

STUDY AND THE OCDS

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Recently I have been asked about the role of study in the Secular Order of Carmel. Some think that too much emphasis on studying may have the effect of scaring people away from the OCDS. Others think that an emphasis on studying makes the formation director's job much more complicated and/or difficult. And others say that there is difficulty in finding adequate formation personnel because they are not academically trained to be teachers.

As far as I can, I would like to clarify some issues in regard to study and the OCDS.

The first thing to say is that most of us have an image associated with the word "study" which comes from our own personal experience. When we were in primary school, we had "to study" in order to advance from grade to grade each year. "Study" meant memorizing, practicing, testing, afternoons or evenings in front of books (with our minds sometimes wanting us to be elsewhere). "Study" was competitive. Scores were given and prizes awarded to the ones whose "study" produced the best scores. As we progressed in school and advanced from grade to grade, the "studying" got more and more complicated and, above all, harder. Some people seemed to breeze through. Others succeeded, but at what headaches! But the good thing was, IT HAD AN END!

When or if we got to the advanced stages of "study" at university levels or post-graduate levels, we ran into an even finer "study". People in higher degree programs entered into fields of "study" in order to dedicate their lives and energies to "study" one certain thing. They produced the fruit of their academic work in a thesis that sometimes had the title of "The Study of....."

So "study" has for many of us, an image of "get it over with so you can get out of school" or "dedicate all your energy and time to this one thing".

Neither one of those ideas has anything to do with what the word "study" means in the initial or on-going formation of the members of the Secular Order. So, to try to understand what "study" is in the life of the secular, please take those ideas and images that you have and put them aside.

First, study in formation of the OCDS is not reduced to some sort of academic pursuit of knowledge that is externally discernable by testing like a mathematical times table.

Second, study in formation of the OCDS is not the sole pursuit of one person to conquer a body of knowledge.

Third, study in formation of the OCDS does not have a point at which one says THE END.

A basic definition of what “study in formation of the OCDS” could be, the process whereby, with the help of others, we attempt to deepen our understanding of the relationship with God in the light of Catholic and Carmelite doctrine.

Is there a place of academic and intellectual pursuit? Certainly, for those who have the time and the ability and the talent, yes, there is a place. But that is not what all of us need to do in order to “study” our spirituality.

A primary point is that we are all, at all times, in formation. No matter when we made our definitive commitment to the Lord in Carmel, we are still all in formation.

A second point, all of us are helped and accompanied by others in this process of deepening our understanding, be it by a designated person in certain stages, or by the community which serves as support in the relationship with God. Academic study has a product. Formation study is a process.

Because someone can quote chapter and verse of Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Therese, does not necessarily mean they have been formed. I have heard the lament: “Our poor Holy Parents (Teresa and John), so often quoted, so little followed!”

There are challenges in this type of study. Not the academic ones... there are no tests, gold stars, blue ribbons.

The challenges are first, the desire to deepen the understanding of the relationship with God. That can be very demanding... in fact, it is a lot easier to memorize Saint Teresa!

A second challenge is that you need others do help you and you need to help others. Also, not so easy.

The third challenge is that it is based on Catholic and Carmelite teaching, not just on the way I think about it all.

So, I hope this helps to see the difference between the “study” that got you through school and the “study” that gets you through life.

