusion of grace, is next to impossible. However, I will try to summarise briefly that which is most characteristic in her life and which at the same time shows her to be one of the loveliest and most eloquent examples of the school of Carmel.

### **Practice of the Presence of God**

In the first place surely, comes her desire to converse with God, to lead a higher life for and through Him. She thoroughly understands that the living God who fills heaven and earth, and at the same time dwells in our innermost heart must be the object of our thoughts and love. Most striking in her life is, therefore, her living in God's presence. She may justly repeat the words of Elias the Prophet: "God lives and I stand before His face." To strengthen this in her mind she fostered the devotion to the Holy Face, called herself after it, pictured it for herself. It was an unsurpassed means, not only to see God as man, but to ascend through His Manhood to the Deity, and to live in the bosom of the Trinity as He had lived there from eternity.

### **Her Love of God**

As a result of this contemplation of God, love for God wells up in her with irresistible power. Her spirit has been called a spirit of love and so it is. However, it is no blind desire, but love sprung from intellectual contemplation, from knowledge acquired through faith. In order to remain firm in our love towards Him, she wants us continually to contemplate God's works and notice the proofs of His love. It is noteworthy that she very eagerly admires Nature and the loveliness of our earthly creation, that she enjoys the magnificence of flowers, the glory of a starry sky, but yet she wishes us to leave all this after a short time in order to mount up through this to God. They are a means, not an end.

### **Her Humility and Simplicity**

From her life before the Face of God, and her love and admiration for His power and majesty a third idea springs forth, fitting remarkably well into the scheme of the Order. I mean the idea of her own nothingness compared with God, her wonderful consciousness of her own smallness and slightness, her humility and her conception of herself as being only a child. This characteristic is often met with in the older saints of the Order, as simplicity and humility are the special hallmarks of the Order. How has Blessed John Soreth not stressed this special title Cardinal Gasquet quite pithily points out the characteristics which distinguish the Order of Carmel from the various other Orders: *Simplices et sinceri*. The life of little St. Thérèse has indeed given this phrase a peculiar weight and strength. It is so often said by various Carmelite spiritual authors -- and it tallies so well with our spirit -- that the Order is not called to do great things, to be spoken of, but to make itself loved and attractive by doing ordinary things well, without much talking or noise; to live in a certain seclusion for and with God more than for and with men; to attach value to what God desires more than to what man sets high store by. The first demand of the school of Carmel is a silent introversion in order to live in and with God. From this contemplation springs the feeling of smallness and nothingness, modesty and simplicity. "Unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." In the Collect of the Mass of the Little Flower (Oct. 3rd) the Church expressly mentions these words of Our Lord, so that with the help of St. Thérèse we may be able to lay these difficult yet necessary foundations for the house of our sanctity.

### **Her Trust in God**

One of the paradoxes of St. Thérèse's life is that she, while making herself small and weak, enlists the help of Him in Whose strength she can undertake anything. Her hope and trust are wonderful.

### **Importance of "Little" Things**

A second paradox is that by paying attention to the most trivial things of daily life and seeing them with the eye of God, this saint makes them great and meritorious. Leading the most ordinary life, without being in the least remarkable, she knows how to make of her life an uninterrupted series of the most heroic acts of virtue and to be continuously busy with God. In perfect accordance with all this, we notice, fourthly, little St. Thérèse's perfect surrender to God. It is, as it were, one with her consciousness of her littleness and nothingness.

### **Her Conformity to the Will of God**

She is quite in the hollow of God's hand and surrenders herself absolutely to what His Providence decrees. She strives after, as perfectly as possible, a conformity to the divine will. In this St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was a wonderful example for her in her own Order, and she loved to meditate upon her. This latter saint, one of the greatest glories of our Order, and so exalted in mystic contemplation, above all in the contemplation of the holy Trinity, was forever repeating: "It is God's Will." This was for her absolutely final. Little Thérèse was like her. She was deeply convinced and firmly persuaded that without mortification a spiritual life is an impossibility. Only for little St. Thérèse there was no better opportunity for mortification than accepting everything from God's hand just as He sent it. Constant conformity is not so easy, but this is just the reason why it is the most proper means of mortifying and suppressing ourselves. She absolutely secluded her own will and never wanted to give it play. The image of the rose shedding its petals had a particular charm for her. She wanted to shed all her leaves, to tear off all her petals and strew them

on the path of the Lord. He had to come along that road; she wanted to force Him, as it were, to come and fulfill her desire that He visit her. One of her favourite maxims was: "If you faithfully please Him in the small things of life, He will be bound, nay He cannot but help you in the more important ones." She wanted to be Jesus' flower, not to rock idly on its stem, but to be picked by Him, to die for Him before His eyes, to be strewn in His path and to be trodden on. Another rule of life for her she embodied in an ejaculation or aspiration: "I fear but one thing, to retain my own will, Take it, Lord, for I choose only what Thou choosest."

### **Mary Her Ideal**

As a fifth trait in her character I should like to mention that her ideal on the "Little Way" was Our Lady. Two words of Mary were deeply impressed on her memory: *Ecce ancilla Domini* -- "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." From her youth she had a fervent, childlike devotion for Our Lady. Her statue stood in front of her in the small room of her paternal home, and it seemed to her as if it smiled down upon her. She entered the Order of Carmel to be her child and to imitate her especially in her union with Our Lord. Just as the life of Our Lady was ordinary and consisted of a series of the most common, everyday acts, so Thérèse wishes her own life to be. If God had looked down with such great contemplancy on the humility of Our Lady and had even wished to descend into her, then He would also look down with pleasure upon her, if only she tried to grow a little like Mary. Mary surrendered herself unreservedly to God's wishes through her "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to Thy Word." So little Thérèse gave herself unreservedly to God, wishing to please Him only, to trust Him, to be His alone. Like Our Lady, who was not disturbed when St. Joseph did not understand her condition, but left the explanation of this mystery to God, so little Thérèse gave everything into God's hands with a limitless confidence.

God had also descended upon her, she also saw God slumbering in her. She also wanted to taste of union with God with the same delicacy as that with which Mary enjoyed this delight. But just as the descent of God into Our Lady at once incited her to an act of humility, made her go to Elizabeth, Thérèse likewise wanted her union with God, her surrender to Him, to manifest itself in humble acts of charity. Therefore, she best liked to hear Our Lady praised as the example of all virtues. What does Our Lady want with admiration if we do not imitate her and respond to the great grace which God gave us by making her our example and giving her to us as our protectress? She put herself, therefore, with the Infant Jesus, with Whom she felt one, in the hands of the Virgin Mother. To describe this she employed the most childish images. "When my frock is awry from play and my hair is disheveled, then Our Lady comes and pulls my pinafore straight, sets a flower in my hair and so I can go to Jesus."

## LECTURE 10: TWO FINAL POINTS

### **First Point: Her Apostolate of Prayer**

Finally, there are two points in the life of little St. Thérèse, deserving special note which stamp her as one of the loveliest representatives of the school of Carmel.

The mysticism of the school of Carmel could not claim to be true mysticism if it were not apostolic in its own peculiar way. St. Thérèse of Lisieux shows us the true sense of the Apostolate of the school of Carmel. "I would be a missionary," she says, "I should like to have been one from Creation till the end of the world. I should want to preach the Gospel in all continents at once, as far as the farthest isles. Above all I should like martyrdom. One torture would not satisfy me, would not be enough. I should want to undergo them all. Open, O Jesus, the book of life in which the acts of the saints are written down, I should like to have performed them all for You." But then she recollects that God calls her along a different road to the practice of the Apostolate. The Apostolate as a work of God's grace has to be seen as a work of the mystical Body of Christ of which God is the head and the soul, of which we are the members, animated by God. Not all have to fulfill a like duty. Love gave to St. Thérèse the key of the vocation of Carmel in the Apostolate. "I understood," she says, "that if the Church has a body, built up of different organs, the chief, the most necessary organ of all, could not be wanting. I saw that it must have a heart burning with love. I understood that only love sets the limbs in motion, that if love were to be extinguished, the apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, the martyrs would refuse to spill their blood. I understand that love contains all vocations. My vocation is love. I have found my proper place in the Church. I shall be love. In this way I shall be everything. In this way my dream has come true."

### **Great St. Teresa Practised it Before Her**

The vocation which so transported little Thérèse was not hers only, even though hardly anyone has understood it as well as she has. Great St. Teresa of Avila at the foundation of the first convent of her reform had already explained this vocation to her sisters. "Prevented from promoting as I desired the glory of God, I resolved to do the little which lay in my power, viz., to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I was able and to induce the new nuns who are here to do the same, confiding in the great goodness of God Who never fails to assist those who are determined to leave all things for Him; and hoping that all of us being engaged in prayer for the champions of the Church, for the preachers and doctors who defend her, might to the utmost of our power assist my Lord Who has been so much insulted-O my sisters in Christ, help me to entreat Our Lord herein, since for this object He has assembled you here; this is your vocation, these are your employments; these your desires; hither your tears, hither your petitions must tend. When your prayers and desires and scourgings and fastings are not directed to this object, remember that you neither aim at nor accomplish that end for which Our Lord assembled you here together."

Here we see that St. Teresa not only has recommended to her sisters the apostolate of prayer, but has given it to them as a vocation.

## **Mary Magdalen de Pazzi: Another Model of Apostolic Prayer**

To take an example from the Order of the Old Observance, I call your attention to the great Italian mystic, Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, of the convent of Florence. I would I had the occasion to speak longer about her spiritual life and her mystic works, but time does not allow. In this connection I will say, however, that her vocation above all was to pray and do penance in order to obtain the reform of all classes in the Church, religious, priests, laity, and even heretics and pagans. "I desire," she says, "to offer Thee, O my God, all creatures class by class. Would that I had the strength to gather all infidels, to lead them into the bosom of Thy Church. I should pray her to purge them from their unfaithfulness, to give them new life." It is in flashes of fire and with impassioned accents that she pours forth her prayer to God for the salvation of the souls redeemed by the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary.

### **Contemplative Convents, Aids to Missions**

The Little Flower dreamt of conquering the world for God and to realise this dream she entered a convent where she was quite shut off from the world and then cried out, transported with joy, that her dream had come true. Only he can grasp this who has penetrated into the secrets of God's grace; who understands that in praying for grace and in sacrificing our life in union with the Sacrifice of Calvary, God's Grace is obtained. In this the chief part of pastoral care and of missionary work consists. This is the most splendid and intimate joining of the active and contemplative life, not in one person but in the mystical Body of which we are all members. We must be glad that the unity of the mystical Body of Christ recreates even the most secluded life, spent quite shut off from the world and in the service of God, making it a fit soil for missionary work, from which the latter can ever draw new sap of God's grace. This thought has led to the foundations of Carmels in the missionary countries also. Over and above the other sacrifices, these Sisters give up their country and climate and take a lifelong farewell of parents, relations and friends of their own. This idea drew little Thérèse in desire to Indo-China. "Here," she writes, "here I am loved and this affection is very sweet to me. But that is just why I dream of a convent in which I should be unknown, in which I should have to bear the exile of the heart as well. I should like to go to Hanoi, to suffer much for the good Lord. I should like to go there to be lonely, to have no single consolation, no single joy on earth."

Besides, the sight of these convents in the missions keeps alive the idea of the value of the Apostolate of prayer, both for those who practice it and for those who remain outside. It is edifying to see how missionaries themselves vie with each other in founding Carmelite convents: how Popes and Bishops insist on the building of these houses; how the Pope, to further this thought, has made little St. Thérèse to be the patron saint of all mission work as well as the work of the reunion of Churches.

### **We Should Imitate the Little Flower**

This should indue all who are called to the spiritual life of Carmel but especially those who cannot now, or who can no longer, take an active part in the Apostolate of the Church -- to regard contemplation as the better part of the Order and should urge them to follow as strictly as possible the contemplative life, calling down the indispensable blessing of God on the activity of the others.

From the small convent of Lisieux St. Thérèse has preached her "Little Way" by sweeping the corridors and washing dishes, cleaning the oratory and working in the garden, by nursing the sick and helping the needy, by studying at the proper time and reading what



the mind requires for its development. She has so conquered the world. It is no wonder that this conception of inner life of the school of Carmel, laid down in her Story of a Soul, has drawn thousands to Carmel, that in our busy, hurrying time she stands high, like a lighthouse in a churning sea.

### **Second Point: Her Continued Apostolate After Death**

When we look up from the often storm-tossed waves of the Mediterranean to Carmel, lifting its serene height in peerless beauty as a safe haven of refuge, then the image of Little Thérèse beckons us to land there and take our rest; then it is her hand that rings the bells of its silent chapel inviting us to pray with her.

History describes how St. Louis, King of France, while on his Crusade, was overtaken by a gale at the foot of Carmel and heard its bells ringing, calling the monks for the night hours; how he went on shore and joined the fathers in their prayers. At his departure he took six monks with him to found a monastery in his capital.

You also are in a gale on your way to the Holy Land, the kingdom of God on earth. I have been allowed to ring the bells of Carmel for you, to make you hear the voices that speak of prayer and apostleship, of prayer on the flanks of that Holy Mountain. Do you also step ashore for a moment to join in this prayer and take back with you the spirit of Carmel, to make it live in the capital of your kingdom, the kingdom of your thoughts, the centre of your lives.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux has said that after death she would strew roses on earth. And of what else is a rose the symbol, if not of love of God, for Whom she wanted to be a rose, a rose shedding its petals on the road of God through the world?

Carmel is the mountain of shrubbery and flowers. with full hands the children of Carmel strew those flowers over the earth. Such a picture of St. Thérèse is widely spread. The Saint scatters widely the flowers which she receives from the hand of Our Lady, the Mediatrix of All Graces. And this is the second noteworthy point in the life of the Little Flower: her continued activity after death.

We read in the Carmelite Missal in the Preface for the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel the significance of the little cloud which Elias beheld from Mount Carmel appearing out of the sea. "Who through the small cloud arising out of the sea didst foretell the Immaculate Virgin Mary to the Blessed El as the Prophet, and didst will that devotion be shown to her by the sons of the prophets." Elias beheld her and with him we all look up to her. She has her hands filled with flowers and she brings her Divine Son the source of all beauty and grace. On those who pray the first drops of the redeeming rain descend, roses of divine grace.

At the feet of Mary, the Mother of Carmel, I see kneeling in prayer with St. Thérèse the many saintly and blessed women and men who were the very flowers of Carmel during the preceding centuries. The flowers of their example rain down upon us. But they must be transplanted to the garden of our soul.

In our own times St. Thérèse, the "Little Flower," is elected to make that rain more abundant than ever. May she give us from the hand of the Mother of Carmel, from the Holy Mountain, the roses we need for the garden of our soul. The twofold spirit of the Prophet of

Carmel will fill the garden of our heart with its sweet odours. And may God walk in its sweetness.

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."