

Module H06: The Historical Founders of the Carmelites

This module is an introduction to the historical dispute about the origins and founders of the Carmelite Order. It traces the development of a thirteenth and fourteenth century tradition claiming that the Order began with the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, and continued through New Testament times and the first millennium of Christianity before receiving a Formula of Life from St Albert of Jerusalem early in the second millennium.

It also outlines the process by which the Order came to be recognised as having its true beginning in the early thirteenth century Formula of Life drawn up by St Albert of Jerusalem and the gradual abandonment of the tradition claiming that the prophet Elijah was the founder of the Carmelites. These historical developments are interpreted in the light of the developments that have taken place in understanding the foundation of the different forms of Religious Life since Vatican II.

Having studied this module, students should be able to identify the main developments leading to what is sometimes called the Elijan succession, the claim of an historical foundation that continued from Old Testament times down to the present.

They should also be able to identify the main developments leading to the abandonment of that claim and the gradual emergence of an historical consensus recognising the Formula of Life as the earliest extant Carmelite document. Students should also be able to discuss the question of the true founder of the Carmelites in the light of the developments that have taken place in the understanding of the founding of the different forms of Consecrated or Religious Life since Vatican II.