

SUMMARIES OF LECTURES of BLESSED TITUS BRANDSMA, O.CARM.

1: Antiquity of the Carmelite school

Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross had no other goal than to restore to the Order of Carmel its ancient spirit; they are not the founders of the Carmelite school of spirituality but are nevertheless its restorers and most brilliant lights. Their glory will not be diminished if the radiance which this school produced before their reform is shown. Far from being opposed to the first centuries of the Order, they often went there to seek examples. St. Theresa recommends the poverty of the early fathers to her daughters; the memory of the hardships they endured in solitude should encourage Carmelites to bear theirs patiently - "the little illnesses of mischievous women." Still more explicitly the Saint writes: "... All of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation; this was our original institution, we belong to the race of those holy Fathers of Mount Carmel, who in such deep solitude and complete renunciation of the world, sought the treasure, the precious pearl of which we speak."

M. L. Van den Bossche has written correctly that St. Theresa added a psychological finesse to the primitive foundation of Carmel.

2: Primitive and fundamental elements

From its beginning, the Order of Carmel has the remarkable privilege of having drawn its spirituality from two sources - the imitation of Elijah and the veneration of the Blessed Virgin.

Imitation of Elijah

As its name indicates, the Order of Carmelites took its origin in Palestine on the mountain famous from the Old Testament for the sacrifice of Elijah and for the grotto where the Prophet retired when he had accomplished his missions near Israel: "From there he went to Mount Carmel" (2 Kgs 2: 25).

Ancient inscriptions, from long before the Crusades, bear witness that Byzantine Christians venerated the Prophet in the very place where, according to legend, the School of the Prophets had been located - El Chader, at the foot of the mountain on the side by the sea.

The rule states explicitly that the hermits were assembled near the fountain of Elijah higher up on the mountain.

An itinerary from the beginning of the 13th century makes a distinction between "the Latin hermits who are called Brothers of Carmel" living near the "*wadi ain es-Siah*," the fountain of Elijah; and "the hermits of Carmel" who live near El-Chader, the School of the Prophets. Many others itineraries confirm this testimony and bear witness to the veneration given the Prophet Elijah on Carmel. Benjamin de Tudela, who visited the Holy Places in 1163, relates that two sons of Edom (thus he designates Aymeric and Berthold) built a chapel in honor of the Prophet near the Grotto of Elijah.

The monk John Phocas, who journeyed to Palestine about 1177, says that some years previously a monk, originally from Calabria, had raised the monastery of Carmel on its ruins and that he lived there with ten companions; as a result of a revelation, he established himself and built a chapel there.

Further confirmation of these facts is given by Jacques de Vitry who relates that several Crusaders led a solitary life "in narrow cells after the example and in imitation of the saintly solitary who was the Prophet Elijah, like bees of the Lord gathering into their hive the honey of spiritual sweetness." The authenticity of some documents pertaining to the early history of the Carmelites can be debated, but from clearly authentic works, it appears even to those who reject many other traditions of the Order; that the spiritual life of Carmel is completely impregnated with the spirit of Elijah and that imitation of the Prophet has given the Carmelite school its special stamp. The Abbot Trithemius (1516) was correct therefore in writing: "Although it was not he who gave them a rule in writing, Elijah was nevertheless the example and model for the holy life of the Carmelites." To prove this, it is not necessary to demonstrate historically an uninterrupted succession of hermits on Carmel imitating Elijah up to the time of

the Crusades. It is sufficient that the hermits of 1155 chose the Prophet as their model and that contemporary evidence makes the fact of this imitation certain.

Veneration of the Virgin

We must note as a very remarkable circumstance of the foundation of the Order that the first hermits assembled around a chapel dedicated to the Virgin, "Saint Mary of Mt. Carmel." This is the origin of their name; at once they were called "Brothers of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel." *Nomen fuit omen*. From the very beginning, by a particular design of Providence, the new Order received its other character, a very special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The legend in the breviary relates that Saint Brocard, second Prior General, when dying said to his brethren: "We are called the Brothers of Our Lady. Take care to make yourselves worthy of this beautiful name." *Les Pelerinages par aler en Jherosalem* (1220) and also *Les Chemins et les Pelerinages de la Terre Saint* (before 1265) mention this "little church of Our Lady." The *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* by a certain Philippin (1263-1291), edited by W. A. Neumann, expressly designates it "Monasterium S. Mariae Carmeli. It is with good reason also that in 1282 Peter Emilien, the Prior General, wrote to Edward I of England that he would pray for him "to the Savior and to the aforesaid glorious Virgin for whose honor and glory the Order was specially instituted beyond the seas." The General Chapter of Montpellier (1287) expressed the same thing. In 1311 King Edward II of England wrote to Pope Clement V that he was particularly attached to the Carmelites because they were founded in honor of Mary; Clement V's opinion was the same. One of the most celebrated writers of the Order, John Baconthorpe, wrote of the Virgin at this time, commenting on "Your head is like Carmel:" "And since she is honored, and appreciated by Carmel, it is fitting, that on Carmel which was given to her; she should have Carmelites to venerate her in a special way. This is how it was from of old." The same author in his *Expositio analogica Regulae Carmelitanae* describes the Carmelite life as an imitation of Mary. It would be easy to multiply the evidence. But it is sufficient to add that the Carmelites, called by the people "Brothers of Our Lady," received as their official designation the title "Brothers of the Bl. V. Mary of Mt. Carmel," to which Popes and Bishops attached indulgences. The Devotion of the Scapular, Mary's habit, contributed partially to the Carmelites' becoming known as the Brothers of the Virgin.

This double ideal forms the first article of the oldest constitutions preserved for us, those of the General Chapter of Barcelona (1324). Here we read that from the times of the holy Prophets, Elijah and Elisha, devout hermits lived continuously on Mt. Carmel, sought this holy mountain and loved its solitude in order to give their minds over to the contemplation of heavenly things; they built a chapel here in honor of the Virgin and thus deserved to be called the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, a name recognized by Popes. St. Albert gave them a rule which was approved. The Carmelites are imitators and successors of these hermits. Thus from its origin, the two specific elements of Carmel's spirituality have been imitation of Elijah and veneration of the Blessed Virgin. The Carmelites have always been mindful that they should imitate these two models, Elijah and Mary. They are the Sons of Elijah and the Brothers of Mary. From here also Carmel's mystical orientation proceeds.

3: Special vocation to the mystical life

In 1370 the Spanish Carmelite, Philip Riboti, assembled some documents on the origins of the Order, in which the mystical vocation of its members is particularly affirmed. The authenticity of these documents has given place to very serious debate, but also to important defense. The collection contains the *Institutio primorum monachorum*, attributed to John XLIV, Patriarch of Jerusalem; a letter from about 1235 by Saint Cyril of Constantinople, third Prior General; and finally, the Chronicle of William of Sanvico, the author of which was one of the last to flee from Mount Carmel in 1291 at the time of the general massacre by the Turks and who assisted at the General Chapter of Montpellier (1287) in the capacity of definator of the Holy Land.

Should they be of the 14th century only -- which is by no means proved -- these documents would still furnish us with very precious information about Carmelite Spirituality and what was regarded in the middle of the 14th century as the mystical tradition of Carmel and its ideal. According to the testimony of the Dominican, Stephen of Salagnac, in the second half of the 13th century, the *Institutio*, even as apocryphal, remains a traditional paraphrase of the rule of life created by the Patriarch Aymeric of Malafay in 1156 to which allusion is made in the prologue of the Rule of 1205. The *Institutio* describes the spiritual life of the hermits of Carmel and indicates clearly the double goal of the Order, and affirms consequently from the beginning its members' arrival at mystical graces if they are faithful to their rule and if God judges it opportune. "This life," says the *Institutio* (Ch. 2), "has a double goal; we acquire the first by our virtuous labor and effort with the help of divine grace. It consists in offering to God a holy heart, free of all stain of sin. We attain this end when we are perfect and in Carith, which is to say, hidden in charity... The other goal of this life is communicated to us by a pure gift of God; I mean not only after death, but even in this mortal life, to taste in some way in one's heart and to experience in one's spirit the power of the divine presence and the sweetness of glory from on high. This is called drinking from the torrent of God's pleasures." Not only the purgative way and the illuminative way, but even the unitive way and infused contemplation are clearly proposed as the end to be attained, the goal to be pursued, the ideal to be realized; but still this union and participation in the heavenly life are declared at the same time to be a "pure gift of God." Never in any Order; to my knowledge, has a book furnishing a norm of life and declaring the end toward which its members should strive, enunciated the vocation to the mystical life in so formal a manner.

This double end is the "double spirit" asked by Elisha for his disciples and the imitators of Elijah. Occasionally this double spirit is interpreted as the double portion of the firstborn or as the union of the active and contemplative life. But more generally it is admitted that it pertains to active contemplation which the divine Goodness crowns with passive contemplation.

4: Proper ideas on the mixed life.

The rule, which places the summit of the spiritual life in active and passive contemplation, has a concept of the mixed life which differs from that of the Thomistic School. The latter sums up its ideal in this formula -- *contemplata alius tradere*; to crown the contemplative life with the active life is the highest perfection for St. Thomas and the Dominicans. For Carmel, it would be rather complete dedication to contemplation; it should be interrupted only because of necessity -- when there is need to go to men and speak to them of God. Only charity toward one's neighbor or obedience can be reasons for leaving God for the sake of God. "*Deum propter Deum relinquere*." As the rule prescribes: "To meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, watching in prayer, unless occupied with other justified tasks." The words of Our Lord about Mary Magdalen, which the Church applies to the Blessed Virgin on the feast of the Assumption, have been applied to Order of Carmel: "Mary has chosen the better part and it shall not be taken from her." For the Carmelite, contemplation is "the better part. This difference in concept is felt very little in practice; the Carmelites took into account the necessity of interrupting their contemplation for the care of souls, and the Popes have called upon them for preaching, missions, and numerous apostolic works. Love of neighbor and submission to the head of the Church have constrained them to undertake the mixed life; also to give to others the fruit of their contemplation, but this ideal has been imposed upon them by circumstances. The Order has always sought to preserve its proper ideal for as many of its sons as possible; it asks them to return with the greatest haste as soon as their exterior duties are accomplished to what is the direct and primary object of their calling. Nicholas the Frenchman, seventh Prior General (1265-1271), who relinquished his office for solitude, characterizes this primitive orientation well: "Conscious of their imperfection, the hermits of Carmel persevered in solitude for a long time. But since they aspired to be of use to their neighbor so as not to be culpable in their regard, they sometimes, although rarely, descended from their hermitage. They went to tread on the threshing floor of preaching and to sow with generous hand what they had reaped with delight in the desert with the sickle of contemplation."

5: Contemplation remains "the better part."

This orientation has not changed. In the middle of the 13th century when the Carmelites passed over into Europe and took their place among the Mendicant Orders, they received from the Popes a more marked tendency toward the active life. St. Simon Stock, Prior General, then did his utmost to protect the contemplative ideal as well as he could. On this point the rule underwent no modification, when at the request of the Saint, Innocent IV adapted it to the new living conditions of the Carmelites. These, it must be recognized, were a serious danger to the contemplative life, and many religious no doubt were given over to the active life very much. Two successors of St. Simon Stock regretted that the Friars could no longer enjoy the delights of contemplation. The first, Nicholas the Frenchman, in a severe letter recalls the traditions and vocation of the Order in emphatic terms; this letter, destined to kindle in the hearts of Carmelites the living flame of love for the heavenly things promised and given in contemplation, is entitled *Ignea Sagitta*, the Flaming Arrow. Adding example to his words, the Prior General after ruling for six years resigned and retired to a hermitage. Ralph the German, his successor; was in office no more than three years when he too went to seek solitude in the English hermitage at Hulne, near Alnwick. If this sublime ideal was not followed in the whole Order with the same ardor; this double withdrawal clearly show that the tradition had not been forgotten by the highest authority. That there were others to follow the example of the Priors General is testified to by the Acts of the General Chapter of Montpellier (1287) where different measures were taken to maintain "the citadel of contemplation" in the Order.

6: Special love of solitude.

Although the necessities of the apostolate had turned the Order to an ever more active life, the custom of establishing new convents in solitude was maintained during the first centuries according to the rule, until it was permitted to choose other sites when there was need. In 1254 the Friars refused the house which St. Louis offered them in the center of Paris and preferred the one which the King gave them outside the city. A decree of John XXII ordained that ten convents be transferred to cities so that the Carmelites might occupy themselves with the care of souls the more easily. In the beginning of the 14th century, John Baconthorpe, the greatest scientific authority in the Order at that time, vindicated foundations in solitude; he exalted meditation in the cell with the example of the Virgin, who by her prayers in the seclusion of Nazareth deserved to conceive the Son of God. We have proof that these solitary convents, asylums of contemplation, continued; in the life of St. Andrew Corsini, bishop of Fiesole (+1366), for example, it was to a house of this kind that he retired for his First Mass and obtained his first mystical grace, a vision of the Blessed Virgin. Blessed Angelus Augustine Mazzinghi (+1438) founded hermitages in the following century and the reform which he inaugurated had no other purpose than to remind the Order of its mystical glory.

Not only the rule, but all the constitutions recommend solitude; the cell is a sanctuary where each one lives with God and ascends to him. No province is complete or prosperous without "deserts," even under the mitigated rule. That is why solitude for the Carmelite is the expression of detachment from the world and nearness to God. Poverty moreover has a significance which differs from the meaning that the Franciscans, for example, attach to it; while the Friars Minor regard it especially as an imitation of Christ and opposition to the world, the Carmelites view it principally as a consequence of their adherence to God in contemplation of heavenly things. To neglect it is a sign that one is less united to God and prefers inferior occupations. In the pursuit of contemplation, poverty is intimately joined to solitude; "How sordid the world becomes for me when I gaze at the heavens."

7: Practice of the Presence of God.

Inspired by the words of the Prophet Elijah, "The Lord lives, in whose sight I stand," the *Institutio* attaches special importance to the practice of the presence of God.

This practice is a very efficacious means of living with God and meditating on his law "day and night," as the rule prescribes. Devotion to the Holy Face of Our Lord is one of the original forms of the prayers and daily occupations of the monks being performed in his sight. Among other evidence of this practice, let us point out the images of the Holy Face in the churches of Mayence and Frankfort-on-the-Main painted on the arches of the presbytery and surrounded by texts which recall the presence of God.

Brother Laurence of the Resurrection (+1691) was therefore well within the framework of Carmelite tradition when he wrote *Le Pratique de la Presence de Dieu*, translated into several languages and famous throughout the whole world. St. Therese of the Child Jesus revived this devotion. Paintings of the Holy Face are found in many Carmels.

8: Adoration and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament

In speaking of the Carmelites' tender devotion to the Sacrament of the Altar; it goes without saying that we do not wish to imply that it is peculiar to them, but only to point out some of the remarkable aspects of it. They have always seen a symbol of the Sacred Host in the wonderful food which the angel pointed out to Elijah and which strengthened the Prophet in such a way that he was able to cross the desert and reach Mount Horeb. The Eucharist is the power which permits them to arrive at contemplation. The rule already prescribed daily assistance at Mass and the construction of an Oratory in the middle of the cells. The history of the Order furnishes admirable models of this devotion. St. Peter Thomas (d. 1365) -- Procurator General at the time of the Avignon Popes, Patriarch of Constantinople, Apostolic Delegate of Pope Clement VI for the East at the time of the crusade against Alexandria--was not hindered by the many occupations of a busy life from spending several hours each night before the Blessed Sacrament; oftentimes he was found there lost in adoration. Blessed John Soreth, Prior General (d. 1471) and great reformer of the Carmelites of the 15th century, his life imperiled, grasped the Blessed Sacrament from the hands of sacrilegious men and rescued it from a burning church. At the end of the same century, Blessed Bartholomew Fan ti, the Master of Novices at Mantua who counted Blessed Baptist Spagnoli among his disciples, taught his novices that one cannot be a good Carmelite without special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament: he cured the sick with the oil from the sanctuary lamp. What determined St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to enter the Carmel of Florence was the practice of daily communion observed in this convent--a thing rare for the times. The Carmelites are rightly numbered among the mendicant orders, for their constitutions demand the greatest simplicity in their monasteries; but for their churches and the cult of the Eucharist grandeur was always permitted. The documents establishing several houses give as the reason for foundation the desire of assuring splendor for the liturgical ceremonies. In Carmelite Churches, the scene of Elijah in the desert represented in painting or sculpture is traditional.

9: Chivalric ideal echoed

By the formulas in which it is expressed in the rule, Carmelite spirituality preserves the echo of the chivalric ideal of the crusaders who established it, almost in the same way in which the Exercises of St. Ignatius retain in their wording something of the military ideal of the Knights of Pamplona. Elijah was venerated as the daring champion of Gods cause: "I am burnt up with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts." Six pieces of spiritual armor are described there; the cincture is the symbol of purity, indispensable for one who desires to reach the holy mountain of the vision of God: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." The corselet which protects the vital parts of the body represents good thoughts: "Holy thoughts will protect you. The breastplate which covers the whole body represents justice, a well regulated life, the observance of the commandments and duties of daily life. The shield is faith; for a living faith is the best safeguard for the spiritual life. The helmet symbolizes hope, confidence in God, which gives us the right to walk with freedom and confidence. Finally, the sword indicates conversation with God which as a double edge blade comes to our aid and defends us in all our difficulties.

10: Harmonious middle course between infused and acquired contemplation

According to the ancient tradition expressed in the *Institutio*, the Carmelites admitted that man can strive for mystical graces and arrive at the presence of God; the religious of the Order are called to this height by special vocation. Elijah, strengthened by heavenly food, arrived at the vision of God during this life. Strengthened by the Eucharist, the Carmelite crossing the desert of this life does his utmost to attain the Horeb of contemplation. Although the task is arduous, their ambition is to follow their father. To realize this ideal is impossible without a free gift of God. But that is nothing else than a reason for esteeming their vocation and that of the entire Order; an exhortation to turn every obstacle aside which would make them unworthy of God's designs for them.

The ancient constitutions, as also the most esteemed writers of the Order; such as John Baconthorpe and John of Hildesheim, are in perfect agreement with the *Institutio* on this point. The great diffusion of the *Institutio*, which was regarded as the manual of Carmelite spiritual life, proves that at the outset of the 14th century at least, the Carmelites considered their religious life as a constant practice of virtue and a preparation for the mystical graces which are its crown. But far from becoming proud because of this sublime vocation, they built their spiritual edifice a solid foundation of humility, being filled with admiration for the overflowing Divine Goodness which rewards its chosen ones during life.

11: Intimate relationship between the sensible, intellectual, and affective elements of contemplation.

The Dominicans have considered the intellectual as the most important element in contemplation while the Franciscans generally have placed greater importance on the affective and sensible elements. The first insist on vision; the second, especially on seraphic love of which their father was so eloquent a singer. Carmel takes the middle course between the two schools: this includes several disciples and admirers of St. Bernard, but for them the affections of the heart and the sensible representation of God's mysteries are perfectly united to the consideration of the mind and are intimately joined with intellectual contemplation. Here also are found disciples and admirers of Eckhart, but more ponderous than their master and very ready to combine the most elevated intellectual abstractions with sensible images and very tender love. We have an example of this in the sermons of Henry Hane, who is none other than the Henry de Hanna (d. 1299), who was the faithful helper of St. Simon Stock in spreading the Order in England, the Netherlands, Germany and France. They are preserved in an Oxford manuscript which bears the title *Paradisus animae intelligentis*, the text of which P. Strauch edited. They contain more than one image found in the works of St. Teresa; the Saint certainly did not know the sermons of Henry Hane, but both of them drew from the same tradition. Hane was influenced by Eckhart but he was on his guard against the too daring expressions of the great Dominican mystic. Sometimes the Carmelite school is called the eclectic school; it would be more correct to say that it takes the middle course between the intellectual and affective schools; this is the reason why it exercised so important an influence on popular devotion, especially in the 15th century. Great St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross were faithful to this tradition of avoiding extremes and harmonizing spiritual life, although St. Teresa leans toward the affective school and St. John of Cross toward the intellectual; the synthesis of their mysticism, which will remain the glory of Carmel, is a harmonious connecting of the different elements of contemplation we find sketched in the medieval Carmelite school.

Another authoritative witness of the school at the beginning of the 14th century is Sibert de Beka, founder of the convent at Gelderen, later provincial of Germany and doctor of Paris, who is famous for his *Ordinale Ordinis* and for a commentary on the rule. He sees the consummation of the contemplative life in perfect love as long as it is joined to a sweet and savourous of the Goodness of God, a knowledge, moreover; which can only be habitual or implicit. He is therefore also a witness to the harmonious combination of the intellect's action and the will's.

12: Decline and Reforms

The expansion of the Order, the increasing necessities of the apostolate and consequently the prolonged stay of many religious outside the convent contributed to the multiplication of foundations in the center of cities, and caused worldly principles to penetrate into the monastic life. Solitude was practiced less, poverty was weakened; studies themselves were a cause of decadence unfortunately by creating privileges from the regular observance and by exempting the most distinguished members of the Order from the common life. The Western Schism opened the door for mitigations. Yet there remained those who observed the rule, faithful even to sanctity: St. Peter Thomas, of whom we have already spoken, and who was one of the founders of the faculty of theology at Bologna, was a Frenchman from Perigard; St. Andrew Corsini in Italy; in Germany, John of Hildesheim (d. 1375), who in his *Historiatrium Regum* retains the traditions of the Order in such remarkable fashion, and with him, representing the Carmelites of the school of Eckhart, Henry of Hanna; in England, the Carmelite translators of the works of Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole. Hermitages were established at this time in England as well as in Italy, which proves that the ancient tradition was not completely forgotten.

What is remarkable is that the Order had so much vitality to restore the primitive ideal after a period of decline. Decadence, moreover; is never such that there are not some convents where the primitive rule is kept intact. The reforms which operated for the great benefit of souls here and there in one or another province prevented the Order from losing its initial orientation. At the beginning of the 15th century when the Popes mitigated the rule, a group of Italian convents in the region of Mantua remained faithful to the primitive spirit, and approved moreover by Papal authority, were organized into a congregation which would flourish greatly. Along with Bl. Angelus Augustine Mazzinghi, a very renowned preacher who devoted all his free time to solitude and contemplation, we cite among its most illustrious members Bl. Baptist Spagno (d. 1517), the great humanist, six times Vicar-General of the Mantuan Congregation who became Prior General of the entire Order; his neo-classical poems sing the praises of the Virgin and of the saints of the Order, and also of the contemplative life which he tried to maintain with all his strength.

Other reforms of the same type were established at Albi (1499) and at Mt. Olivet (1516). But the most important reformer of all was Bl. John Soreth who was Prior General for twenty years (1451-1471).

13: Mitigation of the rule. Appeal for methodical prayer. Blessed John Soreth.

The mitigation of the rule pertained to two points especially. The first was the restriction of solitude. A less hermitical life was granted to the Carmelites, a life which brought them more into the life of the people. But despite this, the primitive end of the Order was not abandoned; on the contrary, as though the dangers which threatened the spirit of prayer had rendered more lively the consciousness of the Order's destiny and inspired it to take the necessary measures to assure its realization, the new constitutions explicitly recommended contemplation and insisted that a place be made for prayer and contemplation.

It is perpetually repeated, "Prayer is the best part for Carmelites;" the Carmelite should guard the contemplative life as a treasure, and the active life should not be an obstacle to it. There is a direct relationship between the reform of Bl. John Soreth who lived ordinarily at Liege and who was an intimate friend of the Duke of Burgundy, and of the propagators of the *Devotio Moderna* in the Lowlands. This latter did much to popularize methodical prayer, regular meditation, and a mental prayer more accessible to the greatest number because it utilized the imagination and the sensible memory more. The great Carmelite devotion to Mary was in perfect harmony with the chief spiritual themes of the *Devotio Moderna*, namely, the Imitation of Christ, and meditation on the life and passion of our Savior. The Carmelites were apostles of the devotion to St. Joseph, St. Anne, St. Joachim, and the Infancy of Jesus and the Holy Face. To facilitate meditation on the mysteries of Christ, several of them wrote itineraries of the Holy Land, in which imagination plays a greater part than reality, but which exercised a considerable influence on piety. It is in one of these itineraries -- that of John Pascha (d. 1530), Prior of Malines, *Een devote maniere om een gheestelijke Peigrimage te trecken tot den heylighen Lande*, Louvain, 1563 -- that we find the most ancient formulas of our present-day Way of the Cross with its fourteen stations. Carmelite poets relate pious legends about the sojourn of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus on Carmel on their return from Egypt. Several saints of the Order are represented with the Infant Jesus in their arms -- St. Albert of Sicily (d. 1306), Blessed Joan Scopelli (d. 1491). The *Historia trium regum*, so widely circulated in the 15th century, contributed to the propagation of devotion to the Infant Jesus. John Soreth was a providential man. His *Expositio paranetica in Regu am armejitarum*, written in 1455 and entirely animated with the ancient spirit, adapts the life of the Order to the new circumstances. A Frenchman, he underwent the influence of the Victorines and St. Bernard; but, from all evidence, he was won over to the *Devotio Moderna* and to systematic meditation. For him meditation has a three-fold object: 1) the book of nature in which God teaches us so many mysteries and which we should admire because it reveals God's law to us, the ordinary subject of the Carmelite's consideration according to the rule; 2) the book of Holy Scripture which must be constantly read because it was written for us and contains the law of God; 3) the book of life which God writes for each of us and which will teach us how we should observe God's law. Thus there are three distinct forms of meditation which can, however; be combined. In the exposition of the rule, the insistence on the practice of virtue and the exercise of meditation is remarkable. But what is perhaps more astonishing is the fact that this follower of the *Devotio Moderna* spoke so

remarkably of the vision of God and of mystical graces about which the authors of this school are in general very reserved. Particularly the reading of Holy Scripture, which is the law of God, should fill us with great joy from the fact that God lives in us by his grace, and we are able to progress like giants, carried away beyond our strict obligations by the pure love and joy which is the cause of our election. Prayer is not an oasis in the desert of life: it is our life. During the hours of meditation we prepare the food which maintains it throughout the day's work and renders our prayer continuous. It is to be noted that these developments of methodical meditation serve to explain the following passages of the rule: "To meditate day and night on the law of the Lord and to watch in prayer;" for thus apostolic activity is subordinated to the primary end of the Order which is conversation with God. And so providentially exterior activity proceeds from union with God but should not interrupt it.

14: Abstinence and the mitigation of the rule

The second point which the mitigation affected was abstinence. The mitigated rule permits the use of meat three or four times a week. This was not such an important deviation from the primitive rule as is sometimes stated. One of the most authoritative commentaries on the rule-- that of Sibert de Beka (d. 1333) -- relates that when the Carmelites were transplanted to Europe and sought to adapt the rule to their new needs, before presenting it for the approbation of Pope Innocent IV (1247), and influenced perhaps by the Rule of St. Benedict which promises blessings for those who abstain from wine, they asked if they might not rather abstain from wine. On this they were in agreement with the writers of the primitive rule who, according to Sibert, always followed the example of the Rechabites and the Essenes, whom they venerated as predecessors and models. The latter did not abstain from meat because they had to partake of the sacrifices in the temple. By virtue of an analogous principle St. Albert, the author of the rule of 1205, prescribed abstinence from meat and not from wine, matter of sacrifices in the New Testament. In 1247 two Dominicans were appointed by Innocent IV to revise the rule, Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher and William, Bishop of Tortose, who decided on abstinence from meat. They likewise admitted the possibility of dispensation. A significant episode! Carmelite spirituality will always insist rather on abstinence in general as a fundamental of the spiritual life than on the particular form of practicing it.

15: Establishment of the Carmelite nuns under the mitigated rule

Although in preceding centuries devout women had sought to enter into intimate contact with this or that house of the Order as recluses who situated their cells near the Carmelite churches, such as Bl. Joan of Toulouse (13th century), it is only in 1453 that the Carmelite nuns were officially founded by Bl. John Soreth with Nicholas V's approbation. The Prior General did not intend to create a new Order; but to confirm the Order's vocation by joining to it a group of members who would be entirely dedicated to its primary end, the contemplative life. The mitigated rule under which he established them was not an obstacle to regular observance, to a poor; solitary life of continuous prayer and union with God. The convent of Couets near Nantes was particularly famous for its good example. Directed in its beginnings by Bl. Frances of Amboise, Duchess of Brittany, whom John Soreth himself admitted to Carmel, it was lived in so fervently after one hundred years of existence that its reputation had reached as far as Spain. No doubt St. Teresa was thinking of Couets when she proposed to leave for a convent in the north in order to live more faithfully according to the traditions of the Order.

The new institution soon spread from the Lowlands and the Rhineland to France, Spain and Italy; at Florence, St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi obtained permission to observe the primitive rigor. The foundations of Bl. Soreth are distinguished by a very special love of simplicity, poverty, solitude and prayer. The cloister was less severe than it would be after the Council of Trent; in the Lowlands and in the Rhineland it was stricter; but in Spain, much more relaxed.

16: Affinity of the Carmelite School to Ruysbroeck and the Devotio Moderna

A circumstance which favored the establishment of the Carmelite nuns was the legation and canonical visitation of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa in Germany and the Lowlands (1451) in which he decreed that the devout women living in common in several cities but without a definite rule, e.g., the Sisters of the Common Life, should choose an approved rule and unite themselves to an existing Order. A group of women who were under the direction of the Carmelites of Gelderen and living near their church, asked for affiliation to the Order of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. This was the occasion for the Prior General to ask Nicholas V for permission to establish a second order of women with the first order of Friars. It is known that the companion of Cardinal Cusa, Denis the Carthusian of Ruremonde, Capitular of Gelderen, was the author of several treatises on the life of the sisters and on the reform of their convents. These details explain a little the close relationship of the Institute of Carmelite Nuns with the Devotio Moderna. The Charterhouse was a spiritual master for Carmel also. History tells us how much the Carthusians favored Ruysbroeck's mysticism and the spirituality of the Devotio Moderna in general; because of their love for solitude and the contemplative life, they served as an example and a stimulus for the Carmelites who aspired to a more strict observance. The contact between the Carmelite nuns, their spiritual Fathers and the masters of the Devotio Moderna was not merely occasional; it was a matter more of a common spirit. In a very striking way Father Martin, S. J., has demonstrated that the terminology and images of Ruysbroeck and St. Teresa are closely related and sometimes even identified. Above we established some analogous relationships between Bl. John Soreth and the writers of the Devotio Moderna. This is, it seems, an additional and very significant indication of the middle and conciliatory position which the Carmelite school has taken between the different schools.

17: Strict observance under the mitigated Rule. Reform of Touraine and John of St. Samson. Aspiration.

The reform of St. Teresa, undertaken with the permission of the Prior General and of the Provincial of the Order; after divers and sudden changes, resulted in the separation of the reformed branch. But this result must be attributed to fortuitous circumstances and not to any formal Opposition. What proves that the Old and New Observances did not live in a spirit of Opposition is the fact that shortly after the Teresian reform a very austere reform was introduced in France under the jurisdiction of the General. In the early years of the 17th century Fathers John Behourt and Philippe Thibault (d. 1638) started a "stricter observance at Rennes in the Carmelite Province of Touraine, of which a blind lay brother; John of St. Samson (d. 1636) was the soul and greatest mystical writer; H. Bremond rightly calls him the St. John of the Cross of the Calced Carmelites. It is remarkable that this reform, inspired by that of St. Teresa no doubt, reclaimed the ancient traditions. In the treatises which the blind mystic dictated, an appeal for the primitive customs of the Order is made, and in a much more explicit way than in the works of the two Spanish mystics. Besides the great historical and spiritual works published during the same century by the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance especially in Belgium -- the *Speculum Carmelitanum* and the *Vinea Carmeli* of Fr. Daniel of the Virgin Mary, veritable arsenals of ancient documents, and the *Introductio in terram Carmeli* by Fr. Michael of St. Augustine (d. 1684) -- we could consult the spiritual works of the mystics of Touraine to instruct ourselves in the spirit and traditions of the Carmelite school.

John of St. Samson insists very strongly on the mystical vocation of Carmelites. The active life should not have first place. Recalling that the rule demands a life of prayer; he chooses this prayer -- "to be lost in the object of contemplation, God and the things of God." No doubt it is necessary to preach, study and work, but because of the dangers which exterior activity brings, it is necessary for young scholastics to exercise themselves intensely in the principal object of their vocation and establish themselves solidly in the practice of meditation and contemplation. Contemplation is still a pure gift of God; but it is important that we for our part remove all the obstacles and practice the virtues so that we may be found disposed in the way which God demands before giving his mystical favors. In this doctrine, human activity enjoys a considerable part; in its higher degrees, contemplation remains an absolutely gratuitous gift. Thus equilibrium is maintained between the school of acquired contemplation and that of infused contemplation. John is careful to note that perfection does not consist in ecstatic phenomena but in union with God who lives in us. This fire, which burns in us, sets us aflame, and the flame of our love is united to Divine Love which enflames our heart.

It is necessary that Carmelites understand this vocation and prepare for it. As a means of arriving at the dispositions required by God, John counsels a form of prayer which the Francis can Henry Herp especially honored, namely, aspiration. It has four degrees: inhaling God, exhaling God, living in God, living by God. Entirely filled with God, we must hunger and thirst for God without ceasing and open our mouth to breathe God. We should start by offering ourselves and every creature to God. As Bl. John Soreth already showed, contemplation by its

nature should elevate us to God. But we must not delay in the admiration of the marvels of nature; this is only a step by which we must mount. In view of God's riches, let us ask him to enrich us, for in the measure that he gives himself to us, he renders us unceasingly more like to himself. We should collaborate in his action by uniting ourselves ever more intimately to him; and we should forever rejoice over this union with God. The kingdom of God which is within us -- the old comparison of the "the soul's spark " -- must be extended without interruption or end by occupying us completely.

18: Two branches of the same trunk

Looking at Carmel from above, its two branches are united at their summits. Despite the separation which exists on the trunk, the two branches intermingle their foliage and blossoms without our being able to distinguish those which belong to the one from those which belong to the other. The blind singer of Rennes, Ven. John of St. Samson, does not have a different melody from that of the inspired singer imprisoned in the Carmel of Toledo, because both repeat what the *Institutio primorum monachorum* had inculcated in the Carmelites of the first centuries, namely, that all Carmelites, Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, in order to be faithful to their vocation should do their very utmost to go, under the guidance of the saintly hermit and prophet Elijah, across the desert of this life up to the Mt. Horeb of the vision of God, strengthened by the heavenly nourishment which is shown on the altar.