

# Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites

## Formation II

### Year A

## The Ascent of Mount Carmel



*"Only the honor and glory of God dwell on this mount."*

**Approved for use in the United States.**

**Copyright © January 2023**

***California-Arizona Province of St. Joseph · Oklahoma Semi-Province of St. Thérèse  
Washington Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary***

The Formation Program documents may be duplicated if they are not sold for profit.  
Any changes to these documents are strictly prohibited.

**Contents**

Introduction to Formation II ..... 3

The Specific Guidelines for Formation..... 4

Introduction to Formation II, Year A..... 5

About the Syllabus ..... 7

Session One: Who John is, overview, and terminology..... 9

Session Two: Disordered desires and inordinate appetites greatly hinder one’s prayer life..... 12

Session Three: The harm that inordinate appetites cause in the soul ..... 14

Session Four: Understanding “voluntary” and “natural” appetites. Freedom from all voluntary appetites, even the smallest, is necessary to attain divine union ..... 17

Session Five: Counsels and methods on how to overcome miseries — inordinate appetites and desires; how to enter the “night of the sense” ..... 19

Session Six: Counsels and methods — continued..... 21

Session Seven: Counsels and methods — continued ..... 22

Introduction to Part II of the Syllabus..... 24

Session Eight: Purification of the intellect by the practice of faith..... 25

Session Nine: Explanation of the nature of union with God..... 27

Session Ten: Growth in prayer — the point of departure for the means, which is faith, hope, and love . 29

Session Eleven: The impediments and harm caused by different apprehensions arising from objects supernaturally and the proper conduct of the spiritual persons in their regard ..... 32

Session Twelve: Meditation to contemplation (the passive night of sense) — recognizing the signs of contemplation ..... 34

Special Session with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II: Called to holiness — the Definitive Promise in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites ..... 40

Bibliography ..... 43

Appendix A: Session 3, The Five Positive Harms of Attachment ..... 44

Appendix B: Session 6, Understanding the “Maxims” or “Sayings” ..... 46

Appendix C: Session 7, Consolation in Prayer — “enkindling of another love” ..... 48

Appendix D: Session 12, St. Therese’s Christmas Story ..... 49

Appendix E: Special session, Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD Superior General March 28, 2020 letter to OCDS51

Copyright Notice – 2023 ..... 56

## **Introduction to Formation II**

### **(Members who have made the First Promise)**

Formation II is in preparation for the Definitive Promise and takes a minimum of three years, and in some instances, due to discernment by the candidate or the council, may take longer. The purpose of this period of formation is to prepare the candidate to maturely make a lifetime commitment to living the Discalced Carmelite charism as expressed in the OCDS Constitutions. Deepening union with God in interior prayer should lead the candidate to grow in virtue, in the desire to serve others, and in faithfulness to the Evangelical Counsels and Beatitudes. Growth in community life continues to be an important aspect of formation. Because this period leads to the Definitive Promise, serious ongoing discernment of the vocation by the Council and the candidate is crucial during this time.

#### **Candidate responsibilities:**

The candidate will strive to be consistent in the practices begun in earlier stages of formation and be faithful to the Promise made at the end of Formation I. (The noted references are not exhaustive; there are many others throughout the Constitutions, local statutes, and Ratio.)

- Attend and participate in monthly community meetings and formation sessions (see Const. 24.b,c).
- Be conscientious in the study and internalization of assigned material and topics (see Const. 24.d and 32-34).
- Continue to study and strive to live the OCDS Constitutions and Statutes (see Const. Preface).
- Develop the habit of reading Church documents, especially those addressed to the laity (see Const. 19 and Ratio 80).
- Read and reflect on Sacred Scripture regularly. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 15)
- Practice silent prayer (remain in God's presence with loving attention) daily for at least half an hour (see Ratio 20-21, 90).
- Pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Pray Night Prayer if possible (see Const. 6.d and 23-24).
- Participate in daily Mass as far as possible (see Const. 6.d and 23-24).
- Continue the habit of daily examination of conscience (commonly included as part of Night Prayer).
- Fast on the vigils of the Carmelite feasts listed in the Provincial Statutes.
- Participate in the community apostolate (see Const. 26).
- Share in the duties and responsibilities of the community as assigned by the local council (see Const. 15).
- Participate in community retreats and days of recollection (see Const. 24.d).
- Most importantly, continue to strive for Christ-like charity toward all in the community, in the family, and in daily life (1 Cor. 13).

## The Specific Guidelines for Formation

It is important to keep clearly in mind the purpose of formation in Carmel and to strike a balance between “head” and “heart.”

- “Number 32 of the Constitutions states that the purpose of formation is ‘to prepare the person to live the spirituality of Carmel.’ This sentence of the Constitutions gives a very important emphasis to the purpose of formation, indicating those elements that are not the priorities in the program of formation. The purpose of the formation program is not to produce experts in Carmelite spirituality, nor to obtain a university degree in spirituality or spiritual theology” (Ratio Institutionis 4).
- “The purpose is to ‘prepare the person.’ The stress on the person who is to be prepared helps the formation community understand that the process must be directed to the individual in a concrete way. The people who come to the Secular Order of Carmel are, with few exceptions, people who have many commitments, especially with families and with work. The program of formation must be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances of each person who is to become a member” (Ratio 5).
- “...The primary role of the person responsible for formation... is to **accompany** those in formation, to help them put into practice what they learn through the process of formation. The information they are given through reading and classes is meant to be a help to the person’s spiritual growth” (Ratio 7).
- “...With a progression suitable to the various stages, the candidate should get a clearer idea of how important, indeed necessary, our charism is for [one’s] personal life...” (Ratio 23).
- “The spirituality of the Discalced Carmelites has a sound intellectual foundation. As members of the Order, Secular Carmelites are called to represent and give witness to a mature and authentic spirituality. Any person who wants to be a Discalced Carmelite must be a person with interest in learning from the teachers of Carmel. There are three Doctors of the universal Church, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Therese” (Ratio 78).
- “There is an intellectual aspect to the formation of a Discalced Carmelite. There is a doctrinal basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. As the friars and nuns, the seculars too ought to have a good intellectual and doctrinal formation since as members of the Order they represent and witness to a mature and profound spirituality” (Ratio 79).

*“The directors [formators] should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. Thus, the whole concern of the directors [formators] should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one...”*

*(The Living Flame of Love, Stanza 3:46).*

## Introduction to Formation II, Year A

During this year of Formation II, candidates immerse themselves in the writings of St. John of the Cross. “St. John of the Cross was the original collaborator with Our Holy Mother St. Teresa in both the spiritual and juridical re-founding of Carmel in this new charismatic way. So, he is called Our Holy Father” (Ratio 77).

Those who want to understand John’s writings should read his work directly, frequently, and reflectively. “We do not read John merely to gain clearer understanding of how people understood discipleship in the sixteenth century; but to gain insight into the nature of Christian commitment and spiritual growth in our own time. So, we must read John with an eye on our own situations — personal, ecclesial, and societal” (The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross, pg. 26).

This year begins with an in-depth exploration of St. John’s writings. The main syllabus is divided into two parts with each session focusing on a distinct theme or sub-theme. Part One covers the sense desires — the inordinate, unmortified desires which are known to be a hindrance to God’s action in the soul. John begins to discuss the purgative phases of spiritual growth with vivid visual images and metaphors. However, he quickly points out that one cannot achieve anything in one’s effort to practice self-denial without “a habitual desire to imitate Christ.” The desire to imitate Christ leads into a prayer of “urgent longings” — kindled in love with yearnings. In this prayer, God becomes the intense desire. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, one will possess the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites (see Ascent ch. 14). This is the heart of John’s teaching, that Christ is the source of all holy love and strength.

Part Two briefly covers the purification process of the intellect by faith, the memory by hope, and the will by charity. John identifies this period of purification as the “Active Night of the Spirit.” He calls souls to practice total detachment not only from their unruly desires and possessions, but also from “spiritual goods” whether in the form of spiritual consolation, locutions, visions, or ecstasies. The heart of John’s teaching is that the purification of the spirit leads one to practice a mature form of prayer, from meditation to the gift of contemplation.

St. John inspires the Secular Carmelite to be vigilant in the practice of faith, hope and charity. “He guides the Secular Carmelite through the dark night to union with God. In this union with God, the Secular Carmelite finds the true freedom of the children of God” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 8).

“Based on this principle, the Saint also sees the purifying and unifying effect of the theological virtues in sisterly and brotherly relations. This is particularly so in the exercise of love for others: ‘Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love’ because that is what the Lord does: by loving us, He makes us capable of loving” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 24B). “...one act done in charity is more precious in God’s sight than all the visions and communications possible...” (Ascent Bk. 2, 22:19).

St. John’s teaching reminds his readers that, through complete detachment, a degree of perfection is attained, not by withdrawal from the world, but by taking up the Cross and facing the real world with all its uncertainty and limitations: “Carmelite Seculars accept from the

viewpoint of faith, hope and love, the work and suffering of each day, family worries, the uncertainty and limitations of human life, sickness, lack of understanding and all that makes up the fabric of our earthly existence. They will strive to make all this, material for dialogue with God, in order to grow in an attitude of praise and gratitude to the Lord” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 22).

As can be seen, prayer and union with God is the focal point of John’s teaching of detachment and self-denial. Deepening union with God in interior prayer allows one to grow in virtue and the desire to serve others. As previously noted, the Carmelite apostolate is based on a fervent interior life — friendship with God.

In closing, the purpose is to live the teaching of Our Holy Father St. John of the Cross and be a witness to our Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. By paying heed to his counsels, all souls can sing with the Saint:

*—ah, the sheer grace!—  
I went out unseen,  
my house being now all stilled.*

+++++

## About the Syllabus

Formation II, Year A

### Required Reading:

Selected chapters from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, ICS Publications, 1991.

Selected chapters from Foley, Marc. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Saint John of the Cross. Reflections*. ICS Publications, 2013.

*The Holy Bible* — Referred sections in the main text.

Glossary of Terms: *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pgs. 767-777.

### Additional Reading:

Foley, Marc. *John of the Cross: The Ascent to Joy*. ICS Publications, 2002

*The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching*. ICS Publications, 1995.

*The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, ICS Publications, 1991. Dark Night, Book One, Chapters 1-8 (Imperfections of beginners)

Hardy, Richard P. *John of the Cross — Man and Mystic*, ICS Publications, 2015. (This book describes how John himself practiced the spirituality he teaches. It shows John in a very human light, especially his fatherly love and care of others and his joyfulness.)

Matthew, Iain. *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.

**Note:** “Additional reading” is intended for personal enrichment and is not required.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Note:** The following syllabus (12 sessions) is not limited to academic study. Each session with its explanatory notes and essential points is the prescribed guideline for each candidate to follow throughout the year. “Although the Ascent is a masterpiece, it is important to concentrate on the content, the dynamic process, and not on the scholastic or a negative sounding language that some may find distracting. The reader must distinguish between what is said, and how it is said” (*The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, pg. 36). John’s writings are the expression of the Discalced Carmelite charism, as such it is important that each candidate takes time to read, meditate and experience the progression in prayer at his or her own pace.

**Explanatory note regarding “Essential points to discuss”:** The candidates and formator are expected to read and reflect on the materials and ponder the essential points prior to the monthly formation sessions. However, it would not be practical to try to discuss every point during the session. It is preferable to choose several points for in-depth discussion. It is good practice to discuss those points which make a personal impression on the participants.

Because formator participation is crucial to the candidates’ formation, good preparation is indispensable. After the opening prayer and the discussion of the legislations, formators are encouraged to take about 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the session to talk about the

## OCDS Formation II, Year A

session theme, the assigned reading, and a brief review of the points to be discussed before moving on to the discussion itself.

**Studying the OCDS Legislations:** Unless the community is studying these materials together, it is appropriate for each session to begin with ten minutes of discussion on some selection of the OCDS legislations or documents of the Order, as determined by the local Council.



## Session One: Who John is, overview, and terminology

### Part A. General introduction: Biographical sketch.

**Required Reading:** Collected Works of John of the Cross *General Introduction* (pg. 9-28) and *Biographical Chronology* (pg. 28-33)

**Additional Reading:** John of the Cross — Man and Mystic, ICS

#### Essential Points to discuss:

- The early years: His birth; his early school years
- Carmelite vocation — entering the Carmelite novitiate; studying at Salamanca University
- Vocational crisis and meeting St. Teresa: “Fray John listened, he felt inspired, caught the enthusiasm, and beheld a new future opening before him” (General Intro. pg. 13).
- Conflicts of jurisdiction and St. John’s imprisonment in a monastery in Toledo
- A brief introduction to his writings (General Intro. pg. 33-34)
- His drawing of Christ on the Cross (General Intro. pg. 87)
- Final years
- Death — Ubeda, Spain in 1591; his body was laid to rest in Segovia, Spain.
- Honors bestowed by the Church: John was beatified by Clement X in 1675, canonized by Benedict XIII in 1726, and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pius XI in 1926.

**Part B. The Mount of Perfection: the path of Mount Carmel, the perfect spirit. Only the honor and glory of God dwells on this mount.** (This session also covers the different terminologies used in the writings of St. John of the Cross.)

**Required Reading:** Introduction to The Ascent of Mount Carmel, pg. 101-118, The Sketch of the Mount, the poem *The Dark Night* and the diagram of the mount

#### Essential Points to Discuss:

- The Sketch of the Mount serves as a summary of the doctrine contained in his treatise. John of the Cross gave many copies of his drawings to nuns and friars.  
**Note:** Go through the sketch of the Mount during the session. John’s doctrine is beautifully expressed in this sketch.
- “It is a work that explains the path one must follow in order to reach perfection, or union with God... Yet the book amounts to far more than a collection of workable rules and techniques...; it is a work of spiritual theology” (pg. 102).
- John tells his readers that he will explain the active night of purification of the senses in Book One of The Ascent of Mount Carmel (chapters 1-15) and the active night of the spirit (intellect, memory and will) in Books Two and Three of the Ascent.

**Side note:** The Ascent of Mount Carmel is the most structured theological work of St. John of the Cross. The understanding of human behavior and its faculties (sense and spirit) as it

relates to God in prayer is the main theme of Book One of the Ascent. It is important to spend a generous amount of time reading and reflecting on the different terminologies, images, metaphors, and symbols to understand the depth of his teachings that lead to one's transformation in Christ. The following excerpt is taken from The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections, Marc Foley, OCD, pages 2-16.

**The Dark Night:**

The dark night is John's primary metaphor for the periods of sensory and spiritual purification. It is John's way of speaking of God's transforming presence in our lives and our response to Him. The term "night" explained by him in Book One Chapter 2 of the Ascent has different meanings as the theme develops. In Book One, "night" symbolizes "**the point of departure**" because individuals are learning to lay down their possessive desires and attitudes in order to focus upon a higher purpose. "This denial and privation are like a night for all one's senses" (see A.1.2:1). John uses the term "active night of the senses" to explain the purification process. Another reason is the darkness of the road travelled: "Now this road is faith (**the means**), and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night." Night also "pertains to **the point of arrival, namely God,**" for God is also a dark night to the soul in this life (A.1.2:1). All who long for union with God must courageously enter this threefold darkness of the journey (A.1.4). In actuality, these three nights comprise only one night, the night of the senses, resembles early evening... The second part, faith, is completely dark, like midnight. The third part, representing God, is like the very early dawn just before the break of the day (see A.1.2:5).

John uses the term "active night of the spirit" in Books Two and Three of the Ascent to understand the purification process of the spiritual faculties (intellect, memory, and will).

**In Book Two of the Ascent (chapters 1-15)** the "night" is the journey in faith, which is darkness or "night" to the natural understanding. It is the purification of one's intellect by the practice of the virtue of faith.

**In Book Three of the Ascent (chapters 1-15),** the "night" is the purification of the memory by the practice of the virtue of hope. It is "darkened" or purified of distinct forms, images and ideas which are not of God.

**In Book Three of the Ascent (chapters 16-45),** the "night" is the purification of the will from all imperfection, feelings or emotion, by the virtue of charity.

**Senses:** For John, the soul refers to the whole human person. Its two major divisions are sense and spirit. Sense includes the five bodily senses (touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste) and the interior senses of the imagination, phantasy and sense memory. "All these components — the five bodily senses and the interior senses of the imagination, phantasy, and sense memory — are interrelated and work together. The five bodily senses receive impressions from the external world, the sense memory stores them, and the imagination and phantasy construct them" (The Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 4).

**Spirit:** "The spirit, or the 'higher part' of the soul, consists primarily of the faculties of the intellect, memory, and will. They are not objects, but rather our capacities to know, to desire, and to love" (pg. 5).

**Passive and Active:** Just as sense and spirit are two interrelated parts of the soul, so passivity and activity are two inseparable dimensions of our purification and transformation. The active dimension of purification is the soul's response to God's invitation and presence. Active purification alone is insufficient for attaining transforming union. In The Dark Night, Books One and Two, St. John describes how God purifies the soul passively and perfects the theological life.

**Detachment:** "The equivalent of poverty of spirit, refers to a freedom from the appetites so the heart may be surrendered entirely to God..." (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 768.)

## PART ONE

### The Active Night of the Senses

#### Session Two: Disordered desires and inordinate appetites greatly hinder one's prayer life

**Appetites:** Generally, inordinate affective desires in which the will participates; that is, willful desires not rightly ordered to a moral or spiritual good. Appetites, when habitual, impede union with God. These weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken the soul (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 767).

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 1-5

*One dark night,  
Fired with love's urgent longings  
—ah, the sheer grace!—*

**Explanatory note:** Book One of the Ascent deals with the active night of sense. John calls this night “the point of departure” (A.1.2:2). “Its focus is on behavioral change; correcting obvious faults, choosing to mortify our self-centered ego, and exercising restraint regarding sensory (disordered) pleasures. The purpose of the active night of sense is not to repress desire but to reorient it. It is the soul's first attempt to change its life (a new form of life). In short, God is luring the soul away from the pleasures of earth by means of the pleasures of heaven” (Ascent Reflections pg. 7-8). “The point of departure” is a sense of need, a recognition that our life will not be complete until God is at the center. In essence, “the point of departure” is the orientation toward one's prayer life. Hence, this night is “the sheer grace!”

*“Though the path is plain and smooth for people of good will,  
those who walk it will not travel far, and will do so only with difficulty  
if they do not have good feet, courage, and tenacity of spirit.”  
(Sayings 3)*

#### Essential Points to Discuss:

- Here John uses the expression “night” to signify the denial of gratification of the soul's inordinate appetites in all things (see A.1.2:1).
- It is the nature of human desire and attachment which is at issue, not the things of the world and relationships that are part of daily life. Created things and human relationships are good and worthy of desire, provided they are used as God intends. “Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it, rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within that cause the damage when set on these things” (A.1.3:4).

**Note to formators:** This clarification is essential to the understanding of John's teaching throughout his work (see footnote 2 in the Ascent).

- John is talking about stripping away the craving for gratification (gusto, apeto) in those things (something internal). “This is what leaves it free and empty of all things even

though it possesses them.” Likewise, even though David (Ps 88:15) was manifestly a wealthy person, he says he was poor “because his will was not fixed on riches” (A.1.3:4). When desires are put in order, one can be rich or poor and still turn everything to God.

**Side note:** “John does not mean to say that we have to kill all our desires since he is going to say we find all our desires satisfied in God, which would be impossible if they were all eliminated. What we want to be rid of is not desires as such but the disorders. Adam and Eve before the fall had a perfectly integrated human nature in which none of the desires were disordered and all led to God's glory. John does not want us to become bodiless angels without human desires, but fully integrated human beings as God created us to be.”

“From this chapter 3 paragraph 4, I always take away one important point for self-examination: What is disordered in my desires? Am I as ‘detached’ as I like to think? I am surrounded by so many possessions. How many of them really possess me? It's easy to think I am ‘detached’ when my ordered little world is not threatened. The test, for me, is not how much I have or lack right now but how I respond when those things are taken away”

— Fr. Steven Payne  
courtesy Cincarm - a Carmelite platform

- “When inordinate desires are cast out, the soul will be clothed with new knowledge of God. As a result, one’s activities, once human, now become divine. This is achieved in the state of union, when the soul in which God alone dwells has no other function than that of an altar on which God is adored in praise and love” (A.1.5:7).
- “Those who have no other goal than the perfect observance of the Lord’s law and carrying of the cross of Christ will be true arks, and they will bear within themselves the real manna, which is God...” (A.1.5:8).
- As can be seen, John’s attention is on the inner person, and not on things themselves which are value-neutral. Understanding one’s own shortcomings and imperfections leads to growth in self-knowledge, which in turn leads to truer knowledge of God. “Night” is an encounter of God’s presence — purifying and transforming one’s life.
- Participants may wish to discuss practical applications of these concepts.

### Session Three: The harm that inordinate appetites cause in the soul

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 6-10; The Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 27-52

**Explanatory note:** In chapters 6 through 10 of Book One of the Ascent, John sets before the reader the self-inflicted misery, damage, or harm that comes from indulging inordinate appetites. John mentions two types of harm that inordinate appetites cause in the soul: privative and positive. The deepest harm that inordinate desires cause is privative — the loss of desire for God. The specific effects that flow from this privative harm are the positive harms that “weary, torment, darken, and defile the soul” (Ascent 1.6:5; Reflections p. 29). John states time and again, “this is a venture in which God alone is sought and gained” (Ascent 2:7:3). John uses powerfully descriptive language to convey one’s miserable condition and possessive attitudes.

#### Essential points to discuss:

- “To begin with, it is clear in speaking of the privative harm that a person by a mere attachment to a created thing is less capable of God...Since love of God and attachment to creatures are contraries, they cannot coexist in the same will” (A.1.6:1). Obsession with an object, person, project or idea makes one neglectful of his or her duties toward God and neighbor.

**Side note:** The phrase “attachments to creatures” can include possessive relationships, over-indulgence in otherwise legitimate pleasures, over-concern with rules and procedures, self-willed ideas, excessive interest in programs of self-help, personal fulfillment, materialism, over-use of electronic devices, etc.

- John uses the passage of Matthew 15:26-27 to segue into expressing his experience as a spiritual director. He takes the concept of dogs feeding on crumbs and applies the image to people who settle for the crumbs of created things when God is inviting them to eat at His table. “The crumbs serve more to whet their appetite than to satisfy their hunger” (see A.1.6:2-3).
- The five positive harms to the soul are:
  - weariness
  - torment and affliction
  - blindness and darkness
  - defilement and stains
  - weakness and tepidity (A.1.6:1)
- Discuss how these harms manifest in the Christian’s life in the world.
- John observes that life is thrown out of balance by disordered inclinations. Behavioral patterns stem from tendencies (inclinations) that are often unconscious and reflexive. While external improvement in behavior is praiseworthy, the root tendencies need deeper healing. By responding to God’s invitation (prayer and meditation), one’s body, mind, and spirit are realigned toward God. **God works deep healing in the soul that**

**habitually seeks Him.** In Christ's words: "Come to me ... I will refresh you; and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:28-29). God's invitation: "Come listen to me, come to the waters" is further explained in *Ascent* 1 ch. 7:3-4.

- John is also making another important observation about those who practice extraordinary penances and other religious practices (outward observances) without striving to deny their appetites (inner purification). "The ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with Divine Wisdom. But **such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites.** If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their (inordinate) desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises" (A.1.8:4) (emphasis added).

**Side note on external practices:** It would be appropriate for the candidates to reflect on how their prayer life has evolved over the past three years. John is not against penitential practices. The focus is on inner purification rather than outward observances.

#### **Understanding the term "penitential practices":**

**A.** John's observation reflects the teaching of St. Therese of Lisieux regarding penance and growth in virtue. Therese was very much disappointed when her entrance to Carmel was delayed:

"... I was unable to hold back my tears at the thought of such a long wait...The trial was very great and made me grow very much in abandonment and in the other virtues... I made a resolution to give myself up more than ever to a serious and mortified life. When I say mortified, this is not to give the impression that I performed acts of penance. Alas, I never made any. Far from resembling beautiful souls who practiced every kind of mortification from their childhood, I had no attraction for this. My mortification consisted in breaking my will always so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a reply, in rendering little services without any recognition...etc., etc. It was through the practice of these nothings that I prepared myself to become the fiancée of Jesus..." Story of a Soul ch. VI.

**B.** The following is a commentary on Ascent, Book One, 8:4, by Fr. Steven Payne, OCD, courtesy, Cincarm -- a Carmelite platform

I thought I'd mention one comment that struck me again in Chapter 8 paragraph 4. There, John notes that "the ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with Divine Wisdom. But such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites. If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises."

I was struck because I can see in my own life how much easier it has always been to substitute works of piety and religious practices for the more difficult challenge of

purifying my own desires. Think how much people run after the extraordinary today, instead of focusing on the very ordinary struggle to overcome our own selfishness in the very ordinary circumstances of our daily lives. Saint Teresa talks somewhere about meeting a group of pious women whose devotion impressed her — until she said “no” to their plans, and then they became unbearable. She said they frightened her “more than all the sinners in the world.” Anyway, it struck me because it’s a theme that will recur so often in John: that the greatest dangers on the spiritual journey come not so much from obvious evils but from apparent (even real) goods that are nonetheless not properly ordered to God

- John presents three privative harms:
  - “The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue” (A.1.10:1).
  - When the soul dissipates its energy in other things, it loses its fervor for God and its strength in the practice of virtue (see A.1.10:1).
  - “Ordinarily, the reason many people do not have diligence and eagerness for the acquisition of virtue is that their appetites and affections are not fixed purely on God” (A.1.10:4).

**Note:** For a detailed study of John’s explanation of the five effects of positive harm, please refer to Appendix A “Positive Harms.”



## Session Four: Understanding “voluntary” and “natural” appetites. Freedom from all voluntary appetites, even the smallest, is necessary to attain divine union

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 11 and 12; Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 53-54.

*“Those who do not allow their appetites to carry them away will soar in their spirit as swiftly as the bird that lacks no feathers.”*  
(Sayings, 23)

### Essential Points to Discuss:

- Having spelled out in vivid detail the privative and positive effects inordinate attachments can cause in the soul, John is careful to explain in chapter 11 that not all appetites (desires) are harmful, nor equally a hindrance to union with God (see A.1.11:2). John is not speaking of good, natural desires for God-given things — food, drink, good music, healthy friendships, etc. These are part of human existence. The concern here is attachments which take away the soul’s freedom to follow God unreservedly and instead cause one to stumble, to grow lax, and to be uncharitable.
- Voluntary appetites that involve imperfections must be “put in order.” “That is, one must not give consent of the will advertently and knowingly to an imperfection...” (A.1.11:3). The word “knowingly” is important because “one will fall into imperfections, without having knowledge or control of them” (A.1.11:3). Of course, one cannot do much about imperfections or disordered appetites that one is not even aware of. First, they must be brought to consciousness.

**Note:** It is the “disordered” that needs to be eliminated, not the appetites (desires) themselves.

- When voluntary desires become habitual, they become an obstacle to union with God. As long as one is sincerely trying to serve God, scattered failings are not necessarily a hindrance to prayer, but habitual desires that are not resisted and conquered become a barrier to spiritual progress and divine union (see A.1.11:3). Some examples of these habitual imperfections are: the common habit of being very talkative; love of gossip (including electronic “gossip” through cell phones and the internet); a small attachment one never really desires to conquer, for example, to a person, to clothing, to over-eating (A.1.11:4), and in the modern world, attachment to TV, cell phone, internet, social media, and not having times of silence in one’s day.
- John offers a telling image. “It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord... Admittedly the thread is easier to break, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without doing so. This is the lot of those who are attached to something: No matter how much virtue they have they will not reach the freedom of the divine union” (A.1.11:4).

- “If a small crack in a pitcher goes unrepaired, the damage will be enough to cause all the liquid to leak out... Accordingly, one imperfection leads to another, and these to still more” (A.1.11:5).
- Resisting first movements (the first stirrings of temptation) “wins strength, purity, comfort, and many blessings” (A.1.12:6). Virtue is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). John’s solution lies in looking away from self to Jesus who is the fullness of life; for, as John says, souls become like the things they love.
- Mortifying inordinate desires does not lead to the elimination of desire, but rather the release of our deepest desire for God, which in turn, purifies, transforms, and integrates all natural desires” (Ascent to Joy, pg. 55).

**Imperfections:** From the viewpoint of their object, the diminutive is used: “small attachments,” “little satisfactions.” The problem lies not in the object but in the subject; that is, one’s attachment interferes with the dynamism of love and spiritual progress. Habitual imperfections, when known, recognized, and voluntary, impede one from reaching the freedom of union (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 770).

## **Session Five: Counsels and methods on how to overcome miseries — inordinate appetites and desires; how to enter the “night of the sense”**

(The topic is continued in sessions six and seven.)

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 13, 1-4; and Ascent Reflections *The Imitation of Christ*, pg. 62-65

**Additional reading:** Ascent Reflections, pgs. 66-68.

**Explanatory note:** After having explained the self-inflicted misery and harm that come from indulging inordinate appetites, John offers some counsels on how to overcome inordinate attachments and begin to make progress on the path to spiritual maturity.

Chapter 13 of the first book of Ascent is one of the most well-known and frequently quoted sections of John’s writings. It contains “counsels and methods” on how to actively participate in overcoming shortcomings by entering the “dark night.” “The active way, which will be the subject of the following counsels, comprises what one can do and does by oneself to enter this night. The passive way is that in which one does nothing, but God accomplishes the work in the soul while the soul acts as a recipient. This will be the subject of the fourth book, Dark Night I & II” (A.1.13:1).

The dark night involves “an inflow of God into the soul” (N.2:5.1). Thus, the “active” night comprises what we do, the choices we make that create an opening in our lives through which the awareness of God would flow freely without a hindrance (see Reflections, p. 55).

*“Reflect that your guardian angel does not always move your desire for an action, but he does always enlighten your reason. Hence in order to practice virtue do not wait until you feel like it, for your reason and intellect are sufficient.”*  
(*Sayings*, 37)

### **Essential Points to Discuss:**

- **(1) “First**, have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all events as he would” (A.1.13:3). The Carmelite Rule (which will be studied later) offers a way of living a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ, “pondering the Lord’s law (e.g., Scripture) day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty.”
- John bids his readers to ‘study’ (considerer) the life of Christ. The Spanish word *considerer* means to ponder, to consider, to reflect upon, and to esteem. Each person is called to reflect upon how God is calling them to practice the virtues seen in Christ’s life, rather than to replicate Christ’s behavior (see Reflections, pg. 63).

- “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the **encounter** with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Thanks solely to this encounter — or renewed encounter — with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption” (Evangeli Gaudium — The Gospel of Joy, emphasis added).
- John counsels that ascetical practices should be performed with “order and discretion” (see A.1.13:7). God meets each person where they are, each with their own unique personality and understanding of the spiritual journey. Consequently, “a devotion or ascetical practice should never conflict with the responsibilities and obligation of our life. All of us are called to practice the virtues that we see in the life of Christ. However, we need to practice them according to our station in life” (Reflections, pg. 65).
- **(2)** Second, in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ (see A.1.13:4).
- One cannot practice detachment/self-denial (the emptying of sensory satisfaction) simply by one’s willpower or obligation. One’s motivation should come from “love of Jesus” and the means is daily meditative prayer and interior recollection.
- The counsel to deny one’s appetites on the sensual level must be understood as a means of awakening one’s desire for God. The less one is focused on sensual desires, the more one is awakened to the presence of God. In other words, the emptying of self is transformed into the inpouring of God.
- “John’s teaching is based upon the reality that there are certain objects, persons, substances, situations, and so on, that we have to either modify our use of or keep a distance from, not because they are bad in themselves, but because we don’t have the capacity to use them without suffering spiritual damage. All of us have our fatal attractions” (Reflections, pg. 72).

**Mortification:** A progressive attitude, a holy indifference to all inordinate appetites within oneself (and all actions deriving from them). One cannot find God without mortifying unholy desires within oneself. And this gets to the practice of all virtues: self-denial embraced out of love for Jesus Christ and patterned after His death (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

## Session Six: Counsels and methods — continued

**Required reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 13:5-10

**Additional Reading:** Ascent Reflections, pgs. 75-80

For further understanding of John's "maxims" or "sayings," please refer to the article *Understanding the Maxims or "Sayings"* (Appendix B).

**(3) Third:** Endeavor to be inclined always not to the easiest but to the most difficult... (A.13:6-7)

Read the entire Maxims meditatively.

**Explanatory note:** "It is important to note that St. John does not say to do the most difficult thing, etc., but rather to be *inclined* to do the most difficult thing, etc. He is speaking about a readiness, an openness, an attentive state of mind that stands in vigilance to do God's will. This mental stance, which is a sustained act of the will, makes a person conscious of the presence of God because it alters a person's consciousness." In the end, one learns to be governed not by what pleases or displeases the appetites, but by the will of God.

"...just as Jesus found his 'meat and food' in doing his Father's will (A.1.13:4), we too are nourished on a deep spiritual level when we live out a habitual desire to do God's will. We experience this nourishment because when we are inclined to do God's will, we are united to both our deepest will and God's will that connects us to our true selves" (John of the Cross: Ascent to Joy, pg.69, note 5).

### Essential Points to Discuss:

- Do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but embrace the life of Christ, and desire to enter into complete nakedness, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world (see A.1.13:6).
- "As noted, by the introductory words, 'endeavor to be inclined,' John reveals that he is speaking of a habit of mind through the love of Christ, and this inner attitude, one will find the freedom and power necessary to do the Father's will, whatever it may be" (footnote 3. A.1.13:6). Practicing John's counsel gives great peace of mind and heart during the uncertainties and limitations of human life. It frees the soul from fruitless anger, conflict, and disappointment.
- "The great danger in today's world...is the covetous heart — the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures...Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades" (*Evangelii Gaudium* — The Gospel of Joy).

## Session Seven: Counsels and methods — continued

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book One, ch. 13:11-13; ch. 14 and 15

**(4)** Fourth: “To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing...” (A.1.13:11-13). These lines are those already written down in the sketch at the beginning of this book, that of The Ascent of Mt. Carmel.

**Additional Reading:** Read the entire Maxims meditatively)

**Explanatory note:** John underlines the importance of non-possessiveness. He also speaks about a fundamental truth of life, namely, “...they cannot rejoice in them (things of the world) if they behold them with possessiveness...In detachment from things they acquire a clearer knowledge of them and a better understanding of both natural and supernatural truths concerning them, and they receive great benefits and advantages from their joy. They delight in these goods according to the truth of them, but those who are attached delight according to what is false in them...One should seek this alone in the use of things, turning away from vanity and concern of one’s own delight and consolation” (A.3.20:2-3).

“There is another exceptional and principal benefit of detachment from joy in creatures: freedom of the heart for God” (A.3.20:4).

John teaches that it is only the non-possessive heart that is truly free, and although such persons “have nothing, possess everything with greater liberty” (A.3.20:3).

### **Essential Points to Discuss:**

- “... and when you come to the possession of the all you must possess it without wanting anything. Because if you desire to have something in all your treasure in God is not purely your all” (A.1.13:12).
- “In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest. For in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down, because it is in the center of its humility. When it covets something, by this very fact it tires itself” (A.1.13:13).

**Poverty of Spirit:** A detachment from particular knowledge, earthly and heavenly, and from satisfaction and pleasure. The reality indicated by other expressions such as purity of heart, emptiness (void), night, nothing (nada), detachment, and nakedness (denudation); the negative aspect of the theological virtues, which bring it about. Those who have attained it are blessed; only they find complete satisfaction of heart (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

### **Sub-theme: “Fired with love’s urgent longings.” (Chapters 14 and 15)**

*“When evening comes, you will be examined in love.  
Learn to love as God desires to be loved  
and abandon your own way of acting.”  
(Sayings, 60)*

**Explanatory note:** John concludes his counsel with a rather surprising note: but essential to the understanding of the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. He says that while we must make an honest effort, our disordered appetites will never be healed except by “another deeper love” of God (consolation in prayer). In this prayer, God becomes the intense desire. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, one will possess the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites. John’s understanding is that by finding satisfaction and strength in this love (of God), one could readily deny all other appetites and temptations (see A.1.14:2). Again, John is not expecting from beginners the complete mortification of their appetites. Beginners do what they can with the help of God’s grace, but complete purification won’t come until God himself brings it about in the passive nights. Consequently, discursive prayer and meditation are essential practices that enable one to turn toward God. John observes that our focus should not be always on our imperfections and shortcomings. Rather, we turn to God in prayer for healing and transformation. One’s compulsive, sensual love needs to be replaced with a higher, nobler love. John promises that in the end all our desires will be fulfilled in God.

*“Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me. What do you ask, then, and seek, my soul? Yours is all of this, and all is for you. Do not engage yourself in anything less or pay heed to the crumbs that fall from your Father’s table. Go forth and exult in your Glory!”*  
(*Sayings of Light and Love*, 27)

**Essential Points to Discuss:**

- Chapter 14 of the Ascent, Book One is the most important: it gives a retrospective key to everything that has gone before, putting all John’s ascetical advice into perspective. In other words, John’s active night of sense does not begin with a grim determination to annihilate all desires in order to please God. Rather, God first takes the initiative, enkindling the soul with longings, so that it “wants” to make the effort to remove whatever impedes union. What gives the impetus is an infatuation with God. At the beginning, these longings are immature and sometimes misdirected, but they get the person moving and make one “want” to grow and change. (paraphrasing Fr. Steven Payne, OCD — For further understanding, see “*Consolation in Prayer — enkindling of another love*” Appendix C).
- In this prayer, God becomes the object of intense desire. This is the heart of John’s teaching: that Christ is the source of one’s focus, love and strength.

When souls follow John’s counsels, and depart from those inner “houses” in which they have been imprisoned by inordinate desires and attachments, they too can sing with the Saint:

*“—ah, the sheer grace!—  
I went out unseen,  
my house being now all stilled.”*

## Introduction to Part II of the Syllabus

### THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL - BOOK TWO

#### PROGRESSION IN PRAYER AND UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF UNION WITH GOD

#### ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE INTELLECT, MEMORY, AND WILL

**Prayer:** Communion with God, requiring a will that is with Him and a mind set on Him. Its aim should be what is more pleasing to God. Objects and places should be a means to help one pray in the living temple, which is interior recollection. All the prayers of the Church are reducible to the Our Father. Interior prayer may be meditative or contemplative. In union, it becomes wholly the exercise of love (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

*“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven,  
it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”*

— St. Thérèse of Lisieux

*“Seek by reading and you will find by meditating; knock in prayer  
and the door will be opened in contemplation.”*

— St. John of the Cross.

**Explanatory note:** Part two of this formation year touches on the period of purification identified by John as the “active night of the spirit,” when the intellect is purified by faith, the memory is purified by hope, and the will is purified by charity. This active night of the spirit and the active night of sense are two aspects of the same night. “The purgation of the senses is only the gate to and beginning of the contemplation that leads to the purgation of the spirit. This sensitive purgation [of spirit] ... serves more for the *accommodation of the senses to the spirit than for the union of the spirit with God*” (N.2.2:1). [emphasis added]

When consolations are withheld, the person may not realize that God is continuing to work in the soul. “When the sweet breast of consolation is withheld, God does not withdraw. Rather, the mode of God’s presence changes... God is no longer found on the surface of the waves because he is present on the bottom of the ocean.” John calls this gentle, quiet mode of God’s presence “contemplation,” and the soul’s receptivity and response to it the “passive night of sense” (See Ascent Reflections pgs. 9-10).



## Session Eight: Purification of the intellect by the practice of faith

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book Two, ch. 1-4

*In darkness and secure,  
by the secret ladder, disguised,  
—ah, the sheer grace!—  
in darkness and concealment,  
my house being now all stilled.*

### Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The secret ladder represents faith, because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and intellect. Accordingly, the soul lives in darkness... to climb the divine ladder of faith, that leads up to and penetrates the deep things of God” (1 Cor, 2:10) (A.2. 1:1).
- “...John is not concerned with the content or articles of faith. Rather, his focus is on faith as contemplation: the quiet, gentle presence of God that ‘instructs (the soul) in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how it happens.’ Faith as contemplation, does not communicate facts about God but is an experience of God’s self-communication. Faith... communicates God Himself to us...” (Ascent Reflections pg. 108).
- “...all that is required for complete pacification of the spiritual house is the negation through pure faith of all the spiritual faculties, gratifications and appetites. This achieved, the soul will be joined with the Beloved in a union of simplicity and purity and love and likeness” (A.2.1:2).
- The previous purification pertaining to the senses is more external. In other words, purification of the lower part has an impact, but does not affect one’s deeply held beliefs and spiritual pleasures. Hence, “this spiritual night, which is faith, purifies everything, both in the intellect and in the senses. As a result, the soul declares in this stanza that it departed in darkness and secure... For the less a soul works with its own abilities, the more securely it proceeds because its progress in faith is greater” (A.2.1:3). Note the difference between “dark night” (in the first stanza) and “darkness” (in the second stanza).
- “Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul... It brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. As a result, the excessive light of faith bestowed on a soul is darkness for it” (A.2.3:1). “The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses” (A.2.3:2).

**Note:** This is another important teaching of John. In later chapters, he will explain that the excessive light is the loving knowledge of God Himself. “The knowledge that faith provides is **intuitive**” (Ascent: Reflections, pg.108). St. Therese spoke of being guided by

the light of faith as a **“felt sense.”** *“He teaches without noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that He is within me, at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what to say and do”* (Story of a Soul, pg. 179, Study Edition pg. 276, near the end of chapter 8. See The Ascent to Joy, pg. 95).

- The novelty of the knowledge does not lie in the information, but in a new sense of the presence of God through faith and love. One receives it in a kind of passive activity. There are no adequate human controls. Before God, only poverty, confidence, and abandonment remain (see DN Intro, pg. 356).
- “Such is the faith to the soul; it informs us of matters we have never seen or known... This amounts to saying that faith is not a knowledge derived from the senses but an ascent of the soul to what enters through hearing” (A.2.3:3).
- John observes that attachment to understanding, feelings and opinion hinders one’s spiritual growth. Consequently, one must pass beyond everything to **“unknowing”** (see A.2.4:4).  
**“Unknowing”** means the way one experiences the whole realm of the supernatural that cannot be known by natural means of feeling and understanding.  
**“Supernatural” in this context** means the initiative comes from God, not from oneself. In general, it may refer to the realm of the mystery of God, of Christ, His grace (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776). That is, the “supernatural” does not refer to extraordinary or rare experiences; it refers to grace, sanctity, and to being authentically human.
- Regarding this road to union: entering on the road means leaving one’s own road and moving toward the goal. Turning from one’s own mode implies entry into what has no mode (unknown) — that is, God. John strongly encourages one to move from the “natural bound” to the “supernatural bound” (spiritual bound) by practicing the virtue of faith (see A.2.4:5).

**Purification:** The process by which one eliminates, through the theological virtues, all that is contrary to receiving into one’s own life the fullness of God’s life. The entire spiritual journey is purifying, comprising God’s communication and the human person’s effort to respond. (see Glossary of Terms, pg.775)

## Session Nine: Explanation of the nature of union with God

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book Two, ch. 5

**Additional Reading:** Ascent to Joy, *The Goal: Union with God* pg. 49; *The Metaphors of Union* pg. 52

**Union: 1.** Natural union is that by which God is present to creatures preserving them in being.  
**2.** Supernatural union is the goal of the spiritual journey, a union of likeness brought about through love (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776).

**Explanatory note:** “John sees the spiritual life as this universal call to search constantly for union with God. It is a personal exodus from our own captivity to the promised land... This exodus of spiritual dedication is a departure from security, implies a willingness to journey through the nights” (Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross, pg. 46). In chapter 5, John explains the phrase “the nature of union of the soul with God.” “This chapter is fundamental to his entire work because the whole process of purification flows from the nature of union and our willing participation” (footnote ch. 5:1).

### Essential Points to Discuss:

- John is not discussing “substantial union” by which God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even those in mortal sin. This union between God and creatures always exists. John is talking about the soul’s “union of likeness” with God. This “union of likeness” does not always exist, except when there is a likeness of love by active participation in it (see A.2.5:3).
- “God communicates supernatural being only through love and grace, which not all souls possess. And those who do, do not possess them in the same degree... A person who has reached complete conformity and likeness of will has attained total supernatural union and transformation in God” (A.2.5:4).
- Souls must detach themselves from all that is not God “so that God, who is naturally communicating himself to them through nature, may do so supernaturally through grace” (A.2.5:4).

**Note:** the virtue of detachment is closely connected to union with God.

- It is important to note that the presence of God — who is naturally communicating himself to souls through nature and through grace — is not different in kind, but in intensity. The soul is now more aware of the presence of God. This increase of consciousness happens because in the process of purification, the soul’s capacity and receptivity for God has increased; it has made more “room for God” (see Ascent to Joy, *The Goal: Union with God*, pg. 49).

**Note:** the process of purification of the faculties is closely linked to union.

- John provides two excellent metaphors to explain the nature of union: The “window” and the “painting.” “A ray of sunlight shining on a smudgy window is unable to illumine that window completely and transform it into its own light...the cleaner the window is, the brighter will be its illumination. The extent of illumination is not dependent on the

ray of sunlight [God] but on the window [the soul]" (A.2.5:6).

"A soul makes room for God by wiping away the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting its will perfectly to God's; for to love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God" (A.2.5:7).

- "When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation" (A.2.5:7). Happy are the souls who can cry out: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God..."* (Gal.2:19-20).
- *"Let us rejoice and give thanks. We have not only become Christians but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice. We have become Christ"* (St. Augustine "On the Gospel of St. John," lecture 21).

**Note:** even though the soul is transformed, it is still distinct from God. It remains a "window." (see A.2.5:7)

- Consequently, the preparation for this union, "is not an understanding by the soul, nor the taste, feeling, or imagining of God or of any other object, but purity and love, the stripping off [what is not God] and perfect renunciation of all such experiences for God alone" (A.2.5:8).

**Note:** John's teaching of purity of heart in relation to union is "entirely cleansed, clear, and perfect."

- John's painting metaphor sheds light on the nature of this union. One whose sense of sight is impaired will discover less detail and delicacy in the painting, while one who has better vision will discover more details and perfections. "There is so much to behold in the painting that no matter how much one sees in it, still more remains unseen" (A.2.5:9).

**Side note:** Grace increases one's capacity to see the beauty that was *always present*. "This increase of sight we call faith (or contemplation), which is the conscious awareness of the soul's pre-reflective and preconscious knowledge of God. This increase of the knowledge of God is the result of grace alone, but it follows upon the soul's choice of love which is the decision to 'labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God.' Thus, for John, there is an interfacing and interaction between knowing and loving; they are inseparable. We can only love what we know, but only love has the power to disclose to us the true nature of what we love" (Ascent to Joy, pg. 50). John calls this "loving knowledge."

**Transformation:** A term for union, which implies a change in form by which a soul receives a new form. God's likeness in its being and activity, while remaining different from God in its nature. It is the human person who is transformed in God, and not vice versa. The life of one transformed is Christ's life (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776).

## **Session Ten: Growth in prayer — the point of departure for the means, which is faith, hope, and love**

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book Two, ch. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12

**Theological Virtues:** Faith, hope, and love (charity): working interdependently and being the likeness of God, they bridge the infinite distance between God and His creatures. They are the only proper and proximate means to union with Him (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 777).

**Explanatory note:** In part one of this formation year, John uses the term “the point of departure” for purification of sense faculties of all that is not God. Part two looks at John’s explanation that the soul might leave the “point of departure” for the means, which is “faith” “hope” and “love” — a way to emptying and purifying the spiritual faculties of all that is not God (see A.2.5:6). The three theological virtues are the means and preparation for the soul’s union with God (see A.2.6:6). John especially addresses those who have begun to enter the state of contemplation (see A.2.6:8). John discusses the faculties and the theological virtues separately, *however*, they do not function independently or in isolation from one another. When a person is touched by divine grace, the whole of the soul is affected, not just part of it. As one’s faith vision is transformed, so is the object of one’s hope and one’s desire or love that seeks the ultimate good (see Ascent to Joy, pg. 89).

*“The very pure spirit does not bother about the regard of others or human respect, but communes inwardly with God, alone and in solitude as to all forms, and with delightful tranquility, for the knowledge of God is received in divine silence.”  
(Sayings, 28)*

### **Essential Points to Discuss:**

- The theological virtues perfect the faculties of the soul and produce emptiness and darkness: faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, and charity in the will (A.2.6:1).
- “...the soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, or through enjoyment or through imagination, or through any other sense; but only faith, hope, and charity (according to the intellect, memory, and will) can unite the soul with God in this life” (A.2.6:1).
- “...faith is the substance of things to be hoped for and that these things are not manifest to the intellect, even though its consent to them is firm and certain. If they were manifest, there would be no faith. For though faith brings certitude to the intellect, it does not produce clarity, but only darkness” (A.2.6:2). The reason for this darkness is that it strips the intellect of the customary light (natural knowledge).
- “Hope, also, undoubtedly puts the memory in darkness and emptiness as regards all earthly and heavenly objects. Hope always pertains to the unpossessed object. If something were possessed there could no longer be hope for it” (A.2.6:3).

- “Charity, too, causes a void in the will regarding all things since it obliges us to love God above everything” (A.2.6:4).
- John observes that some are content with a certain degree of virtue, such as perseverance in prayer and detachment, but never achieve true nakedness of soul — Christ’s poverty, selflessness, and spiritual purity. Such a one searches only for sweetness and delightful communications from God (a spiritual sweet tooth) (see A.2.7:5).
- The cross is a supporting staff that greatly lightens and eases the journey (see A.2.7:7).  
**Note:** Outward self-denial is insufficient for faith if one is inwardly filled with spiritual pride, missing the entire point of imitating Christ’s poverty of spirit.
- “... the road leading to God does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners and experiences;” but demands only one thing — surrendering self to the suffering Christ. “A person makes progress only by imitating Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (A.2.7:8).
- John’s understanding is that Jesus accomplished the most marvelous work of His whole life by dying on the Cross. That is, He brought about the reconciliation and union of the human race with God through grace (union with God through participation). When reduced to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between God and soul will be accomplished (see A.2.7:11).
- The intellect gets ideas and concepts in two ways: naturally and supernaturally. Natural knowledge includes everything the intellect understands by way of the bodily senses or through reflection (see A.2.10:2). “The ‘natural’ are those the soul can actively construct by its own power through forms, figures and images” (A.2.12:3). “Supernatural knowledge comprises everything imparted to the intellect in a way transcending the intellect’s natural ability and capacity” (A.2.10:2). “The supernatural are represented passively [the initiative comes from God] without the work of the senses” (A.2.12:3).  
**Note:** Reason and faith are compatible with one another. John is not against reason. He is against a desire to know God through “extraordinary charismatic phenomena” (knowledge that comes from vision, locution, feeling, understanding, forms and images, etc.). “There is no necessity for any of this kind of knowledge since one can get sufficient guidance from natural reason and from the law and doctrine of the Gospel. We should make such use of reason and the law of the Gospel that, even though — whether we desire it or not — some supernatural truths are told to us, we accept only what is in harmony with reason and the Gospel law. All matters must be regulated by reason save those of faith, which though not contrary to reason transcend it” (A.2.21:4).
- “Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning secret wisdom of God” (A.2.8:6). The soul passes from lower levels of awareness to higher ones.  
**Note:** John captures the unexplainable experience of the higher knowledge of God in his poem, *Transcending All Knowledge*: “I entered into unknowing/yet when I saw myself

there/without knowing where I was/I understood great things/I will not say what I felt/for I remained in unknowing/transcending all knowledge” (Collected Works pg. 53).

- To grow in faith is to deepen one’s awareness of and attentiveness to God’s indwelling presence. It is a “habit of soul” or a habitual state of consciousness (see A.2.3:1 and Ascent Reflections pg.108).

## **Session Eleven: The impediments and harm caused by different apprehensions arising from objects supernaturally and the proper conduct of the spiritual persons in their regard**

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book Two, ch. 11 and 17

**Additional Reading:** The Collected Works of John of the Cross, ICS Publications, 1991. Dark Night, Book One, chapters 1-8 (imperfections of beginners)

**Side note:** John's focus in these chapters is the supernatural knowledge that reaches the intellect by way of the exterior bodily senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). It is important to keep in mind John's cautionary observations as one navigates this journey in the uncharted waters of the world within.

### **Essential Points to Discuss:**

- Spiritual persons can — and often do — perceive supernatural representations and phenomena: visions of saints or angels; hearing extraordinary words; smelling extraordinary fragrances, etc. John's advice is to ignore such visions and apprehensions. "The more exterior and corporeal these things are, the less certain is their divine origin. God's self-communication is more commonly and appropriately given to the spirit, in which there is greater security and profit for the soul..." (A.2.11:1-2).
- "...they [these apprehensions] are ready occasion for breeding of error, presumption and vanity in the soul... A person, then, forsaking faith, will follow after these communications, believing that their light is the guide and means to the goal, which is union with God" (A.2.11:4).
- "...they [the persons experiencing this] often develop secretly a special opinion of themselves — that they are important in God's eyes. Such a view is contrary to humility." It's easy to fall into a self-satisfaction that becomes truly obvious at times. Such representations and feelings must always be rejected (A.2.11:5).
- "... if the corporeal vision or feeling in the senses has a divine origin it produces its effect in the spirit at the very moment of its perception... God produces the effect passively in the spirit. The good effect, accordingly, does not depend on one's wanting or not wanting the communication" (A.2.11:6).
- Consequently, John identifies six kinds of harm from one's attachment to extraordinary phenomena (see A.2.11:7):
  1. Faith will gradually diminish.
  2. Sensory things are an impediment to the spirit because they detain the soul and prevent the spirit from soaring to the invisible. This is one of the reasons our Lord told the disciples that it was fitting for him to go so that the Holy Spirit might come (Jn.16:7).
  3. The soul begins to develop a possessive attitude toward these communications and fails to persevere on its journey to genuine renunciation and nakedness of spirit.



4. Individuals gradually lose the effect of these communications and the interior spirituality they produce because they set their eyes on the sensible aspect, which is the least important part of the communication.
  5. Individuals gradually lose God's favors because they receive these favors as something belonging to themselves and do not profit well by them.
  6. Lastly, in desiring to accept them one opens the door to the devil (A.2.11:7).
- "If individuals remain both faithful and retiring in the midst of these favors, the Lord will not cease raising them degree by degree until they reach divine union and transformation" (A.2.11:9).
  - John poses the question: *Why does God allow such visions if they are potentially harmful?* (see A.2.17:1). The reason is that God perfects people gradually, according to their human nature, and proceeds from the lowest and most exterior to the highest and most interior (see A.2.17:4).

**Note:** Reading chapter 17 is helpful for understanding God's action in "lifting the soul from the extreme of its low state to the other extreme of the high state of divine union" (A.2.17:3).

- John ultimately leads souls to the safest and most reliable vision of all — that of Jesus Christ. "God could answer as follows: If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer, or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover ever more than you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom and reward." (A.2.22:5)

## Session Twelve: Meditation to contemplation (the passive night of sense) — recognizing the signs of contemplation

**Required Reading:** Ascent, Book Two, 12-15; Ascent Reflections *The Passive Night of the Sense*, pg. 97-100

**Explanatory note:** John's understanding is that meditation is the work of the sense faculties since it is a discursive act built on forms, figures, and images — imagined and fashioned by the senses. For example: imagining Christ crucified or some other scene (see A.2.12:3). John is not advising turning away from Christ; rather, he stresses communion in loving faith more than discursive reflection; a simple gaze of faith and personal communion rather than imaginative representation (see footnote 2 of A.2.12:3). This is the Carmelite charism of prayer.

**Meditation:** Its purpose is to acquire some knowledge and love of God. It is helpful for learning how to follow and imitate Christ. As the acts and knowledge of love of God increase, **a habit of knowing and loving God is begotten in the one meditating**, and the activity of meditation simplifies into a loving attention. In this simplification of meditation, one begins to perceive the three signs of readiness to move beyond discursive meditation (see Glossary Terms, pg. 772).

*“In all our necessities, trials, and difficulties, no better or safer aid exists for us than **prayer** and hope that God will provide for us by the means He desires... ‘When means are lacking and reason cannot find a way ... we have only to raise our eyes to You that You may provide in the manner that pleases You.’” (A.2.21:5, 2 Chron. 20:12)*

### Essential Points to Discuss:

- “These considerations, forms, and methods of meditation are necessary to beginners... They are suitable as the remote means to union with God” (A.2.12:5). John's observation is that many spiritual persons err greatly by holding on to the former ways of approaching God through images, forms, etc., and fail to allow God to lead them to more spiritual, interior, and invisible graces (see A.2.12:6).
- “Once the faculties reach the end of their journey, they cease to work, just as we cease to walk when we reach the end of our journey. If everything consisted in going, one would never arrive; and everywhere we found means, when and where could we enjoy the end and goal?” (A.2.12:6).
- “Since these individuals do not understand the mystery of this new experience, they imagine themselves to be idle and doing nothing. Thus, in their struggle with ...discursive meditations they disturb their **quietude**..., and they drag the soul further away from spiritual space” (A.2.12:7).
- This withdrawal of sensible consolation results in a twofold crisis that John calls the “passive night of sense.” First, it is a crisis of choice. Will the soul continue to pray and practice virtue without the support of consolation, or will it give up? Second, it is a crisis

of confusion. This is because many beginners have the erroneous belief that God's presence in their lives is the intensity of consolation that they experience. Therefore, when consolation is absent, they think that God has withdrawn from them, and they do not know why (see Ascent Reflections, pg.97).

**Note:** Even though the aspect of the passive night of sense that John focuses on is the transition from discursive meditation to the beginnings of contemplative prayer, **we need to keep in mind that the passive night of sense involves every aspect of one's daily life.** A common analogy for the passive night of sense is the period in a marriage when the honeymoon wanes and the couple begin to grow in love together by means of daily sacrifices (see Ascent Reflections, pg. 100). Also see St. Therese of Lisieux's "Christmas Story" (Appendix D).

- "The proper advice for these individuals is that they must learn to abide in the quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no heed to the imagination and its work. At this stage, the faculties are at rest and do not work actively but passively, by receiving what God is effecting in them" (A.2.12:8).

**Side note:** In chapter 13, John explains the signs for recognizing in spiritual persons when they should discontinue discursive meditation and pass on to the state of contemplation. And in chapter 14, he explains why the presence of these signs are necessary for one to advance. These two chapters should be read in their entirety to better understand the progression of prayer.

- "The first [sign] is the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation or receive satisfaction from it as before" (A.2.13:2).
- "The second sign is an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects, exterior or interior" (A.2.12:3).
- "The third and surest sign is that person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without the acts and exercises of the intellect, memory and will. Such a one prefers to remain only in the general loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, without any particular knowledge or understanding" (A.2.13:4).

**Note:** John's observation is that spiritual persons must observe within themselves all three signs together (see A.2.13:5). Contemplation, as the general loving knowledge of God, is the decisive element in this new situation (see footnote 2 of A.2.13:2). If the third sign is missing, the person is more likely to be experiencing a period of lukewarmness rather than readiness for infused contemplation.

- "...the more habituated persons become to this calm, the more their experience of this general loving knowledge of God will increase. This knowledge is more enjoyable than all other things because without the soul's labor it affords peace, rest, savor, and delight" (A.2.13:7).
- John's understanding is that: "what the soul therefore was gradually acquiring through the labor of meditation on particular ideas and forms has now been converted into

habitual and substantial and general loving knowledge... Accordingly, the moment prayer begins, the soul, as one with a store of water, drinks peaceably without labor” (A.2.14:2). John further observes that this union with pure knowledge is independent of time. “This is the short prayer that, it is said, pierces the heavens” (A.2.14:11). “*For a little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and **more beneficial to the Church**, even though it seems one is doing nothing, than all these works put together*” (SC. 29:2).

- John further observes that in this new experience, some spiritual persons (at least at the beginning), become disturbed with the thought of backsliding and going astray. They are indeed getting lost, but not in the way they imagine, for they are losing the exercise of their own senses and first mode of experience. This loss indicates that the spirit being imparted to them, in which the less they understand the further they penetrate into the night of the spirit. They must pass through this night to union with God beyond all knowing (see A.2.14:4).
- The supernatural knowledge and light shines so purely and simply in the intellect that it frees it from all intelligible forms. This causes darkness because it dispossesses the intellect of its customary light (see A.2.14:10). This is an important teaching of John’s understanding of the term, “darkness.” It is truly a “sheer grace” to pass through the senses to spirit “in darkness and concealment,” and to experience the “loving knowledge of God” in contemplation.

*—ah, the sheer grace!—  
in darkness and concealment,  
my house being now all stilled.*

**At the end of this year of formation, the candidate should have a basic grasp of the following concepts:**

- John's doctrine on the "appetites"
- The harm disordered desires inflict on the soul
- Behavioral patterns are tendencies more than choice, and they need a deeper healing rather than just behavioral improvement. Hence, Jesus says: "Come to me...I will refresh you" (I will heal you) (Matthew 11:29).
- Transformation and union with God are not about the individual only. God gives His gifts to individuals for the good of the Church and the World.
- For Seculars, union with God through participation is lived amid life's daily challenges and informs their attitudes and actions.
- The virtue of self-denial is a form of love and union with God. Love is the very essence of detachment and self-denial. "Fired with love's urgent longings" — "a more intense enkindling of another, better love is necessary for the denial of all inordinate pleasures" (A.1.14:2).
- Genuine love is not a romantic, self-gratifying experience. Rather, it involves a process of conversion, of transcending one's ego, of giving one's life for the Beloved. Love is a self-disciplined process. "To love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God" (A.2:5-6).
- The fruits of detachment and self-denial:
  - Increased knowledge of God and of self;
  - Growth in humility and in understanding and empathy toward others;
  - Freedom from slavery to desires and attachments, and the experience of a sense of God's mercy;
  - A single-minded, single-hearted choice for love of God and the habit of seeing everything as secondary to the quest for God's love. "All the world's wisdom and human ability compared to the infinite wisdom of God is pure and utter ignorance" (A.1:4.4).
- Faith as contemplation does not communicate facts about God; it is an experience of God's self-communication. Faith communicates God Himself to the soul.

**And progress with the following spiritual attitudes appropriate to this level of formation:**

- A single-hearted desire to embrace the theological virtues of faith, hope and love as the living expression of union.
- An increased desire to cast out everything that interferes with the inflowing God.
- Detachment not only from possessions and unruly desires, but also from "spiritual goods" (spiritual sweet tooth).

- No expectation of or desire for extraordinary experiences such as locutions, visions, or ecstasies.

**Note:** More important than a candidate's intellectual knowledge is the internalization of St. John's teachings. The purpose of all formation is to prepare the person to live the OCDS vocation. There is to be no sort of final exam or test. Councils may evaluate how well the candidate is progressing by observing the person's behavior in community life, by listening to the person's participation in the formation discussions, and by regular "check-ins" to talk informally with the candidate about how things are going.

**Ratio 66.** Signs of a vocation to Carmel, at the level of the Teresian charism:

- a taste for prayer and
- a desire to establish a personal and friendly relationship with God
- a contemplative and active spirit. ["This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works" (IC, VII.4:6.)]
- a love for the Church
- a desire to familiarize oneself with Carmelite spirituality.

**Note:** It is recommended that candidates continue reading the rest of the Ascent for their spiritual enrichment and understanding of the purification process of the intellect, memory, and will according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross.

**BOOK TWO OF THE ASCENT (Chapter 1-32)**

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT -PURIFICATION OF INTELLECT  
BY THE PRACTICE OF FAITH**

**BOOK THREE OF ASCENT (Chapters 1-15)**

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE MEMORY  
BY THE PRACTICE OF HOPE**

**BOOK THREE OF ASCENT (Chapters 16-45)**

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE WILL  
BY THE PRACTICE OF CHARITY**

**Note to Formators:**

In his letter to the Secular Carmelites (March 28, 2020), Superior General Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, OCD, reminded the Secular Carmelites of the need to participate in the mission and apostolate of the Church and the Order as an integral part of the OCDS identity. "Unfortunately, with regard to this, there are still misunderstandings and many people think that it is enough to

attend community meetings for some practices of devotions, reflection or conferences, but without a real and concrete commitment of service in the activities of the Order or the Church in which one finds oneself. Perhaps this is due to weak formation which does not take into account what the Constitutions recommend: 'In the last three years of initial formation there will be a deeper study of Scripture, the documents of the Church, the Saints of the Order, prayer, and **how to participate in the apostolate of the Order...**' [emphasis added] (n. 36 d).

Following from Father General's letter, formators are requested to introduce the candidates to the following article and selected paragraphs of the Church documents:

Fr. Deeney's article, *New Vision — Apostolate of Our Charism*, Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites pg. 38.

Vatican documents: *Christifideles Laici*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* — The Gospel of Joy.

OCDS Constitutions *Serving God's Plan* 25-28

**Note to the Council:** The following needs to be completed well before the discernments begin; it may be divided into two or more sessions, if needed. It is important to have special sessions with the Formation Director for candidates in their third cycle of Formation II.

### **Special Session with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II: Called to holiness — the Definitive Promise in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites**

**Required Reading:** OCDS Constitutions, Art. 11-16. Ratio, 59-93.

*Ritual for the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order*, Chapter III: Rite of Making the Promise

**Additional Reading:** The Promise and Vows in the Secular Order, Fr Alzinir Debastiani, OCD

#### **Essential Points to Discuss:**

- “The Secular Carmelite wants to see God, wants to know God, and recognizes that prayer and meditation now become more important. The Promise is a commitment to a new way of life in which the ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ’ marks the person and the way this person lives” (Ratio Art. 88).
- “For the members of the Secular Order it is an honor to be part of the Carmelite family...The Secular Carmelite seeks intimate union with Christ in the world through the lived experience of the Promise made according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order” (Ratio Art.86).
- “Following Jesus as members of the Secular Order is expressed by the promise to strive for evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and through the beatitudes” (OCDS Const. Art.11).
- “The promise of chastity reinforces the commitment to love God above all else and to love others with the love God has for them...This promise does not prevent a change in state of life” (Const. Art. 13).
- “By the promise of poverty the Secular Carmelite expresses the desire to live in accordance with the Gospel and its values. In evangelical poverty there is a wealth of generosity, self-denial, and interior liberty...” (Const. Art.14).
- “The promise of obedience is a pledge to live open to the will of God...For this reason the Secular Carmelite freely cooperates with those who have responsibility for guiding the community and the Order in discerning and accepting God’s ways: the Community’s Council, the Provincial and the General” (Const. Art. 15).
- “The beatitudes are a plan of action for life and a way to enter into relationship with the world, neighbors and co-workers, families and friends. By promising to live the beatitudes in daily life, Secular Carmelites seek to give evangelical witness as members of the Church and the Order, and by this witness invite the world to follow Christ: ‘the Way the Truth and the Life’ (Jn.14:6)” (Const. Art.16).



- “What is the element that distinguishes those called to be Secular Carmelites? It is not the spirituality, nor the study, nor the devotion to Mary. Simply put, the Secular Carmelite is moved to commit himself or herself to the Order: to commit himself to the service of the Church through collaboration and cooperation with the goal of the Order. This commitment in the form of the **Promise** is an ecclesial event and an event of the Order in addition to being an event in the life of the person who makes the Promise” (Ratio Art. 83).
- Secular Carmelites are called to share in the common vocation to holiness (see, Preface to the OCDS Constitutions). “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation...* is the vocation to holiness, that is perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony to the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church” (*Christifideles Laici — Called to Holiness*, para. 16). Hence, “... this promise is a pledge to pursue personal holiness...” (OCDS Const. Art. 11).
- “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and their participation in earthly activities. Once again, the Apostle admonishes us: ‘Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Colos. 3:17) (*Christifideles Laici — The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II). “... The Secular Order receives new vocations with joy, but also with a feeling of responsibility, so that in them also the charism may be daily understood more deeply, bear fruit and expand...” (Ratio 20).
- “... within the lay state diverse ‘vocations’ are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a ‘commonly shared’ lay vocation, ‘special’ lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutions that have developed recently in the Church. These offer the lay faithful, and even priests, the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows or promises while fully maintaining one’s lay or clerical state” (*Christifideles Laici — The Various Vocations in the Lay State*, para. 56).
- “...Our Lord will reward anyone who does more than he [or she] is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues” (Rule of St. Albert, Art.24).

### **The Definitive Promise:**

I, (name), inspired by the Holy Spirit, in response to God’s call, sincerely promise to the Superiors of the Order of the Teresian Carmel and to you my brothers and sisters, to tend toward evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty,

obedience, and of the Beatitudes, according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites, **for the rest of my life**. I confidently entrust this, my Promise, to the Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel.

+++++

As the candidates prepare for the Definitive Promise, it is helpful to recall the words of Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Letter to the OCDS, March 20, 2020:

... I urge you to know your [legislative] documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy. May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Fraternally, Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Superior General, 2009–2021

(The entire letter is in Appendix E)

## Bibliography

*The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, ICS Publications, 1991.

*The Holy Bible*.

Foley, Marc. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Saint John of the Cross. Reflections*. ICS Publications, 2013.

Foley, Marc. *John of the Cross: The Ascent to Joy*. ICS Publications, 2002.

*The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching*. ICS Publications, 1995.

Matthew, Iain. *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.

Deeney, Aloysius, OCD. *Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites*, ICS Publications, 2009.

Hardy, Richard P. *John of the Cross — Man and Mystic*, ICS Publications, 2015.

His Holiness Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation — *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation - *Christifideles Laici* (30 September 1988).

Evangelii Gaudium - The Gospel of Joy Full text:

[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

Christifideles Laici: Full text: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html)

## Appendix A: Session 3, The Five Positive Harms of Attachment

See *the Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book One, chapter 6*

St. John of the Cross describes the positive harms to the soul under their five effects: they weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken the soul (A.1. 6:5.)

- Weariness is illustrated in John's description of a lover. "Just as lover is wearied and depressed when on a longed-for day his opportunity is frustrated, so is the soul wearied and tired of all its appetites and their fulfillment, because the fulfillment only causes more hunger and emptiness" (A.1. 6:6.) John also portrays this weariness in the image of a covetous treasure hunter. "Just as anyone who digs covetously for a treasure grows tired and exhausted, so does anyone who strives to satisfy the appetites' demand become wearied and fatigued." (A1.6.6.)

**Note:** The focus of the first illustration (lover) is on "fulfillment." What the soul really hungers for is God. Trying to satisfy this hunger with anything other than God leaves the soul wearied and dissatisfied. The focus of the second illustration (treasure hunter) is on the "exhaustion" caused by covetous desires. After spending so much time and effort trying to get what can never satisfy, the soul feels exhausted.

- Torment and affliction are the second kind of damage the appetites cause in an individual... "A soul is tormented and afflicted when it reclines on its appetites just as is someone lying naked on thorns and nails." (A.1.7:1) "The appetite torments in the measure of its intensity...and the more numerous the appetites that possess a soul the greater in number are its torments" (A.1.7:2.)
- God, then, in compassion for all, invites them to drink the living water and eat the real manna. "The Spirit of God refreshes the soul. 'Come to me,' Jesus says, 'all you who labor and are burdened [with wrongful desires and affections], I will refresh you' (Mt 11:28) — and you will be relieved of all of your inordinate desires. (see A: 7:4).
- The third kind of harm the appetites bring upon a person is blindness and darkness. As a cloudy mirror does not clearly reflect a person's face, and as muddy water reflects only a hazy image, so too it is with our intellect when cluttered with sinful desires. It becomes darkened and unable to receive a clear impression of either natural wisdom or supernatural knowledge (see. 8:1). As David laments: "My iniquities surrounded me, and I was unable to see." (Ps 40:12).
- "The appetite blinds and darkens the soul... A moth is not helped much by its eyes because, blinded in its desire for the beauty of light, it will fly directly into a bonfire." (8:3)
- The fourth way the appetites harm the soul is by defiling and staining it. "Strokes of soot would ruin a perfect and extraordinarily beautiful portrait, so too inordinate appetites defile and dirty the soul, in itself a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God." (9:1)

- The vision of the prophet Ezekiel teaches that there are three kinds of wrongful desires and affections: those in the intellect — thoughts of base things; those in the will — desire for sensual things; those in the memory — reflecting and keeping them in mind. The total yielding to wrongful affections and desires in any one of these three faculties would be a total turning away from God. (see 9:5-6; Ezk 8:10-16)
- “Weakness and tepidity are the fifth kind of harm the appetites produce in a person. The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue” (A.1.10:1.) When the soul dissipates its energy in other things, it loses its fervor for God and its strength in the practice of virtue. (A1.10:1.) “Ordinarily, the reason many people do not have diligence and eagerness for the acquisition of virtue is that their appetites and affections are not fixed purely on God” (A.1.10:4.)

## Appendix B: Session 6, Understanding the “Maxims” or “Sayings”

By Steven Payne, OCD (Courtesy, Cincarm — a Carmelite platform.)

First, I think it's worth reminding ourselves of the "literary genre." That is to say, John is giving us “maxims” or “sayings,” which have a venerable tradition in Christian spirituality. A maxim is a kind of pithy and memorable summary of practical advice (e.g., "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today") but not a complete treatise on ethics or behavior. Maxims have to be interpreted and applied (for example, we'd die of exhaustion if we tried to do EVERYTHING today instead of postponing some things until tomorrow). Jesus himself was fond of “sayings” or “maxims” and many Scripture scholars believe that some of the earliest written documents among believers were collections of his sayings. And we know that some of these are very hard sayings (“let the dead bury the dead, offer no resistance to evil, unless you hate father and mother, etc., etc.”), and that some Christians have gotten into trouble when they interpret these out of the context of the whole gospel message. Moreover, Jesus' sayings, though in the tradition of "wisdom" sayings, often turn conventional wisdom on its head and show us the paradoxical possibilities of the kingdom that he came to inaugurate and proclaim.

Much the same can be said of John. We know that in his early years in Carmel he gave many spiritual conferences and did much spiritual direction, and that he liked to leave people with pithy little summaries of his main points. These maxims or “dichos” were among his first writings, then, and later sometimes were simply incorporated into his treatises. They're not complete treatments of the subjects they address, but succinct reminders of important points.

Notice that these maxims are simply meant to help us follow the first counsel, which is to imitate Christ. Notice at the end of the list how he says that we should desire to enter into complete nakedness and poverty “for Christ.” If anyone wants to reject his maxims as too hard, I'm sure John would say, “Fine, if you know another way of learning to imitate Christ, more power to you!” But in his own experience, some counter-measures against our natural inclinations are needed in order to break the power of the “pleasure principle.”

“Not to the easiest, but to the most difficult, etc.” He encourages us to “embrace these practices” not in order to punish ourselves but “to overcome the repugnance of your will toward them,” so that we can learn to be governed not by what pleases or displeases our appetites, but by what God wills. The point is not to form new attachments but to break the power of the ones we already have, so that we're guided not by whether something gives us pleasure or pain but by whether or not it is God's will.

Far from being impossibly idealistic, I think of John's advice as eminently practical (though admittedly I may be watering it down to fit my own spiritual limitations). I think of these maxims as like riding a bicycle; if you've got one that keeps pulling to the left, then you have to lean to the right in order to provide a counterbalance and keep on a straight course. We human beings struggle with inertia, and even in religious life we can easily get into a rut without noticing it: our favorite place in choir, our favorite person to sit beside in recreation, our favorite housework assignment, etc., etc. That's why I find it personally useful to vary and change things when I can, to sit where I don't usually sit, to talk to the person I don't usually talk to, to take the help out I'm not naturally inclined to, to eat the foods I like less, etc., etc.

Ultimately you get used to those, too. We'll always have preferences. But the work of the "active night of the senses" will be done when we get to the point where we can eat what's put in front of us, where we can pray whether we're given our "favorite spot" or not, where we don't become all unglued if our preferences aren't followed. Again, I think John would say the goal is to get to the point where, after letting God know our preferences, we can still honestly pray, with Jesus, "Yet not my will but Thine be done." Peace, Steven Payne, OCD

## **Appendix C: Session 7, Consolation in Prayer — “enkindling of another love”**

Chapter 14 is one of the most important chapters in the first book of John of the Cross's ASCENT, and gives us a retrospective key to everything that has gone before. John begins by saying that he has now "explained the first verse" of the Dark Night poem, and "discussed the nature of this night, the reason for calling it a night, and the method of actively entering into it." It reminds me of the old advice for organizing a talk: begin by telling them what you are going to say, then say it, then tell them what you've said. But there's one thing he hasn't really mentioned before now, and is perhaps the most important point of all for putting all the ascetical advice in perspective. Here John says that "a more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of the soul's Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of this pleasure. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, it will have the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites.... For the sensory appetites are moved and attracted toward sensory objects with such cravings that if the spiritual part of the soul is not fired with other, more urgent longings for spiritual things, the soul will be able neither to overcome the yoke of nature nor to enter the night of sense.... How easy, sweet, and delightful these longings for their Bridegroom make all the trials and dangers of this night seem."

In other words, at the most fundamental level, John's active night of sense does not begin with a grim determination on our part to annihilate all our desires in order to please God. Rather, God first takes the initiative, enkindling us with longings for him, so that we will \*want\* to make the effort to remove whatever impedes union. What gives us the impetus is our infatuation with God. Granted, at the beginning these longings are immature and sometimes misdirected, but they get us off the mark and make us \*want\* to grow and change. I think of it as analogous to human love. Think of a teenager whose parents are always after him (or her) to shape up, apply himself, dress right, use good manners, keep his room clean, all of which he has no motivation to do.... until suddenly he gets a crush on a girl and wants to impress her, and starts doing all these things. (It doesn't have to be a teenager, and maybe that's not a good example, because he might try to impress her by getting a tattoo or a nose ring these days!) The point is, the journey John presents to us in ASCENT I looks discouraging if we think of it as an enormous feat of self-mastery that \*we\* have to accomplish before we can move on. But if we think of it rather as a response to the enkindling of love for God in our hearts, it makes all the difference. I think of all the popular songs in which the singers profess that they would "climb the highest mountain, swim the deepest sea, walk through fire, etc., etc." to be with the ones they love.... And we don't think of this as masochistic or negative. In fact, lovers often seek challenges to prove their love. So it is here, I think. So much for my \$.02.

Peace, Steven Payne, OCD



## Appendix D: Session 12, St. Therese's Christmas Story

One of the convincing stories about St. Therese's life was her childhood conversion at the age of fourteen. Grace intervened to change her life on Christmas day in 1886.

The following year she entered the Discalced Carmelite convent. In her autobiography, Story of a Soul, she referred to this Christmas as her "conversion" (Chapter V):

I was really unbearable because of my extreme touchiness; If I happened to cause anyone I loved some little trouble, instead of forgetting about it, I cried like a Magdalene and then when I began to cheer up, I'd begin to cry again for having cried. I was quite unable to correct this terrible fault. I really don't know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel when I was still in the swaddling clothes of a child!

God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day. On that luminous night, the gentle, little Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light.

It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion. We had come back from Midnight Mass where I had the happiness of receiving the strong and powerful God. Upon arriving at Les Buissonnets, I used to love to take my shoes from the chimney-corner and examine the present in them. This old custom has given us so much joy in our youth that Celine wanted to continue treating me as a baby since I was the youngest in the family. Papa had always loved to see my happiness and listen to my cries of delight as I drew each surprise from the magic shoes, and my dear King's gaiety increased my own happiness very much. However, Jesus desired to show me that I was to give up the defects of my childhood years. He permitted Papa, tired out after the Midnight Mass, to experience annoyance when seeing my shoes at the fireplace, and that he speak those words which pierced my heart: "Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!" I was going upstairs to remove my hat, and Celine, knowing how sensitive I was and seeing the tears already glistening in my eyes, wanted to cry too, for she loved me very much and understood my grief. She said, "Oh, Therese, don't go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now!" But Therese was no longer the same; Jesus has changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had a happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing. Celine believed it was all a dream! Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Therese had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half (when her mother died,) and she was to preserve it forever!

On that night, Jesus made me strong and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night, I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory, beginning, so to speak, "to run as a giant." The source of my tears was dried up...The work that I have been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant...I could say to Him like His apostles: "Master, I fished all night and caught nothing" (Lk5:5.) More merciful to me than He was to His disciples, Jesus took the net Himself, cast it, and drew it in filled with fish. He made me a fisher of souls. I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a

desire I hadn't felt so intensely before. I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please other; since then I've been happy!

Therese's conversion story is not simply a sentimental touch, mingled with Christmas presents and little children. Her "Christmas conversion" has deeper meaning. Her participation in God's saving Grace - the realization that God is working within the nitty-gritty of everyday life is the lesson at the heart of her Christmas story.

Thus, Therese's Christmas story is clearly reflecting the teaching of St. John of the Cross. The knowledge and light shines so purely and simply in the intellect in such a way that frees all intelligible forms — causes darkness because it dispossesses the intellect of the customary light (see A. 1. 14:10). This is an important teaching of John's understanding of the term, "darkness." It is truly a "sheer grace" (for Therese) to pass through the senses to spirit "in darkness and concealment," and to experience the "loving knowledge of God" in contemplation.

St. Therese's participation in God's invitation amid her dark night experience - this enlightenment, and the spiritual theology that flowed from this Christmas story, transformed the Catholic Church and brought Therese the status not only of being the greatest saint of her time, but eventually being named a Doctor of the Church.

## **Appendix E: Special session, Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD Superior General March 28, 2020 letter to OCDS**

CASA GENERALIZIA CARMEUTANI SCALZI  
CORSO D'ITALIA, 38  
00198 ROMA

Rome, 28 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Order,

On this day when we commemorate the 505th anniversary of the birth of our Holy Mother Saint Teresa, I greet you, using the words with which Teresa used to begin her letters: may *Jesus and the grace of the Holy Spirit be with you.*

This anniversary reminds us of the great gifts that the Lord gave to Holy Mother. We also remember this year the 50 anniversary of the Doctorate proclaimed by St. Paul VI on September 27, 1970. The Apostolic Letter *Multiformis sapientia Dei*, which I invite you to read and meditate on, recognizes that Teresa “has always been celebrated, both for the extraordinary facts of her life, for the rare virtues of her soul and for her spirit of good judgment”, and “a very sure guide and teacher of sacred sciences”. As Teresa herself wrote, to remember what “is a gift and that we possess it, we are compelled to love the giver.” (cf. Life 10:5). Therefore, in recognizing the gifts received from God’s goodness in the lives of our Saints, in the history of our Order, as well as in the personal history of each one of us, everything invites us to thank Him and to grasp the signs of His living, faithful, and active presence in the events of our time.

In this context I would like to recall this year another important event of 20 years ago: the 2nd International Congress of the OCDS held in San Juan de los Lagos (Mexico) from August 31 to September 7, 2000.

In commemorating this event, I would like, first of all, to thank all those who collaborated in the organization and in the organization of the Congress, in particular Fr. Aloysius Deeney OCD (General Delegate for OCDS), Irma Estrada Franco OCDS (General Secretary of the OCDS), and the members of the OCDS of Mexico.

Secondly, after a brief reminder of the Congress, I would like to enumerate some of its fruits, offering some reflections so that you may continue on your path of following Jesus according to the charism of the Teresian Carmel with that attitude dear to the Cardinal, and now Saint, John Henry Newman: “To live is to change, and to be perfect means to have changed many times”.

### *The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress*

The Letter to the Congress participants (of 23 September 1999) stated that “the theme and purpose of the Congress will be the revision of the Rule of Life [of 1979], with particular attention to the responsibilities and gifts of the laity in the Order and in the Church, as expressed in *Christifideles laici*, *Vita Consecrata*, and other documents of the Church”.

This objective responded to the request of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of the OCDS in 1996 (held in Rome) and the operative conclusions of the OCD General Chapter of 1997: “The Secular

Order should be promoted and supported in the various Circumscriptions of the Order, according to the diversity of situations. Particular attention should be given to the revision of the *Rule of Life* from the laity's point of view" (n. 107.a).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, in which about 250 lay and religious delegates participated, had as its motto: *A single Order with the same charism*. It emphasized that the one charism of the Order is lived differently by the friars, the nuns, and the seculars, and that from a solid formation on the identity of the laity of the Order, based on the doctrine of our Holy Founding Parents, also springs the essence of their mission, that of witnessing to friendship with Christ and with their brothers and sisters in the midst of the world.

### *Some Fruits of the Congress*

A first fruit of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress was the creation of an International Commission composed of 10 members of the OCDS of different nationalities. The objective was to continue the drafting of the new Constitutions. It was coordinated by the General Delegate and took into account the contributions of the 1st International Congress and the proposals of the working groups of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, as well as other contributions sent by the Provinces. The editorial work was carried out in 3 years, thus in 2003 a draft of the new Constitutions of the OCDS was presented at the General Chapter of Avila. This draft was then revised by the General Definitory and finally sent to the Holy See, which approved it in June 2003.

The new Constitutions were enriched with the insertion of the text of the Rule of St. Albert. This was an important addition because the Rule is the primordial inspiration common to all: the friars, the nuns and the laity. This was confirmed with the insertion in the Constitutions of the affirmation that *the laity of the OCDS are members of the Order*, like the friars and nuns (cf. *Proemio* and Art. 1); Secular Carmelites live the charism of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross in the world and enrich consecrated life (OCD friars and nuns) with their secular style of life.

A challenge that perhaps we must continue to face in the circumscriptions is that the experience of the charism of the Teresian Carmel for OCDS should be realized first of all in the family environment, work, and other commitments in the midst of the world. It is there that the witness of the living God, who desires to maintain a relationship of friendship with every human being created in His image and likeness, should take place and bear witness. Unfortunately, it is perceived that there are still members of OCDS who live their vocation only in the sacristies of monasteries or convents, without an effective "spreading" of the charism in the world around them.

Another fruit of the Congress was the clarification of the identity of the laity in the Order. Your vocation is both contemplative, lay and apostolic, which presupposes a daily commitment to integrate these three key elements. This identity brings with it the awareness of having common elements of the Teresian charism with the other branches, with which to collaborate in an interdependence that respects the differences, the right autonomies, and the vocational identity proper to each one.

The autonomy of the OCDS must be well understood. It concerns government according to its own Constitutions and Statutes, but also formation. The accompaniment of the friars, on whom for historical reasons the OCDS depends juridically (cf. Const. 41; Ratio 19; cf. Const. 2), should

promote the maturity of lay identity in the Order and fraternal relationships of collaboration, with mutual respect for the autonomy of each one.

A third fruit of the Congress was the emphasis on the need to participate in the mission and apostolate of the Church and the Order as an integral part of the OCDS lay identity. The Church asks for this in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in *Christifideles laici* (1988) and in *Vita Consecrata* (1996). This dimension was somewhat underestimated and hidden because of a reductive vision of contemplation. Instead, we know that the fruit of authentic contemplative prayer is service to others, striving to bring about “good works” (cf. St. Teresa, 5M 3,11; 7M 4,6) according to one’s own abilities and talents, for the good of the Church, the Order and society, as did Teresa and John of the Cross (cf. Const. 26).

Unfortunately, with regard to this, there are still misunderstandings and many people think that it is enough to attend community meetings for some practices of devotions, reflection or conferences, but without a real and concrete commitment of service in the activities of the Order or the Church in which one finds oneself. Perhaps this is due to weak formation which does not take into account what the Constitutions recommend: “In the last three years of initial formation there will be a deeper study of Scripture, the documents of the Church, the Saints of the Order, prayer, and how to participate in the apostolate of the Order...” (n. 36 d).

In the Congress, and as it appears in the Constitutions, the importance of the organization of *Provincial Councils* in the circumscriptions of the Order was highlighted (cf. Constitutions 57). Their specific mission is to prepare the Statutes of the circumscription and to coordinate the initiatives of the apostolate and formation in the communities. In this sense, many circumscriptions have organized and developed the OCDS with great commitment and have collaborated to increase awareness of the lay identity in the Order and a mature autonomy, growing in number, internal organization and formation, as well as developing communion among the communities. In other countries or circumscriptions, unfortunately and for various reasons, this has not been the case. The Provincial Council has not acted as a body of communion and animation both in the life of the communities and in relationship with the friars and nuns. And here, for all of us, we have a good way to go according to the principle of *synodality*, as I mentioned in last year’s letter.

Finally, as a further fruit of the Congress, in 2009 the *Ratio Institutionis* of the OCDS was published, which offers the guiding principles for the formation of the laity of the Teresian Carmel, reiterating the need for a solid formation that allows us undertake a vocational journey and service in the mission animated by the spirit of our Saints. More recently, the aspect of fraternal communion in the OCDS has been highlighted with the insertion of the chapter on fraternal communion (3 B) and the paragraph on St. Joseph (31 a). Thus, what is essential in the OCDS has been completed in the documents, defining your identity, objectives and goals as lay members of the Order.

*Dear brothers and sisters of the OCDS,*

With this commemoration of the Second International Congress of the OCDS, the signs of some of its fruits, as well as commemorating an important event in the history of the OCDS, I would

like to thank the Lord with you for his gifts. At the same time, this urges us to grow spiritually, especially in living charity so that we may return love to the infinite Love of the Holy Trinity (cf. John of the Cross, *Song* 38, 2-4).

I urge you to know your documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

I also entrust to your fraternal and filial prayer the last *Extraordinary Definitory* of this sexennium, which will take place in September in Mexico City, as well as the preparation work for the General Chapter to be held in May 2021.

I wish a Holy Easter of Resurrection to each of you, your families and communities. May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy (cf. *Way* 26:4). May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Faternally,

Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD  
Superior General

PS: I would like to add to you Secular Carmelite sisters and brothers, and to your loved ones, a word of closeness, comfort, and hope in these moments of trial due to the Covid-19. It is an unexpected, fast, and enveloping situation that makes us experience our human fragility and precariousness: physical, psychological, economic, and above all it leads us to reflect on our relationship with God, others, and nature.

Obviously, our first duty is to abide by the dispositions of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in order to avoid exposing ourselves to contagion and putting our own family and the people around us at risk.

I know that there are many challenges facing you, especially being unable to work to support the family. Those who have children and the elderly at home find themselves having to manage their own care and educational needs in confined spaces. Even this creates tension and requires sacrifices. Others, on the other hand, experience loneliness and isolation, locked up at home without the possibility of receiving visitors. These situations require a great deal of balance, great patience, and the daily commitment to live harmoniously and peacefully with others. Definitely, it is a propitious time to exercise the Teresian virtues.

Today we are rightly concerned to equip ourselves with devices to protect ourselves from contagion, but it is also important to wear the armor of which our Rule speaks to us, the “weapons of the virtues, living an intense life of faith, hope and charity” (CC 6 f), trusting in God, who allows trial, but does not abandon us in it. We constantly remember the words of Isaiah, quoted in our Rule:

“In silence and hope will be your strength” (Is 35:15; *Rule of St. Albert*, 21).

Let us take advantage of this time of apparent powerlessness to pray, read, form ourselves, strengthen family relationships, making virtue out of necessity, as our Holy Mother St. Teresa said (cf. *Way* 32:4; 5; *M* 3:7; 6 *M* 5:2). Let us intensify our prayer, asking the Lord’s Mercy for an end to this pandemic and other evils; may He give strength to all those involved in the fight against the virus and assistance to the sick.

### **Copyright Notice – 2023**

OCDS Provinces, Communities, and Groups are granted permission to print/copy the Formation Program solely for OCDS non-commercial use. Reproduction and/or distribution of the formation program for commercial purposes with the intent to make a profit is strictly prohibited. This includes selling booklets at OCDS Congress/fundraising events, etc.

Without limiting the use of the formation materials and to avoid any doubt as to its intent, you must not adapt, edit, change, transform, publish, or re-publish the National Formation Program on this provincial website or any of the formation materials in your possession.

We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Institute of Carmelite Studies for their gracious permission to use extracts from their publications.