

CHAPTER I

The Gift and the Mission of the Order

1.

Through Jesus Christ,
 Son of the Father
 and “firstborn of all creation”,¹
 we live in union with God
 and with our neighbours
 in a new way.

And so, we share in the mission of the Incarnate Word in this world,
 and we form the Church,
 which is in Christ “as a sacrament - a sign and instrument
 of communion with God, and of the unity of the whole human race.”²

2.

Living in allegiance to Jesus Christ,³
 and embracing his Gospel as the supreme norm of our lives,⁴
 by the power of his Spirit
 who distributes his gifts to each according to his will,⁵
 we seek to live together in mutual service of one another
 and of all people.

In this way, we co-operate in God’s plan
 to gather all men and women into one Holy People.⁶

3.

Among the gifts of the Spirit is the evangelical life,
 which we profess as religious,
 called by Christ to live and to spread
 his transforming and liberating power,
 and even evangelical life itself,
 in a manner that is specific to us,
 effective, and contemporary.
 This life is characterised by an intense search for God,
 in total adherence to Christ,
 finding expression in fraternal life and apostolic zeal.

4.

Inherent in this vocation
 is the full acceptance of the conditions
 which Christ sets
 for those who wish to follow him in this kind of life.
 It involves acceptance of God’s will,
 as sharing in Christ’s obedience.
 It also includes the life of poverty

¹ Col 1:15

² LG 1

³ Prologue to the *Rule*

⁴ PC 2

⁵ 1Cor 12:11

⁶ LG 9; GS 32

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and community of goods,
as an expression of our unity in Christ
and of mutual gospel-inspired union with our brothers.

Finally, it is consecrated chastity,
as an expression of our love of God
and of our brothers and sisters.

5.

We look upon our consecrated life above all as an invitation
and a great gift from God,
by which he consecrates us to himself,
that we may serve our brothers and sisters
following Christ's example.

This vocation perfects in us, through our shared brotherhood,
the power, which is also charismatic, a gift of the Spirit,
received at baptism and at confirmation,
binding us in a special way to the Church
and making us ready to serve God and humanity,
"to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls,
and to spread it to the four corners of the earth."⁷

6.

In this context,
we the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel
are engaged in a process of self-examination
and seek to define the characteristics
among the many existing charisms and vocations
which give our religious family its particular identity
within the Church.

7.

At the time of the Crusades to the Holy Land,
hermits settled in various places throughout Palestine.
Some of these, "following the example of Elijah,
a holy man and a lover of solitude,
adopted a solitary life-style on Mount Carmel,
near a spring called Elijah's Fountain.
In small cells, similar to the cells of a beehive,
they lived as God's bees,
gathering the divine honey of spiritual consolation."⁸

⁷ LG 44

⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Orientalis*, chps. 51 & 52, ed. J. Bongars, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, Hanover, 1611, I, p. 1074 ff.

8.

Later, St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem brought the hermits together, at their request, into a single “*collegium*”; he gave them a formula for living which expressed their own eremetical ideals (“*propositum*”)⁹ and reflected the spirit of the so-called pilgrimage to the Holy Land and of the early community of Jerusalem.¹⁰ Moved by “their love of the Holy Land”, these hermits “consecrated themselves in this Land to the One who had paid for it by the shedding of his blood, in order that they might serve him, clothed in the habit of religious poverty,”¹¹ persevering “in holy penance”¹² and forming a fraternal community.

9.

This way of life was approved successively by Honorius III in 1226, by Gregory IX in 1229, and by Innocent IV in 1245.¹³ In 1247, Innocent IV approved it definitively as an authentic rule of life, amending it to suit Western conditions.¹⁴ These adaptations became necessary when the Carmelites began to migrate to the West to escape persecution, and expressed a desire to lead a life “in which, with the help of God, they would have the joy of working for their own salvation and that of their neighbour.”¹⁵

10.

As a result of the approval of the Rule by Innocent IV, the Carmelites placed themselves at the service of the Church, according to the common ideal of the Mendicant Orders, also known as the Orders of Apostolic Brotherhood. However, they retained the distinctive features of their original charism;¹⁶ and over the centuries the Order and the Church found these features to belong to Carmelites, especially because of the teachers of spiritual life whom God raised up in the Order.

⁹ Prologue to the *Rule*.

¹⁰ *Rule*, ch. 7, 14, 10 with John 15:4, 14:23; Heb 13:14; Acts 21; and *Rule*, chps. 7-11 with Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-36.

¹¹ Papal bull, *Ex vestrae religionis*, Urban IV, 5 August 1262, in *Bull. Carm.*, I, p. 523.

¹² *Constitutiones capituli Londinensis anni 1281*, Rubric I, ed. by L. Saggi, in *AOC*, 15 (1950) 208.

¹³ Papal Bulls *Ut vivendi normam*, Honorius III, 30 January 1226; *Ex officii nostri*, Gregory IX, 6 April 1229; *Ex officii nostri*, Innocent IV, 8 June 1245 in *Bull. Carm.*, I, pp. 1, 4-5, 5.

¹⁴ Papal Bull *Quae honorem Conditoris*, Innocent IV, 1 October 1247 in *Bull. Carm.*, I, p. 8.

¹⁵ Papal Bull *Paganorum incursum*, Innocent IV, 27 July 1246, ed. A. Staring in *Carmelus*, 27 (1980) 281-2.

¹⁶ *Rule*, ch. 7, 14; *Constitutiones 1281*, p. 210.

11.

The Rule outlines the guiding thrust of Carmelite life in allegiance to Christ, according to the spirit of the Order. We are to ponder the law of the Lord, by day and by night,¹⁷ in silence and in solitude, so that the word of God may dwell abundantly in the hearts and on the lips of those who profess it.¹⁸ We are to pray with perseverance, especially by keeping vigil and praying the psalms.¹⁹ We are also to be clothed in spiritual armour;²⁰ to live in fraternal communion, expressed through the daily celebration of the Eucharist,²¹ through fraternal meetings in chapters,²² through shared ownership of all material goods,²³ through fraternal and loving correction of failings,²⁴ and through a life of austerity, with work and penance,²⁵ rooted in faith, hope and love, always conforming one's own will to God's, sought in faith through dialogue and through the prior's service to his brothers.²⁶

12.

Carmelite spirituality is characterised by two features. The first is its Elijan trait which the Carmelites developed living as they did on Mount Carmel, the scene of the great prophet's deeds. Its second feature is an intimacy with Mary in our spiritual life, eloquently witnessed by the title of being her brothers and the dedication of the first Church on Mount Carmel in her honour.

13.

As the human race enters into a new period of its history, we seek, as Carmelites inspired by the Spirit at work in the Church, to adapt our way of life to new conditions.²⁷ We seek to understand the signs of the times and to examine them in the light of the Gospel, of our charism, and of our spiritual heritage,²⁸ so that we may incarnate this way of life in different cultures.

¹⁷ *Rule*, ch. 7

¹⁸ *Rule*, ch. 7, 14, 16

¹⁹ *Rule*, ch. 7, 8

²⁰ *Rule*, ch. 14

²¹ *Rule*, ch. 10

²² *Rule*, ch. 11

²³ *Rule*, ch. 4, 9

²⁴ *Rule*, ch. 11

²⁵ *Rule*, ch. 12, 13, 15

²⁶ *Rule*, ch. 17-18.

²⁷ Gen. Congr. 1992, p. 50

²⁸ PC 2

CHAPTER II

The Charism of the Order

14.

“To live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ
and to serve him faithfully
with a pure heart
and a clear conscience”:²⁹
these words, inspired by St. Paul,
are the basis for all the elements of our charism;
they are the foundation upon which Albert constructed our way of life.
The particular Palestinian context in which the Order originated,
and the approval bestowed by the Holy See
at the various stages of the Order’s historical evolution,
gave new meaning and inspiration
to the way of life set out in the Rule.

Carmelites live their life of allegiance to Christ
through a commitment to seek the face of the living God
(the contemplative dimension of life),
through fraternity,
and through service (*diakonia*)
in the midst of the people.

15.

The spiritual tradition of the Order has stressed
that these three fundamental elements of the charism
are not distinct and unrelated values,
but closely interwoven.

Down the ages the Carmelites have emphasised the dynamic
of the desert experience as a crucial factor in unifying these values.
The desert experience is a Carmelite commitment
to make the crucified Christ - stripped and emptied -
the very foundation of their lives;
to channel their energies entirely towards him in faith,
tearing down any obstacles which may stand in the way
of perfect dependence on him
or impede perfect charity towards God
and towards others.

This process of detachment which leads to union with God
- the ultimate goal of all human growth -
is found in our spirituality in the expressions
“purity of heart” (*“puritas cordis”*)
and “total availability to God (*“vacare Deo”*)
These indicate a total openness to God
and a gradual self-emptying.

Through this process, when we come to see reality with God’s eyes,
our attitude towards the world is transformed

²⁹ Prologue to the *Rule*; 2 Cor 10:5; 1 Tim 1:5.

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according to his love,
and the contemplation of the loving presence of God
will be seen in our lives of fraternity and of service.³⁰

1. The contemplative dimension of our life

16.

From its earliest days,
the community of Carmelites adopted a contemplative style,
both in its structures and in its basic values.
This is clearly reflected in the Rule,
which describes a community of brothers,
totally dedicated to a prayerful attention to the Word,³¹
celebrating and praising the Lord with zeal.³²
The Rule speaks of a community
whose members are open to the indwelling of the Spirit
and formed by the Spirit's values:
chastity, holy thoughts, justice,
love, faith, the expectation of salvation,³³
work accomplished in peace,³⁴
silence which, as the Prophet tells us,
is the cult of justice and brings wisdom to word and action;³⁵
and discernment, "the guide and moderator of all virtues."³⁶

17.

The tradition of the Order
has always interpreted the Rule
and the founding charism
as expressions of the contemplative dimension of life,
and the great spiritual teachers of the Carmelite Family
have always returned to this contemplative vocation.
Contemplation begins when we entrust ourselves to God,
in whatever way he chooses to approach us;
it is an attitude of openness to God,
whose presence we discover in all things.
Thus, contemplation is the inner journey of Carmelites,
arising out of the free initiative of God,
who touches and transforms us,
leading us towards unity of love with him,
raising us up so that we may enjoy this gratuitous love
and live in his loving presence.
It is a transforming experience
of the overpowering love of God.

³⁰ XII Prov., p 48.

³¹ *Rule*, ch. 7

³² *Rule*, ch. 8

³³ *Rule*, ch. 14

³⁴ *Rule*, ch. 15

³⁵ *Rule*, ch. 16

³⁶ *Rule*, Epilogue

This love empties us
of our limited and imperfect human ways of
thinking, loving, and behaving,
transforming them into divine ways.

18.

Contemplation also has a gospel and an ecclesial value.³⁷

The practice of contemplation
is not only the source of our spiritual life;
it also determines the quality of our fraternal life
and of our service in the midst of the people of God.³⁸

The values of contemplation

- when lived faithfully in the midst of the complex events of daily life -
make Carmelite brotherhood a witness
to the living and mysterious presence of God among his people.

The search for the face of God,
and openness to the gifts of the Spirit,
make us more attentive to the signs of the times
and more sensitive to the seeds of the Word in history,
seeing and evaluating facts and events
within the Church and within society.³⁹

Through living like Christ,
in solidarity with the events
and the hopes of the human race,⁴⁰
Carmelites will be able to make appropriate decisions
to transform life, making it conform more closely
to the will of the Father.
Moreover, for the good of the Church,
the contemplative dimension
will encourage those who feel called to an eremetical life.

2. *Fraternity*

19.

A contemplative attitude towards the world around us
allows us to discover the presence of God
in the events of ordinary daily life
and especially, to see him in our brothers and sisters.
Thus we are led to appreciate the mystery
of those with whom we share our lives.
Our Rule requires us to be essentially “brothers”,⁴¹
and reminds us that the quality of interpersonal relationships
within the Carmelite community
needs to be constantly developed

³⁷ PC 7; Can. 674

³⁸ Gen. Congr. 1986, p. 4

³⁹ GS 41; II Prov., p. 32

⁴⁰ GS 1

⁴¹ *Rule*, ch. 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 17, 18; also Gen. Congr. 1974, p. 40

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and enhanced, following the inspiring example
of the first community in Jerusalem.⁴²
For us to be brothers
means to grow in communion
and in unity,⁴³
overcoming privileges and distinctions,⁴⁴
in a spirit of participation and co-responsibility,⁴⁵
in sharing material possessions,⁴⁶
a common programme of life, and personal charisms;⁴⁷
to be brothers also means to care for one another's spiritual
and psychological well-being,
through walking in the way of dialogue and reconciliation.⁴⁸

20.

These fraternal values find expression and nourishment
in the Word,
in the Eucharist,
and in prayer.

Hearing, praying and living the Word
- in silence, in solitude and in community,⁴⁹
especially in the form of *lectio divina* -
Carmelites are led, day by day,
to know and experience the mystery of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰
Inspired by the Spirit and rooted in Christ Jesus,
abiding in him by day and by night,⁵¹
Carmelites allow every choice and every action
to be guided by his Word.⁵²

Inspired by the Word
and in communion with the whole Church,
the brothers come together to praise the Lord,⁵³
and invite others to share in their experience of prayer.

Every day, if possible, the brothers are called,
from solitude and from their apostolic work,
to the Eucharist
- source and culmination of their lives⁵⁴ -
so that, gathered together around the Lord's table,⁵⁵

⁴² *Rule*, ch. 7-11, and Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-36.

⁴³ *Rule*, ch.10, 11.

⁴⁴ *Rule*, ch. 1-3, 5, 17-18.

⁴⁵ *Rule*, ch. 1-3.

⁴⁶ *Rule*, ch. 3, 4, 9.

⁴⁷ *Rule*, ch. 11.

⁴⁸ *Rule*, ch. 11, 12, 13.

⁴⁹ *Rule*, ch. 4, 7.

⁵⁰ Phil 3:8.

⁵¹ *Rule*, ch. 7

⁵² *Rule*, ch. 14.

⁵³ *Rule*, ch. 8.

⁵⁴ PC 6, 15; LG 11; PO 5.

they may be “united, heart and soul,”⁵⁶
 living true, fraternal *koinonia* in unselfishness,
 in mutual service,⁵⁷
 in faithfulness to a common goal
 and in a spirit of reconciliation inspired by Christ’s love.⁵⁸

As a contemplative fraternity,
 we seek the face of God and we serve the Church
 in the world or possibly in eremetical solitude.

3. Service in the midst of the people

21.

As a contemplative brotherhood,
 we seek the face of God also in the heart of the world.
 We believe that God has established his dwelling place
 among his people,
 and for this reason, the Carmelite brotherhood knows itself to be
 a living part of the Church and of history
 - an open fraternity, able to listen to the world it lives in,
 and willing to be questioned by it;
 ready both to meet life’s challenges
 and to give an authentic, evangelical response
 based on our own charism.⁵⁹
 Carmelites will show solidarity and will be eager to collaborate
 with all who suffer, who hope,
 and who commit themselves to the search for the Kingdom of God.⁶⁰

22.

The notion of travelling, hinted at in the Rule,⁶¹
 is an expression of the evangelical and apostolic style
 of the mendicant orders.
 It is a call to the Carmelite brotherhood to discern
 and to follow the ways marked out by the Lord’s Spirit
 for communities and individuals;
 it is a sign of solidarity and of generous service
 - both to the Universal and local Church,
 and to the world of today.⁶²

⁵⁵ *Rule*, ch. 10.

⁵⁶ Acts 4:32.

⁵⁷ *Rule*, ch. 17, 18.

⁵⁸ *Rule*, ch. 11

⁵⁹ MR 12.

⁶⁰ Gen. Congr. 1986, pp. 30-39

⁶¹ *Rule*, ch. 13.

⁶² MR 11, 18.

23.

The community residence is where the community “gathers” and lives; for Carmelites, it is also a place of welcome⁶³ and hospitality, so that people share in a common spirit, in fraternal reconciliation, and in the experience of God lived in the community.

24.

Finally, this way of being “in the midst of the people” is a sign and a prophetic witness of new relationships of fraternity and friendship among men and women everywhere.

It is a prophetic message of justice and peace in society and among peoples.

As an integral part of the Good News, this prophecy must be fulfilled through active commitment to the transformation of sinful systems and structures into grace-filled systems and structures.⁶⁴

It is also an expression of “the choice to share in the lives of “the little ones” (“*minores*”) of history, so that we may speak a word of hope and of salvation from their midst - more by our life than by our words.”⁶⁵

This option flows naturally from our profession of poverty in a mendicant fraternity, and is in keeping with our allegiance to Christ Jesus, lived out also through allegiance to the poor and to those in whom the face of our Lord is reflected in a preferential way.⁶⁶

4. Elijah and Mary, our inspirations

25.

All that we desire and all that we wish to be today was fulfilled in the lives of the Prophet Elijah and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In their own way, both had “the same spirit, ... the same formation, and the same teacher - the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷

By looking to Mary and to Elijah, we can more easily understand and internalise, live out and proclaim the truth which makes us free.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Rule*, ch. 6.

⁶⁴ Gen. Congr. 1986, p. 18; Gen. Congr. 1974, pp. 4-42; Gen. Congr. 1980, p. 90

⁶⁵ Gen. Congr. 1980, pp. 89-90

⁶⁶ I Prov., pp. 18-19; Gen. Congr. 1980, p. 89

⁶⁷ C.f. A. Bostius, *De Patronatu et patrocinio B. V. Mariae*, ed. Daniel a V.M., *Speculum Carmelitanum*, I, Antwerp, 1680, no. 1654.

⁶⁸ V Prov., p. 73

26.

In Elijah we see the solitary prophet
 who nurtured his thirst for the one and only God,
 and lived in his presence.⁶⁹
 He is the contemplative,
 burning with passionate love for the Absolute who is God,⁷⁰
 “his word flaring like a torch.”⁷¹
 He is the mystic who,
 after a long and wearisome journey,
 learned to read the new signs of God’s presence.⁷²
 He is the prophet who became involved in the lives of the people,
 and who, by battling against false idols,
 brought them back to faithfulness to their Covenant
 with the One God.⁷³
 He is the prophet
 who was in solidarity with the poor and the forgotten,
 and who defended those who endured violence and injustice.⁷⁴

From Elijah, Carmelites learn to be people of the desert,
 with heart undivided, standing before God
 and entirely dedicated to his service,
 uncompromising in the choice to serve God’s cause,
 aflame with a passionate love for God.
 Like Elijah, they believe in God
 and allow themselves to be led by the Spirit
 and by the Word that has taken root in their hearts,
 in order to bear witness to the divine presence in the world,
 allowing God to be truly God in their lives.⁷⁵
 Finally, in Elijah they see, not only prophetic wisdom,
 but also brotherhood lived in community;⁷⁶
 and with Elijah they learn to be
 channels of God’s tender love
 for the poor and the humble.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ 1 Kgs 17:1, 15, 18, 19; 2 Kgs 1:2.

⁷⁰ 2 Kgs 2:1-13.

⁷¹ Sir 48:1.

⁷² 1 Kgs 19:1-18.

⁷³ 1 Kgs 18:20-46.

⁷⁴ 1 Kgs 17:7-24; 21:17-29.

⁷⁵ V Prov., pp. 75-76; Gen. Congr. 1974, p. 42; Gen. Congr. 1980, p. 90; X Prov., p. 64.

⁷⁶ *De Institutione primorum monachorum*, vol. 4, ch. 2-3, 7; vol. 7, ch. 1.

⁷⁷ *PrayComm*, p. 160

27.

Mary, overshadowed by the Spirit of God,⁷⁸
is the Virgin of a new heart,⁷⁹
who gave a human face to the Word made flesh.⁸⁰
She is the Virgin of wise and contemplative listening
who kept and pondered in her heart
the events and the words of the Lord.⁸¹
She is the faithful disciple of wisdom,
who sought Jesus - God's Wisdom -
and allowed herself to be formed and moulded by his Spirit,
so that in faith she might be conformed to his ways and choices.⁸²
Thus enlightened, Mary is presented to us
as one able to read "the great wonders"
which God accomplished in her
for the salvation of the humble and of the poor.⁸³

Mary was not only the Mother of Our Lord;
she also became his perfect disciple, the woman of faith.⁸⁴
She followed Jesus, walking with the disciples,
sharing their demanding and wearisome journey
- a journey which required, above all, fraternal love
and mutual service.⁸⁵

At the marriage feast in Cana, Mary taught us to believe in her Son;⁸⁶
at the foot of the Cross, she became Mother to all who believe;⁸⁷
with them she experiences the joy of the Resurrection.
United with the other disciples "in constant prayer,"⁸⁸
she received the first gifts of the Spirit,
who filled the earliest Christian community with apostolic zeal.

Mary brings the good news of salvation to all men and women.⁸⁹
She is the woman who built relationships,
not only within the inner circle of Jesus' disciples,
but, beyond that, with the people:
with Elizabeth, with the bride and bridegroom in Cana,
with the other women, and with Jesus' "brothers".⁹⁰

⁷⁸ Luke 1:35.

⁷⁹ Ezek 36:26.

⁸⁰ Luke 1:28-37.

⁸¹ Luke 2:19-51.

⁸² Luke 2:44-50.

⁸³ Luke 1:46-55.

⁸⁴ MC 17, 35; RMa 12, 19.

⁸⁵ John 13:13-17; 15:12-17.

⁸⁶ John 2:5.

⁸⁷ John 19:26.

⁸⁸ Acts 1:14.

⁸⁹ Luke 1:39.

⁹⁰ Acts 1:14.

Carmelites see in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God
and archetype of the Church,
the perfect image of all that they want and hope to be.⁹¹
For this reason, Carmelites have always thought of Mary
as the Patron of the Order,
its Mother and Splendour;
she is constantly before their eyes and in their hearts
as “the Virgin Most Pure.”
Looking to her, and living in spiritual intimacy with her,
we learn to stand before God,
and with one another,
as the Lord’s brothers.
Mary lives among us, as mother and sister,
attentive to our needs;
along with us she waits and hopes,
suffers and rejoices.⁹²

The scapular is a sign of Mary’s permanent
and constant motherly love for Carmelite brothers and sisters.
By their devotion to the scapular,
faithful to a tradition in the Order, especially since the 16th century,
Carmelites express the loving closeness of Mary to the people of God;
it is a sign of consecration to Mary,
a means of uniting the faithful to the Order,
and an effective and popular means of evangelisation.⁹³

5. The Carmelite Family

28.

The many and various embodiments of the Carmelite charism
are for us a source of joy;
they confirm the rich and creative fruitfulness of our charism,⁹⁴
lived under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
- a fruitfulness to be welcomed with gratitude
and discernment.

All individuals and groups, whether institutional or not,
which draw their inspiration from the Rule of St. Albert,
from its tradition and from the values
expressed in Carmelite spirituality,
constitute the Carmelite Family within the Church today.⁹⁵

This Family includes ourselves
and our brothers of the Teresian Reform;

⁹¹ *Carmelite Missal* (1980), Preface I of the B. Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel; LG 53; SC 103.

⁹² V Prov., pp. 73-75; Gen. Congr. 1980, p. 90; XI Prov., p. 51; *PrayComm*, pp. 159; 161

⁹³ Pius XII, Apostolic Letter *Neminem profecto latet*, 11 February 1950, in AOC, 16 (1951) 96-97; also Paul VI, Letter to the Legate to the International Congress on Mariology, 11 February 1965 in AOC 24 (1964-65) 187.

⁹⁴ IX Prov., p. 1

⁹⁵ XIII Prov., pp. 11, 42-53

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the women religious of both branches;
affiliated religious congregations;
the Third Orders Secular;
secular institutes;
individuals affiliated with the Order through the sacred scapular;
and those who by whatever title or bond are affiliated with the Order;
those movements which, though juridically not part of the Order,
seek inspiration and support from its spirituality;
and any man or woman who is drawn to the values of Carmel.