

The Rule Of Carmel

This is a transcript of a presentation given at by Teresa Martinez, OCDS.

To explain what the general theme of this talk is, an excerpt from Psalm 24 will be used as a preface.: "Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? Those with clean hands and pure heart, who desire not worthless things"

Why was this topic chosen? The topic of the Rule of St. Albert was chosen because the Constitutions of all three branches of the Order are based on Albert's Rule. Plus, because the Rule is an evangelical text, the practices of the entire Rule teach allegiance to Jesus Christ, the means of our salvation. St. Paul tells us "God has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors of Christ" (2 Cor.5) To become ambassadors of Christ we have to understand what our Christian and Carmelite obligations are. We must also be able to differentiate between vocation and spirituality, to understand our obligations. Being able to pray well does not make us Carmelites, however, to be a good Carmelite one must make every effort to pray well.

Just as it is logical, and an obligation, for us to learn about our faith to be able to practice it properly. So too it is logical and is an obligation for us to learn what the Rule of Carmel is, to be able to practice it correctly, through familiarity with the responsibilities of the vocation. When we do so, two things happen, our Carmelite identity develops, along with the desire and the experience of an evangelizing prophetic commitment. By this we are enabled to live the mission of Carmel in the Church and the world.

When we understand what the inherent responsibilities of a Carmelite vocation are, we become convinced about five things:

1. The necessity for good formation.
2. That personal on-going formation is a necessary life long process and commitment.
3. That formation is not just a personal thing, the future survival of the Order depends on how well the vocation is understood, genuinely lived, and passed on.
4. That by our active commitment to the vocation, we contribute to the formation of our brothers and sisters in the community and in the Order.
5. Our commitment then takes on an evangelical thrust for the conversion of others.

To live a Carmelite identity, we must first know and understand who we are, what we are called to do, how we do what we do, and why we do it. It is only with this understanding that a genuine Carmelite charism can be passed on to others. How do we do this?

Fr. Aloysius Deeney said in his talk at the New Orleans OCDS Congress. "There is an academic aspect to the formation of a Teresian Carmelite...A Carmelite that does not have the interest in studying or deepening the roots of his/her identity through prayer and study loses identity and can no longer represent the Order."

Carrying out the mission Carmel, of witnessing to the Presence of God in the world, obliges us to an active participation in on-going formation. We study our Rule and live it faithfully daily. We also prayerfully explore the lives and doctrines of our Saints, and study the roots and history of the Order. This academic aspect of formation guides and teaches us how to become what God is calling us to be.

The obligation and responsibility of on-going formation is twofold.

1. The Order is obliged to provide the best formation possible, and
2. If by omission, we the members are culpable of not taking formation seriously, we rob ourselves the Order and the Church, by not living an authentic Carmelite vocation or Carmelite mission. We would set a bad example, or project a false image of Carmel, and worse of all, this behavior would be contrary to what God is asking of us.

The whole purpose, value and exercise of this Congress is to return to the original inspiration of our Order, through the examination of our Holy Rule, to be able to live the vocation and its mission responsibly, and are what we claim to be.

This examination of our Rule of will be threefold:

1. We will look very briefly at the Rule from a literary perspective.

2. While looking at Albert's Rule as the cornerstone and foundation on which our present Rule and the future OCDS Constitutions lie, we will examine Albert's Rule on the two levels of asceticism that he recommends in order to reach our contemplative goal.

At the first level of asceticism, Albert gives a practical formula, which entails mortification, or the purgation of the senses for ease and comfort. This first stage starts when we enter Carmel. It entails a whole new lifestyle of self-discipline as we learn to practice the Rule faithfully on a daily basis. I.e. Daily Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, Mental prayer etc. This first stage can only be resolved when we realize that we must let go of being in charge of our spiritual agenda of practices, and let God be in charge, through obedience to what He is calling us to. This is the first tiny step in the right direction of becoming Nothing to gain All.

At the second and more difficult level of asceticism, we learn how to live Jesus' teaching of "Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God." Mt.5,8. The ascetic norms that Albert recommends, are the means for the interior purgation, needed to acquire the contemplative spirit of purity of heart. This is learned through daily practice, done in obedience to God's will, and by living the evangelical counsels.

3. The third aspect of our examination of the Rule, will look at a brief chronology of the historical, political, social and ecclesial conditions in the Middle Ages that caused or warranted the mitigations to the Rule. This will provide us with some idea of why mitigations to the Rule were made. And it will also emphasize the magnitude of the reform that St. Teresa was able to accomplish by God's help.

While what is being presented here will be familiar to most, it is essential to go back to our roots from time to time to study them, so as to deepen our fervor and authenticity, so that we become deeply appreciative of what we have. Appreciation and gratitude expand the heart, and enhances the way the vocation is lived.

This brings us to the first point of this amateur analysis of the Rule,

1. THE RULE FROM A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE.

Letter writing in the twelfth century was an art with strict rules of protocol, following the standard form of Opening Words. Starting Point. Exposition. Request and Conclusion. Read THE RULE OF CARMEL (New Horizons. Editrice "il Calamo" s.n.c. Roma. An OCD Publication. 1st. Article - Historical Approach To The Rule Of Carmel by Keese Waaijman, O.Carm). Albert's Rule, written in strict conformance to the correct code of letter writing, encompasses all of these criteria. We see IN THE OPENING WORDS of the Rule that Albert identifies himself and his social status, as protocol dictated.

IN THE SALUTATION - he bids health in the Lord and blessings in the Holy Spirit. He identifies to whom he is speaking, maintaining strict social status by greeting B, the Prior first, then he greets the hermits under him. He also specifies where they live.

IN THE INTRODUCTION - Albert tells them: "everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ - how pure in heart and steadfast in conscience he must be unswerving in the service of this Master." This core advice and general principal is the foundation of the Rule. It is the driving force of all our observances.

THE EXPOSITION - which has been introduced in the Introduction, is now explained. Albert reminds them that it is they who have asked him for a Rule of Life in keeping with their avowed purpose of reaching the purity of heart required for living in the spirit of the prophets. Fr. Camilo Maccise, OCD our present General said in his

talk in San Antonio last June that "A Prophet is a person of God. A prophet and person of the Word. A prophet is a person who provokes crisis. A prophet is a person who fulfills his mission in weakness." A prophet is "Jesus, the Prophet and evangelist of the kingdom of God." As we grow in the vocation, these prophetic traits become visible and part in the way we live.

IN THE REQUEST - he lays out for them two formulas or specific practices that are the means to their goal. They are practical laws of asceticism that teach us how to live the eremitic spirit of the prophets, to learn how to become pure in heart.

THE CONCLUSION - clearly states that the law of the Rule must be practiced in a spirit of generosity "Our Lord at His Second Coming, will reward anyone who does more than he is obliged to." On this topic of reciprocal generosity in the ascetic practices, our Holy Mother teaches in Ch.6 of the WAY, that God always repays those who love Him, and again in Ch.29, that when we give ourselves wholeheartedly, God repays us wholeheartedly in return.

In point two of the Conclusion, Albert counseling prudence and charity says: "See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues."

This concludes looking at the Rule from a literary perspective, and brings us to the second point of analysis - finding some of the parallels between Albert's Rule and our Rule and or Constitutions.

Why Do We need A Rule?

We all need guidelines, or a road map to show us the way to reach a particular destination. For us Carmelites we have our Catholic Faith, the obligations of our Rule, and the lives and doctrines of our Carmelite Saints.

We start this process during the initial period of aspirancy. This requires major personal adjustment when we must let go of our personal spiritual agenda, while allowing God to take over through our obedience to the norms of the vocation. This requires courage, trust and a determined commitment. It is the important first stage of our personal ascent of Mount Carmel. What we learn at this stage is the cornerstone on which the second level of spiritual growth lies. This first phase, may also be likened to the hard work of the first living waters of prayer we drink. Daily perseverance and fidelity are the key practices needed on the journey.

Here then are eight practical parallels between Albert's rule and our Rule or Constitutions. There are many more, but time permits examination of only a few.

1. An Elected Prior is to Govern. - He must be the first to greet people coming to the site. He protects the site from disturbing intrusions. The President, as the elected head and representative of the community, is the public relations contact for the community and also protects the community from disturbing intrusion. For details see OCDS Constitutions #37.

2. All must have separate cells; allocated by the Prior and with the agreement of the other brothers. P.9 -We see that the responsibilities of leadership are shared. The authority of the community's council to govern is based on this. (Constitutions #'s 32, 33, 38).

3. He gives precautionary Advice on the spirit of leadership: "Whoever has a mind to become leader among you must make himself servant to the rest." This is the same advice Christ gave to the apostles after he had washed their feet. Leaders must serve in humility. Then Albert tells the hermits: "You other brothers too, hold your Prior in humble reverence, your minds not on him but on Christ who has placed him over you..." On this point, Holy Mother advises us to pay great attention to obedience, for our Superior represents the will of God for us. She says that we make more spiritual progress through obedience than without it, and that obedience demands the virtues of humility and mortification. (Way Ch.40, Vs 8)

4. All must do their fair share of work. P.16 Charity demands an active involvement in the welfare of one's community and the Order, through personal commitment to the vocation, by participation and collaboration in the work and mission of the Order. We share with or give to our community our individual talent. The

community in turn accepts it and uses it for the good of all, in this way our gift is communized and the community does not become individualized by any one gifted member. (Constitutions #41 & 42)

5. "Observe silence with all diligence and care. That he may not slip by his tongue and fall..." Silence is the soul of the spirit of interior solitude, a prerequisite for living in the Presence of God. Silence is a guard against rash-judgment, calumny and detraction. Silence breeds charity and guards against sinning. St. Paul tells us: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up." (Eph.4,29)

6. Some animals may be kept for sustenance or traveling. Here Albert gives consideration to practical matters of life-support and financial needs. Contemporary translation for us would mean that we must see to the support of our community and our Order, offering prayers for the living and dead of the Order, by donating our services and work for the good of the Order. Sharing our talents or giving financial assistance, as God has enabled us according to His gifts to us.

7. There is to be a common refectory in which meals are eaten together... There is to be a common chapel to come together for the celebration of the Eucharist. This means that both community and solitary prayer times are necessary. As a Carmelite community we pray together at the monthly meeting. We have our larger faith community prayer in our daily Eucharist. We have our solitary time alone with God alone in our half-hour of mental prayer, and as we sanctify the hours of the day by the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours. These practices train us to live in God's Presence.

8. Those who do not know the hours must say extra prayers. In other words, those who can't read are not exempt from their duty to prayer. His flexibility, compassion and charity show the spirit of the Rule, yet it also reflects St. Paul's teaching in Romans 15,1.

LET US NOW LOOK AT THE SECOND LEVEL OF ASCETICISM.

The interior purgation that leads to purity of heart and purity of intentions.

This is a much more difficult stage than the first stage of self-discipline and sensory purgation. This stage introduces us to the practice of the interior virtues of humility, detachment and love of neighbour, that can bring us to a more mature spirituality if we allow it to be by our faithfulness to our obligations. It can be compared to the second book of the Ascent of Mount Carmel, The Dark Night of the Soul. The soul's interior purgation. This second purgation involves acknowledging and getting rid of character flaws that are deep rooted and habitual, that we may not be aware that we have. The suffering and painfulness of this stage is twofold:

1. We must first become aware of and acknowledge our faults, which pains the ego, because it involves letting go of all that the ego holds sacred. My pride. My self-centeredness. My opinion. My rights, My honour. My gain. My prestige. My lusts. My envy, My jealousy. My spite. My bragging. My ingratitude. Etc.

2. This second level of suffering entails an arduous tenacity to persevere daily, as we strive for the conversion from our character flaws. Without God's help this conversion would be impossible.

Here are some of Albert's guidelines to reach the interior goal of purity of heart. His first advice on how to accomplish this is that they make their foundations in solitary places which simply means, that it would be impossible to reach our goal of purity of heart, while submerged in or preoccupied by excessive worldly pursuits and demands, and pre-occupation with self. Our first goal then is learning to free ourselves from all that enslaves us, by letting go of all that the world tells us matters. So that our self-worth and happiness are not grounded in what others think of me. Gaining freedom from bondage to self and dependence on worldly opinions for our happiness, breeds in us the spiritual wisdom, that urges us to practice the detachment necessary for a contemplative spirit of interior silence and solitude. Through which, and only through which, the Divine Indwelling can be found.

At this stage, a tried, true and faithful practice of the Rule brings us to a more spiritually authentic and mature level. Because in the process, we have learned that if the vocation is not lived realistically, or if it becomes separated from normal daily life it becomes an illusion or fantasy. As we become more aflame with a purified

and compelling love for the Beloved, the journey seems somewhat more bearable. The yoke of self-discipline seems a bit easier and the ascetic burden lighter, even if in fact they may not be lighter.

This stage can be compared to the second living waters of prayer. While we must still work hard, our efforts are greatly assisted by God, who loves and rewards our faithful and loving efforts.

Growth in spiritual maturity also imparts the wisdom that helps us to understand the value of the interior purification. When this happens, we can make great strides, because we begin to understand the meaning of joy in the cross.

Fr. Anastatius points out in the little book *The Spirit of the Rule of Carmel*, that this death-to-self abandonment and detachment we practice, on the one hand is the soul's immolation, but it is the necessary purification that disposes the soul to Divine consummation and Divine transformation. (THE SPIRIT OF THE RULE OF CARMEL Published by the Carmelite Sisters, 75 Carmel Rd., Buffalo, New York.)

Holy Mother warns us about obstacles to growth. She says that few of us are willing to dispose ourselves to receive all that God wants to give us. (See *Interior Castle*, Ch.5), and that Jesus wants to give us every good, and, if we love Him generously He will reward us generously. (IBID) Her remarks mean that the generous gift of self is an absolute pre-requisite for spiritual growth. And sacrifice is necessary. When we understand the value of our Holy Rule as a gift from God to assist in our transformation, we live it in the more enlightened way of zeal and gratitude, eager to please so loving a God and Father.

Other practices recommended by Albert as necessary for the acquisition of the hermetic spirit are:

1. Ponder the word of God day and Night - We do this through daily Scripture reading and *Lectio Divina*. In the correct attitude of an open mind, we read, reflect, resolve and react to the Word of God, making it a part of our daily way of life. Scripture reading cannot be separated from ordinary life if conversion is to take place, neither can it be separated from the reality of our situations or our times calling us to action. St. James says: "...I, by my works will show you my faith" (James 2, 14-18).
2. Chastity - We use Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph as our models.
3. Silence - our strength lies in silence to foster holiness, to find the Divine Indwelling, to practice the Presence of God, and to practice charity.
4. Daily Eucharist - is the life and food of the soul, and "summit of Catholic life and identity" Fr.A. Deeney, OCD "Evolution of the OCDS Constitutions" talk at New Orleans OCDS Congress
5. The Divine Office - Is the prayer of the people of God to sanctify the hours of the day making the day holy by offering praises to God, united with Mother Church.
6. Fast and Abstinence are recommended - this discipline fortifies, strengthens and purifies us from our lusts, including spiritual lusts, and thereby assists in emptying us of self, making room for the Spirit of God to fill us. Without the help of God's Holy Spirit, spiritual progress is impossible. Precaution in the Epilogue: "See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded." In our zeal we must not overdo things which may harm us. We are warned also that when we start dwelling on the extraordinary that "this isolates him [(us)], makes him [(us)] proud or depressed, the victim of willful spurts of self-centered imagination." (A Commentary On the Rule of Life Page 34, by M.Griffin, OCD.)
7. Love of Our Lady - From the inception of the Order this has been evident by the chapel built in the centre of the hermit's location. Their name, as Brothers of St. Mary of Mount Carmel, is derived from their devotion to Mary. Which in the feudal sense, also means that because the Order is Mary's property, it is her obligation as its owner to give the Order special protection. Wearing of the Scapular is a sign of our commitment to the obligations we have as children of the Queen and Mother and Owner of the Carmelite Order. We imitate Mary's contemplative obedience. She is the model of contemplative prayer. We imitate her sensitivity to the needs of others, and forgetfulness of self. Like Her, we too must be Christ bearers on earth, making His

Mission our mission.

This concludes part two, and brings us to the third part of the talk:

A Short Chronology Of Our History And Some Of the Contributing Factors Leading To The Mitigations To Albert's Rule.

The source of the following historical data was read in the book, JOURNEY TO CARITH, by Peter Thomas Rohrback, OCD. Published by ICS Publications. I will not be quoting verbatim, but just presenting some pertinent information.

How and when was the Order started.

1. The Order started as a lay movement. Historical documents show that our Order was founded from 1150 AD. When towards the late part of the Twelfth Century after the Holy Land had been re-opened by the Crusaders, many pilgrims and crusaders went to live as hermits on Mount Carmel, in imitation of the prophet Elijah. They considered Elijah a true witness of God; he was Israel's conscience. By his life he proclaimed his faith in the One True God and brought the Israelites back to the practice of their faith. Which is our own mission in the marketplace.

2. Official Ecclesial Recognition of the Order. Between 1209 and 1212, at the request of the hermits, Albert Patriarch of Jerusalem, composed a Rule for them. In 1226 Pope Honorius 111 gave official confirmation for the Rule. This is when the Order came into being as an Order.

3. Why did the hermits leave Mt. Carmel and Migrate to the West? Three things prompted migration from the Holy Land to the West:

- a) The natural growth of the Order.
- b) Because of the political unrest and danger in the Holy Land.
- c) Plus, many of the hermits were European, so contact in Europe was easy. It was the logical destination to migrate to for either expansion or safety reasons.

4. European foundation. The first documented European foundation was made in 1235 in Valenciennes, France. There is no historical documentation to prove that earlier foundations were made in Cologne, Cyprus and Sicily.

5. How were the foundations made? The foundations were not made by big groups, but were usually made by two hermits at a time. The hermits were usually sponsored by a wealthy patron, who was acquainted with them on Mt. Carmel. When they arrived in Europe they lived the same monastic way as they did in the Holy Land. Their foundations were in rural areas. Their chapels were private; the public did not use them, because they were guests on the lands of their sponsors. Which meant that the hermits had no independent means of support. Neither did they have any legal ecclesial status in Europe, being the guests of their sponsors.

6. The Church in Europe. The Church with ecclesial status in Europe received financial support this way:

- a) The monks supported themselves by all that was produced in the monastery
- b) Parish priests were supported by the financial collection from their parishes.
- c) The mendicants were supported by the people they served.

Poverty then, caused many to leave the Carmelite Order to go to Orders that were better off financially. And at this sad stage the hermits could not return to the Holy Land due to the Moslem invasion to re-capture the territory they had lost to the Crusades.

7. The change from being called hermits. In order to survive financially in Europe, the hermits had to become identified with the mendicant movement. At this point in time they were called Friars instead of hermits. Fr. P.T. Rohrback, OCD says in his book that the medieval papal decrees given to the Carmelites at that time does not definitively categorize them as mendicants. Apparently, by doing it this way, it was the Pope's intention to afford the hermits the opportunity of fitting into the European ecclesial scene and also to enable them to get the

financial support they desperately needed for the Order to survive on.

8. Other contributing events. Other social and historical events that precipitated changes in the Rule were: In 1347 there was the bubonic plague, it killed a great segment of the population, which cut the labour force in half, resulting in food shortages, which resulted in stealing and moral decline. The Church and our Order were not exempt from this turbulence. Their financial position was seriously weakened, and also many priests and our Friars died from plague, depleting both Church and our Order. With few Friars and very little money, the Rule was not lived, as it had been, which resulted in poor intellectual and spiritual formation.

9. Then there was the 100 years war between England and France. Monasteries were destroyed, records were destroyed. Some Friars even left their monasteries to fight in the war. The war and all the lifestyle changes that resulted from the war, brought about great demoralization of religious life.

10. Then came the emergence of the new humanism and the Renaissance. The new philosophy of paganism had its influence. Faith was replaced by reason.

11. The decline in morality at the papal court had its influence throughout the Church. We remember the Borgias.

12. The great Western Schism caused division in the Church and also in Religious Orders depending on which Pope one's personal loyalty was given to. Our Order was divided then, some for the Roman Pope and some for the French Pope. When the Papacy was restored to order, Fr John Grossi reunited the Order in 1411.

13. Another result of all the turmoil of the time, was that the practice of the vow of poverty became lax.

14. After the deaths caused by the plague, the Order was greatly depleted. To counteract the loss of members, the custom of bringing young boys into the monastery to be trained as Friars wrought havoc. These young boys became professed without having a vocation and having received very poor formation, they became friars without any commitment to the vocation or love of the vocation. This resulted in a breakdown of monastic discipline, and fidelity to the initial prophetic spirit of the original hermits was absent. Silence, abstinence and solitude were not lived, as they should have been.

15. Reform. The Provincial heads concerned about the state of degeneration of the Order held a Chapter in Nantes to try remedy the situation. They chose to mitigate the Rule to make it easier to practice, hoping that this would foster reform, they reasoned that there would be no excuse now for not living the Rule in its entirety, as it had been made easier to live. But sadly mitigations did not resolve the problem neither did they help, they only caused tensions. Because those who were not keeping the Rule kept to what they were doing, and those who were following the Rule felt that the new mitigations were far removed from the prophetic spirit of the original hermits.

16. Finally, in 1435 Pope Eugene 1V granted the mitigations. He said in his decree, that the mitigations were granted because some members of the Order were unable to keep the Rule because of its severity and rigor, and also because of bodily weaknesses and human frailty.

17. The last but not least of the unfortunate influencing events that adversely effected the Church and our Order, was that seventy-five years after the Protestant Reformation half of Europe was lost to the Catholic faith. Over the years there were others in the Order who sought to reform the Order, but were not successful. While St. Teresa of Jesus was not the first to seek reform, she initiated the reform in obedience to God's will. Guided by the Holy Spirit she was the only one to succeed in the reform of Carmel.

The Past is history.

The Future is mystery.

The Present is God's gift of opportunity to us to earn our salvation.

Wisdom is knowing what to do

Skill is knowing how to do it.

Virtue is doing it.

As St. Paul wrote: "so with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you..."

My prayer is: *Through the mingling of our will with God's will, may we share in His Divinity, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.*

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