

# The Rule of Albert

*as approved by Innocent IV (1247).*

A revised translation of the Carmelite Rule  
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One of the shortest of the great rules is the one originating with St. Albert of Jerusalem (d. 1214), who gave the Carmelites a *Way of Life*. His legislation has come down to the Carmelite Order with some modifications sanctioned by Innocent IV in *Quem honorem* (1247), which scholars today see as constituting it as a rule. This Rule inspires the whole worldwide Carmelite family.

There are several English translations each with their own features. Some problems face the translator. Many of the terms used by Albert can have a technical or juridical sense in medieval times. For these one can turn to the studies of Carlo Cicconetti and Kees Waaijman.<sup>[1]</sup> There are many biblical citations and echoes; most can be easily identified; some are not so sure. One can then either translate Albert's Latin version, or more dubiously look to modern bible translations from the Hebrew or Greek originals. A revised translation is offered here, which is somewhat more literal than existing translations so that people may be helped to catch the nuances and occasional ambiguities of the original. The translation offered reflects the fact that the Rule was written for male hermits on Mount Carmel. Women of the Carmelite Family will perhaps wish to make their own adaptations.

Though the text challenges each translator in matters of style and consistency, there are not many interpretive problems.<sup>[2]</sup> There is, however, a problem of citing the Rule. Throughout its history it has been divided into chapters, articles or sections varying from ten to twenty. The traditional O.Carm. numbers go back to 1586 when John Baptist Caffardi was Prior General. But there are other divisions, for example the translation of B. Edwards or in the English version of the O.Carm Constitutions (1995). The Constitutions of the ODC nuns have a different set of divisions. In 1999 the General Councils of the two branches (O.Carm. and ODC) came up with a new agreed enumeration. In this revised translation the new numeration is given prominence. But for those who may encounter other numeration in their reading, the traditional O.Carm chapters are given as Roman uppercase capitals (I, II, III...) with the ODC nuns' articles in lowercase Roman numerals (i, ii, iii...).

1 [Prol., i]

Albert, called by the grace of God to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, greets his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits living in obedience to him near the spring on Mount Carmel: salvation in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

2 [Prol., ii]

Many times and in different ways the holy Fathers have laid down that everyone—whatever be their state in life or the religious life chosen by them—should live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and serve him zealously with a pure heart and a good conscience.

3

Now then you have come to me seeking a formula of life according to your purpose, which you are to observe in the future.

4 [I, iii]

The first thing I lay down is that you shall have a prior, one of yourselves, chosen by the unanimous consent of all, or of the greater and more mature part. All the others shall promise him obedience fulfilling it by deeds, as well as chastity and the renunciation of property.

5 [II, iv]

You can take up places in solitary areas or in sites given to you, one suitable and convenient for your observance in the judgement of the prior and the brothers.

6 [III, v]

Moreover, taking account of the site you propose to occupy, all of you are to have separate cells; these are to be assigned by the prior himself with the agreement of the other brothers or the more mature of them.

7 [IV, vi]

You are, however, to eat in a common refectory what may have been given to you, listening together to a reading from holy Scripture, if this can conveniently be done.

8 [V, vii]

No brother is permitted to change the place assigned to him or exchange with another, unless with the permission of the prior at the time.

9 [VI]

The prior's cell shall be near the entrance to the place so that he may first meet those who come to the place and everything afterwards may be done as he wills and decides.

10 [VII, viii]

All are to remain in their cells or near them, meditating day and night on the law of the Lord and being vigilant in prayers, unless otherwise lawfully occupied.

11 [VIII, ix]

Those who have learned to say the canonical hours with the clerics should do so according to the practice of the holy Fathers and the approved custom of the Church. Those who do not know the hours are to say the *Our Father* twenty-five times for the night office—except for Sunday and solemn feasts when this number is doubled, so that the *Our Father* is said fifty times. It is to be said seven times for the morning Lauds and for the other Hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.

12 [IX/x]

None of the brothers is to claim something as his own; everything is to be in common and is to be distributed to each one by the Prior—that is, the brother deputed by him to this office—having regard to the age and needs of each one.

13 [xi]

You may have asses or mules according to your needs and some provision of animals or poultry.

14 [X, xii]

An oratory is to be built as conveniently as possible in the midst of the cells; you are to gather daily in the morning for Mass, where this is convenient.

15 [XI/xiii]

On Sundays, or other days if necessary, you shall discuss the welfare of the group and the salvation of souls; at this time excesses and faults of the brothers, if such come to light, are to be corrected in the middle way of charity.

16 [XII, xiv]

You are to fast every day except Sundays from the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross until Easter Sunday, unless illness or bodily weakness, or other just cause counsels a lifting of the fast, since necessity has no law.

17 [XIII, xv]

You are to abstain from meat, unless it is to be taken as a remedy for illness or bodily weakness. Since you must more frequently beg on journeys, in order not to burden your hosts you may eat food cooked with meat outside your own houses. At sea, however, meat may be eaten.

18 [XIV, xvi]

Since human life on earth is a trial and all who want to live devotedly in Christ suffer persecution; your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. You must then with all diligence put on the armour of God so that you may be able to stand up to the ambushes of the enemy.

19

Your loins are to be girded with the belt of chastity; your breast is to be protected by holy thoughts, for the Scripture says, holy thoughts will save you. Put on the breastplate of justice, so that you may love the Lord your God from your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength, and your neighbour as yourselves. In all things take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the darts of the evil one; without faith, indeed, it is impossible to please God. The helmet of salvation is to be placed on your head, so that you may hope for salvation from the one Saviour, who saves his people from their sins. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, is to dwell abundantly in your mouths and hearts. So whatever you have to do, is to be done in the word of the Lord.

20 [XV, xvii]

You should do some work, so that the devil will always find you occupied and he may not through your idleness find some entrance to your souls. In this matter you have both the teaching and the example of Blessed Paul the Apostle; Christ spoke through his mouth; he has been set up and given by God as a preacher and teacher of the nations in faith and truth; in following him you cannot go wrong. In work and weariness, he said, we have been with you, working day and night so as not to be a burden to you; it was not as though we had no right, but we wished to give ourselves as a model for imitation. For when we were with you, we gave this precept: whoever is unwilling to work shall not eat. We have heard that there are restless people going around who do nothing. We condemn such people and implore them in the Lord Jesus Christ that working in silence they should earn their bread. This is a good and holy way: follow it.

21 [XVI, xviii]

The apostle therefore recommends silence, when he tells us to work in it; the prophet too testifies that silence is the promotion of justice; and again, in silence and in hope will be your strength. Therefore we lay down that from the recitation of Compline you are to maintain silence until after Prime the following day. At other times, though silence is not to be so strictly observed, you are to be diligent in avoiding much talking, since scripture states and experience likewise teaches, sin is not absent where there is much talking; also he who is careless in speech will experience evil, and the one who uses many words harms his soul. Again the Lord says in the gospel: an account will have to given on the day of judgement for every vain word. Each of you is to weigh his words and have a proper restraint for his mouth, so that he may not stumble and fall through speech and his fall be irreparable and fatal. He is with the prophet to guard his ways so that he does not offend through the tongue. Silence, which is the promotion of justice, is to be diligently and carefully observed.

22 [XVII, xix]

You, Brother B., and whoever is appointed Prior after you, shall always keep in mind and practice what the Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever wishes to be greater among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first must be your slave.

23 [XVIII, xx]

And you too, the other brothers are humbly to honour your prior, and rather than thinking about him, you are to look to Christ who set him as head over you; he said to the leaders of the Church, whoever hears you hears me, and whoever despises you despises me. Thus you will not be judged guilty of contempt, but through obedience you will merit the reward of eternal life.

24 [Epil., xxi]

I have written these things briefly to you establishing a way of life for you, according to which you are to conduct yourselves. If anyone does more than the Lord himself when he comes again will repay him. You are, however, to use discretion, which is the moderator of virtue.

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<sup>[1]</sup> C. Ciconetti, *The Rule of Carmel* (Darien, Ill.: Carmelite Centre, 1984), an abridgment of *La Regola del Carmelo: origine, natura, significato* (Rome: Carmelite Institute, 1973; K. Waaijman, *The Mystical Space of Carmel: A Commentary on the Carmelite Rule* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

<sup>[2]</sup> There is one however in number thirteen below. Later manuscripts added *ad* to the Latin word *nutrimentum* giving the meaning “for nourishment.” The more difficult reading is preferred, omitting the *ad* so what is involved is the provision of animals and poultry.