

Vivat, Crescat, Floreat: A New Carmel

Vivat, Crescat, Floreat: un nuevo carmelo

Thomas Daniel Stroka · Institute for Sacred Architecture (EEUU)

<https://doi.org/10.17979/aarc.2013.3.0.5109>

RESUMEN

La orden del Carmen posee una específica espiritualidad contemplativa que demanda un lenguaje arquitectónico autónomamente figurativo. La monjas carmelitas de clausura viven en un desierto simbólico, el recinto de su monasterio, a semejanza de los tempranos discípulos de Elías, desperdigados por el Monte Carmelo, en Tierra Santa. Dentro de su vocación de sencillez, se permite a las carmelitas decorar creativamente las capillas de sus monasterios. La presente comunicación ofrece una introducción a la espiritualidad carmelita, las implicaciones arquitectónicas de sus Constituciones y los principios para un nuevo Carmelo.

ABSTRACT

The Carmelite Order has a distinctive spirit of contemplation which calls for an autonomous figurative language of architecture. Cloistered Carmelite Nuns live in a symbolic desert, the enclosure of their monastery, just as early followers of Elijah lived in hermitages scattered across Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. Despite their call to simplicity, Carmelites are permitted to creatively ornament their monastery chapels. This paper provides an introduction to the Carmelite spirit, architectural implications of their constitutions, examples of Carmelite foundations, and principles for a new Carmel.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Carmelitas; constituciones; Elías; ornamento; arquitectura religiosa.

KEYWORDS

Carmelite; constitutions; Elijah; ornament; sacred architecture.



Fig. 01. The prophet Elijah, founder of the Carmelite Order, gesturing toward the Holy Spirit window at the Basilica of Saint Peter, Rome.



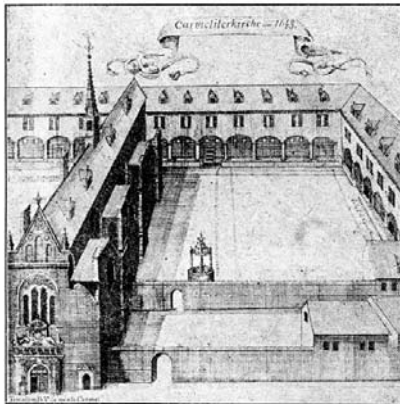
Fig. 02. The tradition speaks of the building of a Temple to the True God by Elijah and his followers.

«The Discalced Carmelite Nuns, by special vocation and without deprecating those who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, work for the building up of the earthly city, are led to the solitude of the cloister so as to remain entirely consecrated to contemplation»¹. Sacred architecture has an important place in Catholic tradition because of its setting for the worship of God; fundamental nobility is demanded for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the *domus Dei*. One commonly overlooked tradition is the distinct character of religious houses, in particular, the autonomous figurative language of the Carmelite Order, and their patronage of architects and artists. Despite their call for simplicity, their monastery chapels have been creatively ornamented for centuries and have served as powerful places of contemplation for their communities and for lay visitors. This paper will provide an introduction to the Carmelite spirit, architectural implications of their constitutions, examples of Carmelite foundations, and principles for a new Carmel.

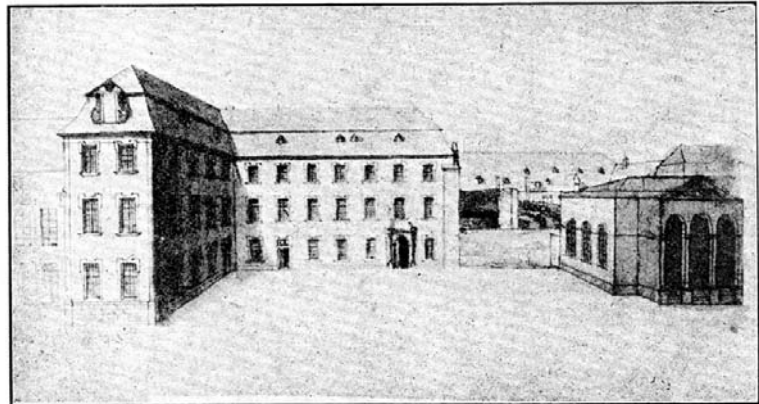
The Prophet Elijah, who lived almost three millennia ago, is considered the founder of the Carmelite Order and founder of monastic life itself. There is in fact a statue of Elijah at the Vatican among all the figures of religious founders (Fig. 01). The spirit of poverty he engendered was so extreme, his followers were happy to live in homes they built with their own hands².

It is at Carmel near modern Haifa, Israel, where Elijah competed with the priests of Baal in the ninth century before Christ³. The *grotto of the prophet* is a small cave at the northern promontory of Mount Carmel which originally served as an asylum and oratory for Elijah and his followers⁴ (Fig. 02). The idea of contemplation in solitude permeates the daily life of cloistered nuns in the Carmelite Order, and is exhibited in the organization and order of their monasteries.

After Pentecost, *Men of the Prophetic Order* embraced the Gospel, were baptized, and became effective apostles in spreading the faith in the Holy Land. An ancient chapel was built on the site in 83 AD, dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, possibly the first chapel dedicated to Our Lady⁵. Saint Helena visited Carmel and commissioned the construction of a larger chapel in the fourth century, which was later restored by Emperor Basil in 885⁶. Throughout the first millennium, Mount Carmel became the dwelling place of up to one thousand hermits at one time, monks living and praying in small grottoes scattered around the promontory⁷. Beginning in the seventh century, the monks were forced into greater seclusion by the advance of Muslim armies. Throughout the Holy Land, buildings were converted from churches to mosques, monastic institutions in the cities were plundered, and Religious were put to death. During the age of the



Das ehemalige Carmeliterkloster mit Kirche zu Köln; jetzt völlig niedergedrückt.



Carmeliterkloster zu Köln (Letzter Flügel).





Fig. 08. San Pietro in Oliveto, Brescia (Italy); cloister by Sansovino.

Crusades, two prominent buildings stood upon Mount Carmel: *S. Margaretha castellum*, a fortification defended by the Templars, and a Greek abbey dedicated to St. Margaret or St. Marina⁸. The Carmelites endured Muslim raids until they were eliminated from Mount Carmel by the Saracens in the year 1291. The spirit of the order developed as it expanded in a diaspora beyond the Holy Land. The brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel were considered by the Church a mendicant order, the third formally established, after the Franciscans and Dominicans⁹.

The Primitive Rule, given by St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, was recognized by Pope Honorius III in 1226 and formally confirmed by Pope Innocent IV as the first rule of the Carmelites (Fig. 03). With only fifteen points, it includes references for monastery buildings. «2. *On the choice of foundation sites*: You may have foundations in Deserts, or wherever they shall be

given you, suitable and adapted to the observance of your Rule, as the Prior and the other Religious shall judge proper»¹⁰. The monasteries are usually located outside the city, in the countryside. In Hebrew, the term *karmel* could not be more appropriate, since the word means garden, and can be derived from the Hebrew word *kerem*, vine¹¹. The Carmelite monastery is intertwined with the verdant abundance of the garden. Saint Teresa often referred to the beauty of the natural world in relation to states of contemplation with God¹². Saint Albert's Rule also calls for individual cells in the monastery: «3. *On the cells of the religious*: Moreover, each one shall have a separate Cell, in the place wherein you propose to live, which shall be assigned to him by the order of the Prior, and with the consent of the other Religious, or the more capable part of them»¹³ (Fig. 04). The presence of the Lord in the tabernacle dwells among the cells by locating the oratory centrally within the monastery. «8. *On the oratory, and on the Diving Worship*: Let an Oratory be erected, as conveniently as possible, in the midst of the Cells, where you are to assemble every morning to hear Mass, when this can be conveniently done»¹⁴. Occasionally there will be a balcony adjacent to the chapel, affording closer proximity to the Blessed Sacrament for the infirmary or the novitiate of the nuns, who may not always be with the nuns in the choir.

Fig. 03. Countryside surrounding Ávila, Spain, with the Monastery of the Incarnation in the center.

Fig. 05. *Reredos* at Monastery of the Incarnation, Ávila.

Fig. 04. Organization of a monastery at Köln, Germany.

Fig. 06. Duncan G. Stroik, Carmelite Monastery of the Infant Jesus of Prague, Traverse City (Michigan, United States), 2013; the new choir grille.

Fig. 07. Front view etching of the Église de Notre Dame des Champs, Paris, with cloister garth on the left, given over to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in 1604. Destroyed during the French Revolution.



Prospectus Unicus magis Constantinum St. Clarae annis exhibens, ad dextram Josephum 2.º; Carmelitaram: ex calcatorum, et ad sinistram alterum S. S. Simonis, et Julii

Fig. 09. Etching of the Grand Canal with S. Simeon on the left and the Carmelite Church on the right, 1741.

Fig. 10. Maginnis & Walsh Architects, Carmelite Convent of the Infant Jesus of Prague, Santa Clara (California, United States), 1919; interior with gilded high altar retablo.

Fig. 11. The main altar at the Stella Maris Monastery at Mount Carmel, Israel, over the ancient Grotto of the Prophet, where Elijah called down the fire of God in front of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40).



The nuns of the Carmelite rule were possibly in existence in the East before the fourteenth century, but are first mentioned in Sicily in 1318 in a Bull by Pope John XXII, *Sanctorum Meritis*. Under the leadership of Blessed John Soreth, Pope Nicholas V authorized the integration of the Carmelite nuns on October 7, 1452. In 1513, the Duchess of Medina established the Monastery of the Incarnation at Ávila, where St. Teresa would join the Order at the age of eighteen (Fig. 05). In 1562, during the reign of Philip II, just as the last monastery observing the Primitive Rule at Cyprus was taken by the Turks, St. Teresa founded the Monastery of St. Joseph at Ávila, re-instituting the Primitive Rule once again¹⁵. The Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus gave to her nuns, at the chapter of Alcalá in 1581, specific constitutions which also point out architectural requirements. The reform initiated by St. Teresa soon expanded to Italy, France and the Low Countries. Guided by Teresa, Father Antonio de Heredia and Father John de Yepey (St. John of the Cross) assisted in the reform of the Carmelite Fathers. The enclosure of the nuns makes them distinct from the men of the Order. «1. The Religious may not be seen without veil except by their parents, brothers and sisters, or in some other cases where there may be an equally just reason...»¹⁶. The law of enclosure applies to all parts of the monastery, including the garden, which should be encircled by a high wall¹⁷. The public church and the exterior sacristy are the only two areas accessible by others. The most familiar point of connection between the enclosure and the public is the *turn*, where packages can be delivered to the nuns. Inside the church, the laity hear the nuns in song and prayer, but do not see them beyond the grille (Fig. 06). «The material separation between the choir reserved to the nuns and the Church will be made by means of an iron grate placed over a fixed and immovable support and another formed by wooden bars in a vertical position»¹⁸. This grille is also closed off by a curtain from the inside of the choir during all times except the liturgical celebration. To impart the spirituality of the desert hermitage, the monastery has both regular cells in the Cloister, as well as hermitages in the woods, where the Religious may find more solitude and abstinence¹⁹. A spirit of simplicity permeates the monastery in its order and daily life. The manual labor of the nuns is not permitted to be so elaborate as to hinder

the spirit of recollection. There is also an explicit rule about silence in the individual cells, and the lack of interruption by other sisters.

The Discalced Carmelites expanded from Spain into France with the generous support of many, including St. Francis de Sales, who recommended the foundation in Paris to the Holy Father Clement VIII. Marie de Medici, the Queen of France, assisted in financing the beautification of the first monastery in Paris in 1604 (Fig. 07). The Discalced Carmelites were given the Benedictine priory of Notre Dame des Champs, renamed Carmélites Déschausées. Philippe de Champagne painted stories from Scripture on the vaulted ceiling, while paintings by Guy de Bolonese, Le Brun, and La Hire were located under each window of the church. A wall can be seen which provides for the enclosure around the perimeter of the monastery, as stipulated in the Constitutions. «The walls should be as strong as possible; those of the enclosure high, within which there shall be ample ground so that the Religious may build some hermitages, to which they may retire for prayer after the example of our Holy Fathers»²⁰. The chapel and monastery buildings were sold and demolished at the Revolution²¹. The Infant Isabella and Archduke Albert VII in the Netherlands asked for the Carmelites to establish a foundation in their land, and had a new monastery built in Brussels. The first English-speaking Carmelites were founded at Antwerp, since all Religious were banished from England and their monasteries destroyed. In Italy, the Carmelites were given the convent of San Pietro in Oliveto, in Brescia. The cloister arcade is attributed to architect Jacopo Sansovino²² (Fig. 08). The formality of Carmelite cloisters is inherited from other monastic orders; the four sides of the court can represent the four rivers of Paradise and the four cardinal virtues, a moral world in which the cloistered are immersed²³.

While the living quarters of the nuns are to be very simple, the church is set apart with great nobility, an example of the ornamentation permitted by the Constitutions. «3. The house, with the exception of the Church, should have nothing ornamental in it; the woodwork should be rough, the house should be small, and the ceilings low, so that what is necessary and not what is superfluous is provided»²⁴. One of the great examples of Carmelite architecture is Santa Maria di Nazareth, in Venice (Fig. 09). The church,



Fig. 12. Josep Lluís Sert, Carmel de la Paix, Mazille (France), 1973; the exterior view.

built from 1656/73, was designed by Baldassare Longhena and embellished with a new high altar by Carmelite architect Giuseppe Pozzo in 1685²⁵. Magnificent examples by the Carmelites can be found in the New World, such as at the Templo de Nuestra Señora del Carmen de Celaya, begun in 1802 with the design by don Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras. The Carmelite Monastery of the Infant Jesus, in Santa Clara, California, was designed by Maginnis & Walsh Architects in 1919 (Fig. 10). Certain elements are lifted directly from the Carmelite tradition, such as the unique belfry design from the monastery at Ávila²⁶. Though the cells are small and severe, the chapel interior is adorned with a great gilded reredos with a Nativity group flanked by Isaiah and John the Baptist. Also in the United States, the Carmelite Order dona-

ted the funds for the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Chapel at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC²⁷.

In 1817, John Baptist Frascatti, architect, was commissioned by the General of the Order to examine the condition of the Monastery of Mount Carmel in the Holy Land²⁸ (Fig. 11). The cornerstone of the new Stella Maris Monastery was laid in 1827, and it was consecrated in 1836. Granite columns dating from the convent of Cherbon IV in 1263 were uncovered and set up in the refectory of the monastery. The corridors and cloisters were paved in white marble. The chapel was consecrated a basilica in 1920 by the Patriarch of Jerusalem²⁹.

The history and the Constitutions of the Carmelite Nuns provide architectural principles for the design of



Fig. 13. Duncan G. Stroik, Carmelite Monastery of the Infant Jesus of Prague, Traverse City (Michigan, United States), 2013; the interior renovation.

a new Carmel (Fig. 12). In the last fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a profusion of iconoclast churches, which diverge from the tradition of sacred architecture and do not adequately serve for contemplation or Divine Worship. There are a few propositions for new Carmelite foundations: First, the enclosure must be continuous around the property, and provide a true spiritual desert for the nuns. The monastery may include shared cloisters and gardens but also should provide private hermitages for the nuns to pray in solitude (Fig. 14). Second, there must be separation from the lay faithful and the cloistered. In the chapel, the choir grille provides a secure barrier. An altar rail can define the space of the sanctuary while also preventing distracting sightlines for the nuns toward the nave. Thirdly, Teresa of Ávila permits ornament in the chapel

of the monastery. An iconographic program can be incorporated, inspired by the multitude of Carmelite saints and daily liturgical prayers. Vertical proportions and natural light can provide a transcendent setting for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The *domus Dei* should contrast with the simplicity of the nuns' cells and provide scenes for contemplation of the one true God. Fourth, the location of the chapel can be at the heart of the monastery so that the cells of the nuns are gathered around the presence of the Lord (Fig. 15). Inspired by the Carmelite tradition in the Holy Land and the European diaspora, a new Carmel for the twenty-first century may be a wellspring for communion with God for both nuns and laity.

«*Vivat, crescat, floreat, vita contemplative!*»³⁰. May the contemplative life live, increase and flourish!



Fig. 14. The sanctuary of the Carmelite church of Sant' Egidio alla Scala in Trastevere, Rome.



Fig. 15. Bartolomeo Salvestrini, The Apotheosis of Beata Maria Maddalena d'Pazzi (with Saint Albert and the Prophet Elijah above), Florence, 1614/33; pen and brown ink drawing, with black chalk and gray wash.

PROCEDENCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 01. Photo by Agnieszka Napiorkowska.

Fig. 02-04. Drawing from *Speculum Carm.* Martini, Pater Clemens, *Der Deutsche Carmel* (Bamberg: Dr. J. Kirsch, 1922).

Fig. 03. Photo by Jim Forest.

Fig. 05, 14. Photo by Father Lawrence Lew, OP.

Fig. 06, 13. Photo by Dietrich Floeter.

Fig. 07, 09, 15. Trustees of the British Museum ©.

Fig. 08. Photo by Roby BS89.

Fig. 10. Photo by Chris Esler.

Fig. 11. Photo by Ilia Krivoruk.

Fig. 12. Photo by Philippe Gozal.

NOTES

(1) *Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Nuns of the Order of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel* (1990), paragraph 213, 175.

(2) 2 Kings, 6: «Behold the place where we dwell with thee is too straight for us, let us go as far as the Jordan and take out of the wood, every man a piece of timber, that we may build us there a place to dwell in».

(3) Cf. Jaime Antonio Abundis Canales, *La Huella Carmelita en San Angel I* (Córdoba: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2007), 15.

(4) Cf. «Introduction», *Rule and Constitutions*, 22-23. «In the prophet Elijah, whom Sacred Scripture presents on the summit of Mount Carmel in profound prayer, burning with zeal for the glory of God and living continually in His presence, the Order recognizes the inspiration of the Carmelite life, dedicated to contemplation in solitude. Elijah accomplishes his work and disappears 'leaving behind him a spiritual following'».

(5) Cf. Barbié du Bocage and Alexandre François, *Dictionnaire Géographique de la Bible* (Paris: De Crapelet, 1834).

(6) Cf. *The Discalced Carmelites of Boston and Santa*

Clara, *Carmel: Its History, Spirit and Saints* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1927), 18.

(7) Cf. Elias Friedman and Silvano Giordano ed. *Carmel in the Holy Land: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (Arenzano: Il Messaggero di Gesù Bambino, 1995), 30. The model of organization was called laura, where the hermits lived in solitude in cells or huts, but under obedience to a superior. They would gather for liturgical celebration on Saturday and Sunday and discuss common problems.

(8) Cf. Friedman, *Carmel in the Holy Land*, 28.

(9) Cf. Abundis Canales, *La Huella Carmelita*, 78-81.

(10) *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 2, 80. See also *Regla y Constituciones de las Monjas Descalzas de la Orden del Beatísima Virgen María del Monte Carmelo* (Burgos: El Monte Carmelo, 1927). «2. De la elección de los lugares: Podréis tener sitios en los desiertos, o donde os fueren concedidos, adaptados y acomodados para la observancia de vuestro Instituto, según que al Prior y a los religiosos pareciere conveniente».

(11) Cf. Abundis Canales, *La Huella Carmelita*, 11.

(12) Cf. Jan K. Birksted, *An Architecture of Ineloquence: José Lluís Sert's Carmel de la Paix. A Study in Modern Architecture and Religion* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 62.

(13) *Regla y Constituciones*, paragraph 3, 81: «3. De las celdas de los religiosos: Además de ésto, en el sitio que propusiereis habitar, tenga cada uno de vosotros su celdilla separada, según que por disposición del prior y con el consentimiento de los demás religiosos, o de la parte más sana, fuere señalada a cada uno».

(14) *Regla y Constituciones*, paragraph 8, 83: «8. Del oratorio y del culto divino: El oratorio, en cuanto sea posible, constrúyase en medio de las celdas, en el cual os juntéis cada día por la mañana a oír misa, donde esto se pueda hacer cómodamente».

(15) Cf. *The Discalced Carmelites*, 47.

(16) *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 19, 97. Different paragraph number in the Burgos 1927 edition (*Regla y Constituciones*): «24. No puedan ser vistas las monjas, sin velo, de ninguna persona, si no es de sus padres y hermanos, o en algún caso donde parezca tan justo como en estos».

(17) Cf. *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 215-216, 176.

(18) *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 220, 177-178. See also in the 1927 edition: «258. La clausura debe ser tan cerrada que, a ser posible, ni desde dentro puedan ver a personas externas, ni desde fuera ser vistas».

(19) Cf. *The Discalced Carmelites*, 212.

(20) *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 65, 120. Paragraph 99 in the Burgos 1927 edition: «Las paredes se hagan lo más fuertes que fuere posible, y la cerca alta, y haya dentro campo para hacer ermitas, para que las monjas se puedan apartar a tener oración, a ejemplo de los Santos Padres».

(21) Cf. *History of Paris, from the Earliest Period to the Present Day. Vol. 1* (Paris: Galignani, 1832), 319-320.

(22) Cf. Francesco De Leonardis, ed. *Brescia: The Cloisters* (Brescia: Fotostudio Rapuzzi, 2005), 22.

(23) Cf. Véronique Rouchon Mouilleron, *Cloisters of Europe: Gardens of Prayer* (New York: Viking Studio, 2001), 28. See also Hugo de Folieto, *De Claustro Animae*, and Honorius Augustodunensis, *Gemma Animae*.

(24) *Rule and Constitutions*, paragraph 65, 120. Paragraph 98 in the Burgos 1927 edition: «98. No se labre curiosamente la casa, excepto la iglesia; la madera de ella sea muy tosca y la misma casa pequeña y las piezas bajas, de manera que se cumpla la necesidad y no la superfluidad».

(25) Cf. Saverio Sturm, «Liturgia e architettura nel Carmelo riformato. Archetipi, miti, modelli», *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 106 (2011): 61-96 (77).

(26) Cf. Maginnis & Walsh, Architects, «The Carmelite Convent, Santa Clara, California», *The Architectural Forum* 30 (1919).

(27) Cf. Thomas A. Tweed, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

(28) Cf. *The Discalced Carmelites*, 168.

(29) Cf. *Idem*, 172.

(30) *Idem*, 126.