

# The spirituality of the OCDS legislation

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During my years of service on the Provincial Council, I often felt like the only thing I ever talked about was our legislation. When asked to speak to a community, most often I gave a talk based on our legislation. So I have had many people ask me why the Order talks so much about the legislation instead of more spiritual things. This past year my Local Council had me facilitating the formation class for those of us who are Definitively Professed and again at least one person expressed concern that we were not studying something more spiritual. This made me wonder and reflect upon why we do not see our legislation as being spiritual? Is there a spirituality to be found in our legislation?

To begin with, I looked up the definition of the word 'spiritual' in the Oxford English Dictionary. It gives a variety of definitions but the one most applicable to our topic is:

**Of, belonging or relating to, concerned with, sacred or ecclesiastical things or matters, as distinguished from secular affairs; relating to the church or the clergy; ecclesiastical.**

I have frequently said that to me our legislation does two things. First, it tells us who we are as Secular Carmelites. Secondly, the legislation tells us that because this is who we are, this is what we do.

Who we are as Secular Carmelites is summarized in two spots in our Constitutions. Art.6 gives a summary of who all Carmelites are based on the Rule of St Albert. This summary would equally apply to our friars and nuns. We find the "definition" of our specific Secular vocation detailed in Art.9. In both these articles, I find much that is concerned with the sacred, the spiritual. Both very quickly point out that we are called to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ. We could probably spend several months unpacking what that means for how we live. We are reminded that as Secular Carmelites, Scripture is central to our lives as is participation in the life of the Church, especially through its liturgy. We are reminded of the importance of prayer in our lives. And we are reminded that as Seculars we are called to live all this out within the context of our secular way of life.

The specifics of our vocation as laid out in Art.6 and 9 of our Constitutions get spelled out more fully in other articles of our Constitutions. These two articles and those which further develop the specifics can provide us much to reflect and pray over. They are the parts of the Constitutions that we probably most easily see as being spiritual, relating to our Carmelite spirituality.

Probably the parts of the Constitutions that we think are least "spiritual" are those dealing with the specifics of the organization and government of the Secular Order. I've heard from people who read the Constitutions but then skip this last section. While Articles 37-60 deal with very practical aspects of the more institutional side of belonging to the Order, there are some important aspects of spirituality that are expressed in these articles. They outline how we fit within not merely the larger Order, but the Church itself. Going back to the OED definition, these articles are about how we belong and relate to each other within the ecclesiastical context.

More importantly, they are about how we relate to each other within community. These articles recognize that Secular Carmelites form community at the local level, the provincial level, and with the

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larger Order. They provide specific guidelines for those relations and various necessary duties involved in our relationships with each other. I grew up in a family where there was a chart of household chores and who was to do each chore each week. These chores were assigned with age and ability taken into account, but we knew who was to wash the dishes each night and whose turn it was to vacuum, dust, or take out the trash. Doing chores was simply an accepted part of belonging to the family. In our communities, provinces, and the Order, there are also duties (chores) which need to be done for the smooth functioning of our Carmelite communities. By spelling out the expectations of those roles and responsibilities, our Constitutions help us to relate to each other in ways that hopefully contribute to building community/family. This helps to avoid misunderstandings or disruption that may harm our relationships with each other. To me, how we love one another is a very sacred thing.

When looking at our Provincial Statutes, we find even more guidance on matters of organization and governance. Again, a great many of these are directed towards the ways in which we relate to one another. We see concern over how to relate to our isolates and to those who are unable to be with us in person due to age or illness. The sections dealing with formation tell us how to welcome new members and help them discern and grow in understanding and in living this vocation to which we are called. The sections dealing with elections and finances may not seem spiritual, but again they tell us about how to relate to each other. How many arguments and fallings-out do we see in the matter of choosing our leaders and in how to best handle finances whether it's within our families, in our government, or at work?

So when we read the parts of our Constitutions and Provincial Statutes that on the surface strike us as "not spiritual," maybe it would be good to ask ourselves what they might be saying about how we behave towards one another. While these articles and statutes certainly won't prevent all matters of difficulty within our communities, they do provide some guidance in how we should proceed.

I would agree that there are parts of our legislation where the spiritual may be harder to see than other parts. Yet, I would argue that in many ways our legislation IS spiritual. It gives us many details about the way of life that God has called us to live. Sometimes we may have to dig a bit deeper when looking at a specific article or statute to see the spiritual in it, but it is there. And when we made our Promise, we committed ourselves to put this legislation into action in our lives. It would be antagonistic to Carmelite spirituality to assume that "spirituality" only includes things that make us feel like we are doing something spiritual, such as prayer or spiritual reading. Loving God is all about doing his will; and what could be more spiritual than actively carrying out his will—even if it means serving the community in mundane, apparently non-spiritual ways?

Everything carried out in exterior (as opposed to interior) life for the sake of the community can and should be done in a sincere and humble spirit of recollection in the Lord, which attitude can, of course, render the most mundane tasks deeply spiritual. The aspects of the Constitutions that are not the easy stuff of *feeling* spiritual are instead the hard stuff of *being* who the Lord wants us to be in the rough and tumble of life. This is who we are and because this is who we are, this is what we do. Therein we find that our legislation really is very spiritual.