



Shaping Love Through Contemplation According to St. Titus Brandsma OCarm (1881–1942)

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Abstract: The article is a theological-spiritual analysis of the teaching of St. Titus Brandsma (Anno Sjoerd Brandsma), a Dutch professor and martyr from Dachau, who lived in the years 1881–1942. This study seeks to show that in the Carmelite's opinion, the contemplation (active and passive) of transcendent Love serves man in the formation of human love—for God, for people and for all creatures. In this way, mysticism does not alienate man, but introduces him to concrete reality, inspiring him to deep commitment and taking responsibility for himself and others. This is of particular importance in the ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil—individual and social. Seeing the dangers of the anti-human ideology of Nazism, Fr. Titus, seeing the dangers of the anti-human ideology of Nazism, tried to show contemplation as a way to return to the Truth and as a chance to save the human family. The analysis carried out in this study, focusing more on the substantive aspect of the writings and less on their chronology, makes it possible to discover the logic, coherence, and originality of Brandsma's thought.

Keywords: contemplation, love, person, development, nature, mysticism, Brandsma, Carmel, spirituality

Although the word “love” is not an unambiguous expression, it is most often used to describe the highest form of personal relationships, having its origin in God, who has revealed himself as the absolute love (cf. 1 John 4:16). In theological terms, love is a gracious gift of the self-giving God, a virtue necessary for salvation, directing the person towards God, towards himself (but in a completely different way than egoism), towards other created persons and—in a sense—towards the entire reality. In psychology and sociology, it is both an emotion and an attitude, as well as a principle for solving life's problems, a foundation for building civilisation. Love is a gift to the person, its most appropriate affirmation, but also an invitation to respond to this gift in an appropriate way. It is not reducible to a merely brief and spontaneous response, but demands the formation of the human heart, a proper education. And here the ever-present problem arises—how to form man for mature love? How to properly understand love?

An interesting attempt to answer these questions can be found in the life and writings of Titus Brandsma OCarm¹—born in 1881, Dutch priest, monk, professor,

¹ It is worth recalling his *curriculum vitae* at this point. Anno Sjoerd Brandsma (later Titus—in the Order) was born on February 23, 1881 on the Ugokloster farm near Bolsward in Friesland, the Netherlands.

philosopher, theologian, lecturer,² ecclesiastical assistant of the Association of Catholic Journalists, rector of the Catholic University of Nijmegen, poet and publicist, martyr of the Second World War, killed in Dachau in 1942, saint of the Catholic Church (Brandsma 1985, 132).³

It seems that in the rich academic legacy and other writings he included the thesis that the contemplation of God plays an unusually important role in the formation of man and his love towards the others. In this paper we will try to present this thought in a systematic way and comment on it.

The published writings of Brandsma total close to eight hundred titles; and among them are academic studies—books and articles on philosophy, sociology, mysticism, Mariology—as well as encyclopaedic entries (e.g., in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: Ascétique et Mystique*) (see Brandsma 2021b, 169), as well as many popular science articles (e.g., in the journal “De Gelderlander” between 1938

He was raised by loving and deeply religious parents: Gisme Postma and Titus Brandsma (Vallainc 1963, 18–19). Initially, he wanted to join the Franciscans, but due to his frail physical build, he was advised against it. And because he had a great veneration of the Mother of God, and also showed inclinations to contemplative life, in 1898 he joined the Carmelites in Boxmeer and took the name Titus—the same as his own father. In the years 1900–1905 he studied philosophy and theology in Boxmeer, Zanderen and Oss. In 1905 he was ordained a priest. In the years 1906–9 he studied philosophy in Rome at the Gregorianum University and attended lectures in sociology at the Leonianum Institute. In 1909, he defended his doctorate in philosophy and returned to the Netherlands. In the same year he began his work as a professor of philosophy in the monastery of Oss and served until 1923; at the same time, he also taught the history of the Church. Because the missions of the Church were close to his heart, in 1919 he asked to be sent as a missionary to Brazil. However, this was not put into practice. In order to help Catholic schools, in 1925 he founded the Union of the Directorate of Catholic Secondary Schools and during the German occupation he was its chairman (Sacra Congregatio 1983, 21–23). In the years 1923–42 he began working as a professor at the newly established (in 1923) Catholic University of Nijmegen. He taught there the philosophy of nature, theodicy, philosophy of history and the history of Dutch mysticism. In the years 1932–33 he was the rector of this university. In 1932, he organized the national Mariological congress. In his research work, he was keenly interested in the unity of the Churches—especially the Eastern Churches. In 1912, he founded a magazine on Carmelite culture “Karmelrozen.” From 1935 he was an ecclesiastical assistant to Catholic journalists in the Netherlands. In 1940, after the German army entered the Netherlands, he opposed—as a Christian and priest—the neo-Nazi ideology. And although—as it was noted in the beatification process—no one had ever heard words against the Germans or even the Nazis from his mouth, on January 19, 1942 he was arrested and imprisoned in Arnhem, Scheveningen, Amersfoort, and finally in Kleve and Dachau (Germany). On July 26, 1942, he died in Dachau as a result of poisoning with an injection of phenic acid (Scapin 1985, 203–4; Sacra Congregatio 1983, 24–25, 81). Despite the long period of Calvary, he never regretted his apostolic activity in defense of the faith and the inviolable rights of the Catholic Church, by which he had just been imprisoned (Sacra Congregatio 1984, 73). The diocesan process began on January 11, 1955 in Nijmegen (Arribas 1998, 341). He was beatified as a martyr on November 3, 1985 by John Paul II, and canonized on May 15, 2022 by Pope Francis.

² In fact Fr. Titus did not have a great gift for speaking and his listeners described his voice as not very “oratorical” and somewhat monotonous (Romeral 2022, 105).

³ It is worth adding here that Brandsma was not endowed with any extraordinary mystical graces or miracles (Dowlaszewicz, Jongen, and Nadbrzeżny 2013, 51); however, he did have contact with them—for in 1931 he met and spoke personally with Therese Neumann (1898–1962), a German mystic and stigmatic (Brandsma 2021a, 431).

and 1941) (see Boaga 2008, 107–8). Brandsma wrote many letters and their addressees included academics, Catholic school principals, those in charge of the Catholic press, family members, religious superiors and fellow Carmelites. He also wrote poetry (even in prison), which shows the harmony between loving God, family ties and commitment to everything that constitutes human life—often marked by suffering (Polkowski 2023, 10–21; cf. Brandsma 1985, 167–68; 2022b, 425–31).⁴ After being arrested, he also kept a diary for a short period (on January 23–31, 1942) (Brandsma 1985, 149).

Throughout his life he wrote mainly in Dutch, but he also used Latin, Spanish, French, English and German language.

The primary source helpful to this study are the following:

- 1) Brandsma's writings—published in an English-language critical edition, in a series entitled: *Collected Works of Titus Brandsma* (see Brandsma 2021a, 2021b, 2022b); and also published in other books in Italian and English;
- 2) documents of the canonisation process prepared by the *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum* (1983, 1984).

The more important studies on Brandsma include publications by authors such as Josse Alzin, Miguel Maria Arribas, Josef Rees, Fernando Millán Romeral, Santino Scapin and Fausto Vallainc. They are all mainly biographical, hagiographical or hagiological in character. However, they do not constitute strictly theological studies.

It is therefore all the more worthwhile to attempt to identify and discuss one of the main theological and spiritual theses contained in Brandsma's legacy. A certain difficulty may be the fact that he was not a theologian in the strict sense, but a philosopher, publicist, journalist, retreat preacher and pastor. Nevertheless, he had sufficient theological training, was passionate about Church history (and especially about the Dutch Church), and studied and cared deeply about the spiritual legacy of his entire Carmelite Order—both branches: the Discalced Carmelites and the Calced Carmelites.⁵ It must also be assumed that he accepts this teaching as his own as well.

The aim of the article is to verify the hypothesis that according to the Dutch Carmelite contemplation gives the human person the ability to shape its love in the proper way—towards God, towards man and towards the world. The analysis of the writings will be focused on the substantive aspect of the Carmelite's views, at the expense of chronology, at the same time giving the opportunity to systematize them and

⁴ It is believed that the posthumously published work of Fr. Titus is the most significant for his academic output (see Bazydło 1976, 1040): *De groote heilige Teresia van Jezus* (Brandsma 1946), as well as *Werken der H. Teresia* (Brandsma 1918–26).

⁵ It should be noted that although Brandsma was a Calced Carmelite, he did not dissociate himself from the legacy of the Reformed Carmel (John of the Cross and Teresa the Great), for he believed that this was a common Carmelite heritage that should unite rather than divide (Brandsma 1994, 91).

provide them with a theological commentary. So far, there has been no similar study on Brandsma's achievements.

The theme largely determines the structure of the paper; the consecutive points of the article will focus on the following topics: understanding contemplation according to Fr. Titus; building a relationship of love with God; proper shaping of relationships to others; loving creatures and the whole world in God.

The work will use the personalistic theological method (taking as the key the hermeneutic phenomenon of the human person). It will contain the following characteristic elements: historical description⁶; theological description; explanation; understanding, i.e. sketching as comprehensively as possible a picture of thoughts concerning the discussed topic in a personalistic perspective⁷; verification of the hypothesis and presentation of conclusions derived from the analysis (cf. Bartnik 1998, 201–45).

Brandsma was convinced that only Christian love is able to overcome human egoism, interpersonal anti-relations, Nazi neo-paganism. He was aware that the existence of evil in the world is caused by the fact that, as St. Francis put it, true love is not known and is not loved: *Amor non amatur* (Brandsma 1985, 127–28). For this reason, Fr. Titus wanted to proclaim to the world with his whole person the Love that can be experienced in contemplation, and through this Love people can understand and fulfill themselves in the Universe.

⁶ *Nota bene* Brandsma himself often used this element in his academic studies. Historical description is related to the context of the words spoken or written. And although—as already mentioned—the main emphasis will not be placed on chronology, but on the content of the statement, it is nevertheless good to remember that Brandsma wrote and preached during the period of the ever-increasing threat from Nazism, also when he was already in prison. He saw how great a danger for man was posed by German nationalism, National Socialism, which were based on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. He feared that the Christian vision would be replaced by an anti-Christian one, and this would have fatal consequences for the good and dignity of the human person, as well as of the entire community. Hence, as a lecturer in contemporary philosophy, he strongly criticized Nazism in his classes with students and strongly opposed the Dutch Nazi Movement. At the same time, he was aware that sometimes you have to pay for opposition with martyrdom and he was ready for it. He was arrested for resisting the occupation authorities, or rather he was defending the foundations of Christianity with his words, being faithful to the instructions of the Dutch bishops (Brandsma 1985, 134–35, 137, 150). It is worth adding here that Nietzsche prophesied that a man would be born who would bury the humble and weak man, and this would be an act of human liberation, and at the same time a complete rejection of God and Christianity (see Gózdź 2022, 370).

⁷ And although it is difficult to classify Brandsma as a systemic personalist, it should be noted that he affirmed the unique value of the human person. The personalistic approach will help in this study to look at various dimensions of human existence in a coherent way. The Carmelite himself also took great care of it.

1. Contemplation as Directing the Nature Towards the Supernatural

Brandsma noticed that a frequent reason for people's departure from faith, or even conscious denial of the existence of the supernatural world, is having an incorrect image of God. At the same time, he came to the conviction that attempts to direct people towards transcendence could not be limited only to apologetics, which, *nota bene* he considered sufficiently developed at that time, but that the beauty and splendour of God should be shown to them so that they could be fascinated by Him. Consequently, he saw the need to present God in a new way, with new concepts, clear for contemporary culture. He claimed that new times need new forms of expression (cf. Brandsma 1985, 187–88).

Father Titus hoped that man could be defended against moral evil, existential emptiness, by appealing to human nature, which is open to love. Since the experience of love is stronger than theory, Brandsma saw it as the basis for defeating all anti-human ideologies, especially the Nazi ideology that was the threat at the time (cf. Brandsma 1985, 129). In order to avoid an inappropriate anthropocentrism, Fr. Titus added that within the human being resides a loving Creator who is Love itself. He wrote: “[. . .] We must see God as the basis of our being . . . and to adore Him not only in our interior, but in everything that exists, to begin with in our fellow man, but also in nature, in the universe.” (Brandsma 1985, 189)⁸ This vision of God can transform the whole man, his interior and his actions. Consequently, Fr. Titus writes: “God, who dwells in our being, God, who acts in the cosmos, must not merely be the object of our intuition. Rather, God must manifest Himself in our lives, express Himself in our words and in our gestures, radiate from our whole being and from all our conduct.” (Brandsma 1985, 189)⁹ It should be noted here that Brandsma stood in opposition to Pelagianism and claimed that man cannot perfect himself by his own power alone. He expresses this with the metaphor of the sunflower, which constantly turns, by the force of nature, towards the sun. It is likewise with people—it is not us who are to seek God with our eyes and by our own power, but it is Him who attracts us with His light, and we are only to be constantly turned towards Him.¹⁰ Man can then make full use of his intelligence and not stop at the surface of

⁸ In this and all other cases translated by Maciej Górnicki. In the original: “[. . .] Si deve vedere Dio come lo sfondo del nostro essere. . . e adorarlo non solo nel nostro intimo, ma anche in tutto ciò che esiste, prima di tutto nel nostro prossimo, ma anche nella natura, nell'universo.”

⁹ In the original: “Dio che abita la nostra esistenza, Dio all'opera nel cosmo, non deve solo essere oggetto della nostra intuizione. Bensì, Dio deve manifestarsi nella nostra vita, esprimersi nelle nostre parole e nei nostri gesti, irradiare da tutto il nostro essere e da tutto il nostro agire.”

¹⁰ According to Fr. Titus—referring to the Carmelite tradition—Mary is a model of such an attitude of constant orientation towards God who reveals himself (Brandsma 1985, 193–95). It can be said that Brandsma took into account Christotypic Mariology, emphasizing the exceptional and unrepeatable role of Mary, but he went in the direction of ecclesiotypic Mariology, showing the Mother of God as a model for the Church (on these types of Mariology) (see Borto 2024, 729–30).

things, but rise from finite things to the infinite, by the power of God's transforming grace. Therefore, it is important to be internally focused, to be open to the illuminating rays of God, in order to burn irretrievably in the fire of His love (Brandsma 1985, 196). It is a matter of being—as Fr. Titus writes—absorbed into God: “Nothing is more important than to abandon oneself to God in everything, to surrender oneself completely into His hands. In His infinite and incomparable love . . . He wants to fill us with Himself if we only want to be filled by Him.” (Brandsma 1985, 198)¹¹ It means surrendering to the creative action of the Holy Spirit and the entire Holy Trinity—God who renews everything, creates everything anew: man, the Church, nations, the face of the whole earth (Brandsma 1985, 196–97).

Here we are approaching an important point of Brandsma's teaching on contemplation and its meaning in the development of humanity. Father Titus, referring to the Old Testament story of Elijah, wrote that man's life is similar to the Prophet's journey to Mount Horeb, where he was to see God and also get to know a completely new dimension of his existence. This can also be done in the life of every human being through contemplation: “It is necessary to taste heaven already in this life, trying to see God united to us as much as possible: a God who lives and acts in all our realities.” (Brandsma 1985, 197)¹²

He understood well that entering into an intimate relationship with God consists in gradually giving him all that constitutes the human person, that is, its interior and exterior dimensions. It is a process whose core is prayer, smoothly changing its shape, from an active to a passive form. At the same time, active prayer is constant meditation gradually transforming into simplified prayer, i.e. into active contemplation, and passive prayer is infused contemplation (passive contemplation) (Brandsma 1994, 9).¹³

According to Fr. Titus, a special harmony is created between active and passive contemplation, a unity of personal effort with the mystical life poured in as a gift from God. And even if human life sometimes brings with it physical pain or spiritual suffering, contemplation, understood as a vision of God's love and greatness, is

11 In the original: “Niente vi è di più urgente che abbandonarsi del tutto a Dio, che mettersi totalmente nelle sue mani. Nel suo infinito ed incommensurabile amore . . . Egli vuole riempirci di se stesso, solo se noi desideriamo essere riempiti da Lui.”

12 In the original: “Si deve pregustare fin da questa vita il cielo cercando di vedere Dio unito a noi il più possibile: Dio che vive ed opera in ogni nostra realtà.”

13 It is worth adding that Brandsma also accepted other descriptions of the degrees of prayer (which are an extension of the basic dividing into active and passive); e.g., after St. Teresa of Avila, he wrote about seven stages: meditation; affective prayer; the prayer of simplicity; prayer of rest; ecstatic prayer; total submission to God; spiritual engagement (Brandsma 2013, 22–23). In the successive stages of prayer, man is gradually made capable of being more open to the presence of the Beloved; the end is some ecstatic reality that silences any natural activity (Brandsma 1994, 69–70). It is not a matter of quieting down the activity and reaching stagnation, but only of quieting down the natural activity and zealously fulfilling God's will.

a compensation for all sacrifices, as well as the toil even of prayer itself and the exercise of the virtues (Brandsma 1994, 9).

It can be said that Brandsma actually took delight in the harmony that exists between nature and supernature. He perceived that God wants to perfect nature in a process that requires human involvement, but which is not arduous. This happens by the grace of God. For although the perfection of the Creator surpasses all natural human faculties, it is God's will that these faculties should reach their fullness in Him. This harmony, combining the beauty of God and the beauty of the soul reflecting the beauty of God, exceeds natural human cognition (Brandsma 1994, 45, 73, 75). In this context, it should be added that Fr. Titus also perceived a harmony, created precisely through contemplation, in the very nature of man. Body and soul achieve a new more perfect coherence, which is not so much manifested in ecstasies as in the "death" of the old (sinful) life and in the new life in God, which leads to the resurrection (cf. Brandsma 1994, 78; 2013, 17).

While analysing the thought of the Dutch Carmelite, it is worth focusing attention on how the subject of contemplation is understood. For our Author believes that God is not only the object of the human intellect, but also of the will, the imagination and also of action (Brandsma 1985, 188). Thus, following Brandsma's thought intuitively, the whole human person is the subject of contemplation, together with the whole dialectic of being "separate" and "communal," up to a new form of existence.

Therefore a concrete question arises: can and should man do something to make his journey towards the loving God more and more intense? In Brandsma's statements one can find very specific answers, strongly rooted in ecclesial Tradition. First of all, he warned against a conscious lack of cooperation with God, i.e. quietism (Brandsma 2013, 20). He encouraged people to take advantage of practical tips on the choice of topics for active contemplation, the author of which is Blessed John Soreth (1394–1471), one of the representatives of the Carmelite family; one can get to know and accept God's love by contemplating (see Brandsma 1994, 62–64)¹⁴:

¹⁴ Father Titus warns, together with the entire Carmelite school (among other things Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross), not to reject the mind in the mystical life—and in the Christian life in general; for the fire of love is born from meditation and imaginative or intellectual contemplation (Brandsma 1994, 19). He refers to Thérèse of Lisieux when she writes that in order to persevere in love for God, one must constantly contemplate His works and recognize in them the evidence of love (Brandsma 1994, 108). The Dutch Carmelite also states that it is rare that one can remain in "imageless" contemplation. At the beginning of the journey, man is not able to remain in full contemplation, and therefore he must direct all his thoughts, deeds, good works, meditating and imitating Jesus Christ in all things; when man is weakened in prayer, he must drink of the spirit of Christ and resist the temptation to seek some strength or image outside the mystery of the Incarnation (cf. Brandsma 1994, 90–91). Father Titus refers to two visions that Elijah received on Mount Carmel and on Mount Horeb: The first is an intellectual vision (in which the emphasis is placed on the content of the revelation that the Prophet is to convey to Ahab); on Mount Horeb, prayer consists in experiencing the action of the Spirit of God, who comforts Elijah and makes him strong. Both of these experiences are—according to Brandsma—closely related:

- 1) the beauty of nature (creation)—admiring the great works of the Creator;
- 2) the word of God (Bible)—getting to know and learning to love God's Truth;
- 3) one's own life—performing introspection and assesment of one's deeds before God, getting to know one's motivations, victories and defeats to understand the spiritual warfare one leads and God's action, to fulfil His will and become good example for the others.

Father Titus himself referred to the Carmelite tradition, which was formed by the first texts written at the beginning of the Order, which contained almost mystical descriptions of natural beauty associated with Mount Carmel, among other things (cf. Blommestijn 2002, 57). He also taught that the deepening of the contemplative life (cf. Brandsma 1994, 9–13) was served by such means as:

- 1) walking in the presence of God—in accordance with Elijah's well-known call in the Carmelite family: *Vivit Deus, in cuius conspectu sto* (1 Kgs 17:1); abiding before God (Blessed Lawrence of the Resurrection OCD (1614–91)), gazing at the Blessed Face (St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus);
- 2) getting to love solitude and being ready to make sacrifices—like Elijah, the contemplative and ascetic;
- 3) detachment from the world—learning to trust completely in the Father, following the example of Jesus Christ, who experienced all bitterness;
- 4) moral life—cooperation with God's grace in forming the virtues;
- 5) constant prayer—prolonged prayer, harmoniously combining oral prayer (also liturgical¹⁵) with interior prayer (meditation or contemplation).¹⁶

The purpose of contemplation is to allow ourselves to be absorbed by God, by His love. To support this claim, Brandsma relied on the writings of a mystic blind

the intellectual enlightenment of the soul is connected with love, with the affective response of the heart. Brandsma was a conscious student and continuator of the Carmelite school, which he saw as combining intellectual enlightenment (emphasized in the Dominican school) with seraphic love (emphasized in the Franciscan school) (cf. Brandsma 1994, 17–18).

¹⁵ It is worth adding here that although the Carmelite family strongly emphasises interior prayer, it does not relegate the liturgy to the background. This was the position of our Carmelite. He believed that on the path of inner development, liturgical prayer could become active contemplation. And so it was—in his opinion—in the case of St. Teresa of Avila. Besides, the contemplative life feeds on the Eucharist, like Elijah, who was nourished by bread as he moved towards contemplation of God on Mount Horeb (Brandsma 1994, 13–15). In Brandsma's teaching, then, contemplation has a Eucharistic dimension, that is, the Eucharist is its source, its place of practice and, in a sense, its culmination; for in Holy Communion we contemplate God.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were keen to use the noun "contemplation" (abandoning the expression "contemplative prayer") to emphasise that it represents an alternative way of praying to "meditation." Saint Teresa was thinking particularly of those who find it difficult to practise prayer, which places great emphasis on the power of reason (cf. Herráiz García 2007, 307); she defined prayer as a loving conversation with God (see Lercaro 1969, 201).

from birth, John of St. Samson (1571–1636), known as the French John of the Cross, a Calced Carmelite. Accepting his teaching, Fr. Titus believed that all people are called to mystical life, and its essence is to see God everywhere—in front of us, with us and in us. The mystical life does not depend too much on man, but the stages of growth depend mainly on God’s pleasure. God has also made human nature able to accept this grace, and it is man’s task not to reject and not to destroy this receptivity. He is to try to remove all obstacles hindering God’s action. Therefore, it is indispensable to practice virtues and strive for holiness. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the main meaning of spiritual life is to create a family relationship with God and to enjoy Him. When man cooperates, then God’s wisdom fills people with His treasures, sweetness, love, gentleness and complete joy, and these gifts bear fruit in man with the desire to give his life to God and for God (see Brandsma 1994, 96, 98–100).¹⁷

We began our analysis by quoting Brandsma’s thought that people’s departure from God is often due to their creation of a false image of Him. Through his speeches and writings, Fr. Titus tried to prove the thesis that the way out for humanity, which loses its relationship with God and thus sinks into evil, is precisely contemplation—practised correctly. It leads to an experience of God’s love, protects against a false view of reality and the temptation of egoism, opens the human heart and widens its horizons.

At the University of Nijmegen, in his famous speech on the idea of God, he stated that every era tends to have its own image of God—a Ruler, a King, a Good Shepherd, a Guide, a Father, a Guardian and Protector, a Giver of Life to plants and animals, a Sustainer of the whole world, planets and stars, a God who breathes life into people, dwells in them and opens the eyes of their mind to his presence. In doing so, he expressed the conviction that each of these images—in this case the real one—is very beautiful and that they should all be understood complementarily, yet they will not give a complete picture of God. Nevertheless, contemplation is necessary and serves to overcome a one-dimensional or narrow-minded view. It helps to broaden one’s horizons and to direct oneself towards the light of the Teacher of truth (Brandsma 2021b, 105, 112). Father Titus was convinced that God, through contemplation, perfects man¹⁸—broadens his heart, making it capable of pure love.

¹⁷ It is significant that Fr. Titus—even in the face of the approaching threats of war and inhuman ideologies—speaking about the relationship with God and prayer, strongly emphasized the calonic (beauty) and eudaimonic (happiness) elements; an example is his simple formulation: “Noi siamo stati creati per la gioia [...]” (Brandsma 1985, 200; “We were made for joy [...]).

¹⁸ In this way, Fr. Titus is part of the Church’s tradition that the Christianisation of conscience involves a purification that not only leads to contemplation, but also flows from it (cf. Bernard 2001, 185–86); for only God can sanctify man—despite all his weaknesses (see Gogola 2012, 147).

2. Shaping the Love for God

In the beginning, teaches Brandsma, the love of the soul is disordered and therefore God Himself wishes to shape it in the right way. He does not forbid man to love the creature, but wishes him to love Him above everything else, and everything else only in Him, through Him and with Him. It is for this reason that God desires the human soul to go deep into itself and to contemplate Him. For He abides within it, but patiently knocks so that man opens himself and forms a relationship of love with Him. Hence, the soul is invited to let go of everything in order to unite itself with God in the depths of its interiority (Brandsma 1994, 72). Father Titus, as a faithful disciple of the Carmelite school, strongly emphasises the mystery of God's presence and giving in the depths of the human person.

As already mentioned in the previous section, Brandsma shared the view of many ascetical and mystical authors that the path of spiritual development, which, despite being a gift of God, also presupposes a great commitment on the part of man, leads to an ever greater intensification of the relationship with God, and sometimes even to a direct vision¹⁹ and understanding of God, towards an ever greater spontaneity, to the point of assuming—metaphorically speaking—a second nature. Brandsma makes an implicit allusion here to the union of the two natures in Jesus Christ, and in this perspective he wants to show the new quality of existence that man receives by way of mystical union with God. Father Titus seeks to explain that this transformation (in theology—both Eastern and Western—often referred to as divinization) does not take place without reference to the humanity of Christ, who constantly remains the only mediator and helper. Contemplation is helpful here, drawing the subject (man) to the Object (to God) and subordinating the subject to the Object, so that the subject is completely in possession of the Object. A bond is formed which is so strong and completely transcends human nature that man feels that he knows the Supreme, but cannot understand what he knows. He cannot describe in words what he experiences. He perceives darkness and light simultaneously in his soul (Brandsma 1994, 101–2).

These reflections led Fr. Titus in the direction of apophaticism,²⁰ but he focused more strongly on the mystery of the “birth” of God in man—perhaps influenced by Rhineland mysticism. He wrote that God, hidden in the human interior, grows in those who meditate and offer Him their love. At a certain point, however, He no longer wishes to remain hidden and then others can perceive God's presence in the human

¹⁹ It must be added here that contemplation in its highest form—during mystical union—can be called “direct,” although this does not mean that man is capable here on earth of seeing God “face to face” (cf. 1 Cor 13:12)—it is therefore knowledge through love, the so-called love-knowledge (Urbański 1999, 275; cf. Zawada 2002, 245–58).

²⁰ At this time, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity OCD was fascinated by apophaticism (1880–1906) (see Miczyński 2023, 975).

person. Brandsma sought to emphasise the metaphysical depth of union with the Creator by stating that God becomes our being, our life, the meaning of our existence and all our actions. Father Titus also illustrated this thought with the Carmelite symbol of the flame, portraying God as a burning fire within the human being, which gives warmth and which is meant to flare up ever stronger (Brandsma 1994, 103–4). Brandsma seems to have shared St. John of the Cross's conviction that by uniting with God, man can become the Burning Fire of Love. Following Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–97), he reiterated the need to rise from humanity to divinity in order to live in the womb of the Trinity, as the Word did and does—for all eternity (Brandsma 1994, 108).

Father Titus therefore viewed contemplation and human development from a Trinitarian and Christocentric perspective, giving these two fundamental dimensions of the Christian life existential and incarnational hue (i.e. with a strong emphasis on the Mystery of the Incarnation). The action of the Trinity in man is a continuation of the creative action. It is a continuation of the eternal birthing of the Son by the Father and the breathing of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. The Dutch Carmelite saw that Christ, who took on human nature in order to make possible again the realisation of the union of our nature with the divine nature, is the way towards the Trinity indwelling in man. In turn, these reflections on the Mystery of the Incarnation directed Brandsma to the Mother of Christ. She became the model of receiving God's Son and forming a relationship with the Persons of the Trinity. On the one hand, man is given the identity of being a child of God, but at the same time he learns from the Mother of God how to conceive and bear Christ (cf. Brandsma 1994, 54, 79–80, 86–87, 97).

Here a very important aspect of the Dutch Martyr's teaching is revealed, namely the Marian dimension.²¹ A particularly important—for Fr. Titus—object of contemplation was the mystery of the conception of Christ by Mary (Brandsma 1994, 89). It is understandable that Fr. Titus, being a Carmelite, referred to the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary in his reflections, but it must be emphasised that some of his Mariological thoughts were quite daring. Since Mary is the Mother of the spiritual life, she is the Mother of life, knowledge and experience of the Lord (see Brandsma 1985, 195), it is necessary for man to become like her. We are even to become a “second-Mary” and the Mother of God should “live in us.” These are, of course, metaphorical, mystical and poetic expressions, and their purpose is to show the significance and depth of Christian identity. Brandsma writes therefore that God is to

²¹ It is worth explaining the reason why, at this point in this analysis, we are focusing on the Marian rather than the Christological dimension. From a strictly theological point of view, the order should be reversed. Our study tries to read the thought of Fr. Titus, who seems to have portrayed human development in the perspective of the chronology of salvific events. Hence, the mystery of the Incarnation precedes the mystery of Pascha. By analogy, the mysterious birth of God takes place in man, who enables the human person to offer himself—together with Christ—in a burnt offering of love for others. This is what happened in the martyrdom of Fr. Titus.

be conceived in us, and we—as the “second” Mother of God—are to bring Him to the world.²² Father Titus was convinced that no devotion is as solid and concrete as Marian devotion (cf. Brandsma 1985, 193).

At this point it is worth emphasising once again that Brandsma linked contemplation closely with morality. Gazing at the love of God leads to true freedom and should become a path towards purification from sins and imperfections (Brandsma 1994, 44). Speaking in positive terms, contemplation also helps to persevere in conversion and to exercise virtues such as chastity, poverty and obedience, love of silence and interior concentration, humility, simplicity, modesty and a sense of minority (cf. Brandsma 1994, 31, 78–79, 109). On the path of contemplation, man begins to express his love for God also through his moral attitude.

The Dutch mystic was convinced that the right it is Jesus Christ who can give the proper shape to love, as he is the only Guide and Teacher of the virtues. Learning the mature love consists in following the path of renouncing everything that is not God, in order to love God more strongly and to love everything with Him—already in a new way. It is a path of a passionate nature, following Christ through the glorious Cross—understood not as accepting suffering for the sake of suffering alone, but as growing in love, ready to give oneself as a gift. It is also a journey through—using John of the Cross’ metaphor—the “dark night” of faith, which is the absence of the image of any created thing, for the sake of detaching man from disordered attachments to creatures in order to make more room for the light of God dwelling in the human soul (cf. Brandsma 1994, 91–93).

It is noteworthy that in the teaching of our Saint we can find extensive reflections on the passion of Christ. Brandsma was convinced that the contemplation of the mystery of Christ’s self-emptying, his death on the cross, leads to a deeper knowledge of the truth of how great a love God had for human beings. The pierced Heart of Jesus is proof of this (Brandsma 1994, 140).

Brandsma’s description of the Saviour’s Passion is characterized by dramatic literalism, insight, empathy, attention to detail, and then leads to the conviction that Christ’s crucified love cannot be left unanswered and that it is necessary to express love to the Saviour in a similar way, being ready to carry one’s own cross to the end.²³ Father Titus creates in a certain sense a theology of the Cross with an existential shade, having the following dimensions (see Brandsma 1994, 123–28, 140):

²² In this context, it is worth quoting a very interesting explanation of the spiritual meaning of the celebration of the three Masses on the Solemnity of Christmas. According to Fr. Titus, the liturgy leads us into three mysteries: the birth of the Son from the Father; the birth of Jesus from Mary; the birth of God in us. The Dutch Carmelite understood Christian vocations as being the “birth” of God (see Brandsma 1985, 191–92).

²³ Perhaps it was the contemplation of Christ’s sufferings and the power of His love that gave Fr. Titus the strength to make a decision to oppose Nazism, and also to be faithful until his last earthly moments, which ended with a martyr’s death in the Dachau concentration camp.

- 1) *agapetological*—Jesus is entirely burning with inexhaustible love and this love motivates him to accept the suffering caused by human sins;
- 2) *kenotic and glorious*—Christ's body and soul have lost the experience of the Father's presence; the human nature of the Son of God appears destroyed; however, voluntary humiliation and the accepted cross become the victorious throne of the reign of the Son of God; Christ conquers the whole world by his weakness;
- 3) *paschal*—weak people find strength in the fall and power of the Son of God; it is a test of faith for man not to doubt Christ;
- 4) *Marian*—the radical love of Christ can be most profoundly known to man through the Mother of God standing under the cross.

God regenerates man to love through the Cross, culminating in a state where man no longer lives only for the Beloved and in the Beloved. Brandsma was keen to use nuptial symbolism—the union of bridegroom and bride—alluding to the Book of the Song of Songs, which also inspired many Carmelite mystics (e.g., Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross). In such a close loving union with Christ, man is—like Him—“resurrected” and lives a new life. The supernatural and the natural are closely united, and nothing can take man out of this state of contemplation. Then man adores God in himself and is able to see Him also in all things (Brandsma 1994, 70–71).

Father Titus described the permanence of this union of the soul with God in biblical words speaking of the indissolubility of marriage (cf. Matt 19:6) (Brandsma 1994, 89). He seems to have seen the guarantee of the permanence of this bond in suffering—accepted and overcome by love. The words of his testimony, written in prison in Scheveningen, on February 12/13, 1942, in the form of a poem, are significant: “[. . .] I am happy in my suffering, / Because I do not consider it to be suffering anymore, / But is the fate that is most desired, / That unites me with You, O God.” (Brandsma 2022b, 425) Father Titus understood his own suffering as a happy opportunity to become like Christ, and to embrace with love all that the Master loves. According to him, through contemplation, human love takes the shape of Christ's love and becomes strong as it is united with the love of the Saviour. The truthfulness of this experience was confirmed by Brandsma with his martyrdom, through which he did not want to separate himself from the world, but wanted to offer it up for others.

3. Shaping the Love for People

In Brandsma's writings many texts can be found which speak that contemplation does not stifle a person's love for others, but that it is actually indispensable for those who want to understand people and the situation they are currently in. The following words of Fr. Titus can be quoted as an example: “[. . .] We cannot understand the

person who loves God, the mystic, as someone who stays away from life, from history. On the contrary, whoever lives history and bears the burden of it must feel as his first and highest task: to come to know himself [. . .]. And through his intellect, come to meet God in the depths of his life.” (Brandsma 1985, 189)²⁴

The Dutch Carmelite was convinced that the right path of mystical life has a community dimension.²⁵ If contemplatives are looking at the same goal, then contemplation unites people into a family, which should become a place where virtues are worked out. History teaches that situations when God calls someone and leads without anyone’s help, without a guide, are exceptions (Brandsma 1994, 99). Therefore, contemplation shapes in the contemplator love for people and, consequently, their mutual love.

On this basis, Fr. Titus claimed that the contemplative life is the source and inspiration for the apostolic life (Brandsma 1994, 19).²⁶ Through the prism of the Carmelite school, of which he was a student and continuator, he saw the apostolate as a manifestation of love (even at the cost of small imperfections—Teresa of Avila), expressed in:

- 1) helping the poor in order to preach the Good News to them (following the example of St. John of the Cross);
- 2) creating new environments and places of contemplation, and supporting missions (following the example of the Reformed Carmel);
- 3) intercessory prayer for others, in and outside the Church, combined with fasting and renunciation (following the encouragement of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi (1566–1607));
- 4) study, work, pastoral commitment, the preaching of the word of God and in any kind of service (as taught by John of St. Samson).

For this reason, Brandsma even wrote about the “apostolate of contemplative life” and, based on the experience of St. Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, he was convinced that the mystical life itself is already—to the highest degree—apostolic life. The apostolate of prayer, in fact, is a missionary life (see Brandsma 1994, 25–27, 98, 114–15).²⁷

²⁴ In the original: “Non dobbiamo considerare la persona amante di Dio, il mistico, come colui che sta fuori della vita, della storia. Anzi, chiunque vive la storia e ne porta il responsabile, deve sentire come suo primario, supremo compito, arrivare alla conoscenza di se stesso [. . .]. E attraverso il suo intelletto giungere ad incontrare Dio nella profondità della propria vita.”

²⁵ The development of man and his mystical life takes place within the human community, and in this community the most perfect activity is love (see González 2001, 291–301).

²⁶ In Fr. Titus’ view, social, cultural or political involvement is (is supposed to be) integrally linked to mystical life (Boaga 2008, 108). In fact he was very happy that he could minister until the end of his earthly life—even in Dachau; spiritually prepared and accepted into the Third Order the Polish priest Tadeusz Zieliński (Rees 1971, 175).

²⁷ This expression is multivariate, it includes, among other things, the following aspects: (a) every apostolate must draw strength from contemplation; (b) the contemplative life has the function of the apostolate; (c) people should be taught contemplation in an apostolic way.

Father Titus repeated after St. Thérèse of Lisieux that love is the special apostolate in the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, in the Church. He admired in her attitude the fact that, being completely detached from the world, she was ready for martyrdom and wanted to conquer the whole world for God at the same time. She was also aware that this apostolate would not cease at the moment of her earthly death and her passage to the reality in heaven, combined with the *visio beatifica*, but giving love to people could be intensified (cf. Brandsma 1994, 113–14, 118).

Here Brandsma touched on the paradox of equating contemplation with apostleship. He explained that if one penetrates the secrets of God's grace, this lack of logic will prove to be only superficial. For one will realise that the essence of missionary commitment is asking for the graces of heaven for people, combined with offering oneself for them—together with Christ—on the cross. This is the most luminous, most perfect, intimate way of uniting the contemplative life with the active life: no longer in a single person, but in the Mystical Body of Christ. In this perspective, a life detached from the world, sometimes even limited to the simplest daily activities, can be entirely directed to the service of God and spiritually fruitful (cf. Brandsma 1994, 114–17).

Father Titus was convinced that contemplation in the perspective of a specific earthly situation should become a strength to undertake the spiritual warfare for the good of man and society. Therefore, contemplation should result in a solid assessment of reality and concrete action. Brandsma was a realist and was aware of many distortions and illusions masking evil in the times in which he lived. It caused him pain that this evil was often accepted and covered up by the academic world, by many professors who considered themselves Christians and at the same time claimed that love was socially useless and that rights belonged to the stronger one. He stated that one can often see in people a lack of love of neighbour and sacrifice, which are covered by talking about prudence, caution, self-control and realism—and this attitude is simply cold calculation (Brandsma 1985, 125; 1994, 150–151).

Seeing the moral evil affecting human hearts and social structures, as well as the great threat posed by ideological evil, Fr. Titus committed all his energies to overcoming the then increasingly widespread conviction that peace could be saved by arming oneself and defending one's rights by force. He opposed such logic and tried to convince people that this was leading the world to more and more wars. Therefore, every individual is responsible for creating peace in the world, and therefore any views and decisions that are wrong must be changed. Brandsma judged very harshly the society that does not do enough to prevent individual countries from arming themselves (Brandsma 1994, 147–48).

Therefore, according to the thought of the Dutch Carmelite, in the face of the threat of conflicts it is necessary to be an apostle of peace, that is, to bring this peace to the world. Such was Jesus Christ, who after his resurrection did not call for war, but spoke surprising words to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, I give to you" (John 14:27). Father Titus had the

courage to preach to everyone—including politicians, academics and journalists—the need to be open to the peace that Christ gives and which is the fruit of contemplation (see Brandsma 1994, 149–50).

Brandsma knew that being subjected to human nature, if it is wounded and turned away from God, is a threat to man himself. Society then becomes a victim of its worst qualities: the selfishness, anger and arrogance of the strong. What is needed, therefore, is resistance to all of that, because good must be stronger than evil (Brandsma 1994, 151). The way to overcome evil, at its deepest roots, is the contemplation of God and work on changing wrong ideas. The involvement of people from intelligentsia is indispensable here, in order to build a healthy mentality from the ground up (Brandsma 1994, 153).

As can be seen, contemplation is not some ephemeral remedy for social problems in the form of escaping from suffering and responsibility, but it puts the human world in order from the foundations—individually and socially. Society should be educated by the press, schools, meetings and congresses; one must try to influence the market and industry so that thinking is changed—from egoistic to altruistic. It is also necessary to overcome the lack of forgiveness that exists in relationships between concrete persons, but also that is hidden in the antipathies that exist between peoples or states.²⁸

In a somewhat idealistic way, he wanted mutual love between people to be formed on earth in this way, so that one could speak about them as about the first Christians: “See how they love each other.” Brandsma was convinced that there was a victorious force in true love, and the practice of life confirms this. He taught that solidarity with others and care for each other is very important. Even if there are some difficulties, true love—drawing its example and strength from Christ—will endure everything (Brandsma 1985, 128, 198–99).²⁹ Such love is the fruit of contemplation, which is able to unmask the falsified reality and protect the society from dangerous philosophical theories. Contemplation protects and shapes social love, which is the best guarantee for the improvement and healing of civilization (Brandsma 2022a, 19).

Father Brandsma saw the Church in this perspective—as a timeless community of those who help each other on the way to the ultimate goal. For this reason, he eagerly drew on the history and schools of spirituality, the experience of the

²⁸ It is worth adding here that Fr. Titus directly accused Nietzsche’s philosophy, claiming that it led people to war (see Brandsma 1994, 155–59). He called for showing National Socialism, based on this philosophy, as a mortal threat, in order to refute this doctrine. He encouraged everybody to do it with enthusiasm and positively, showing the great value of the human person—both in the natural and supernatural order (Brandsma 1985, 126).

²⁹ Father Titus was an example of remembrance and care for others. He was an example of caring for the poor (see Scapin 1985, 43–44). From the prison in Scheveningen on May 6, 1942, he wrote to his relatives: “I live always for you.” (Brandsma 1985, 176) In other prison letters, he also gave evidence of his interest in his friends, relatives, religious family, the Church: he remembered their celebrations, birthdays, greeted their children, was interested in the life decisions of his friends; he greeted various people by name; he was interested in the number of novices and new priests (see Brandsma 1985, 176–85).

contemplatives and the saints. He focused particularly on the Carmelite family, but also held the Dutch mystical tradition in high esteem, with figures such as Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, Blessed Jan Ruusbroec, Nicolaus van Esch, Maria van Oosterwijk, Gertrude van der Oosten, Geert Groote, Gerard Zertbolt of Zutphen, St. Lidwina of Schiedam, Fr. Brugman, Francis Vervoort OFM, St. Peter Canisius, Jan Pilgrim Pullen, Maria Petyt (see Brandsma 2013, 79–361). And this invocation of history, evoking the contemplative experience of many witnesses, had a concrete and logical justification: Fr. Titus saw in their experience a great opportunity—the action of God wishing, through these very witnesses, to renew the world (Alzin 1954, 97),³⁰ that is, to regenerate people to love and also to responsibility for themselves and, in some sense, for the whole of created reality.

4. Shaping the Love for Creatures

We mentioned in our analysis that Brandsma listed the beauty of the created world among the proposed themes for active contemplation. The question that arises here is whether there is not a contradiction in Fr. Titus' statements. Since God is the *par excellence* object of contemplation, does not turning one's attention to matter, whether animate or inanimate, draw one away from the supernatural and distort one's heart and capacity to love? Brandsma believed that precisely a proper focus on the work of creation can deepen man's relationship with God and make him more like the Creator. Let us try to present and analyse the argument used by Fr. Titus.

According to him turning towards transcendence cannot be something opposite to immanence.³¹ Therefore he stated: "It is not possible to make some division in our hearts between God and the world. But one must look at the world with God in the background [. . .]. Prayer is life, not just an oasis in the desert of life." (Brandsma 1985, 198)³² It is precisely the contemplation of nature, its extraordinary beauty and the order existing in it, that makes people ecstatic. It leads to the discovery of its non-accidental purposiveness, the cause of which is the Creator of Nature (Brandsma 2022a, 11). Father Titus also writes: "God guides the stars and planets in their orbits; He gives life to plants and animals. He carries the world in His hand

³⁰ Brandsma touched here on the mystery of God's "incarnation" in history—both individual and social; the more people open themselves for God's action, the more the reality can be transformed by love (Boaga 2008, 108).

³¹ It is worth adding here that the antinomian method in theology—of showing Transcendence and Immanence at the same time—was known earlier. It was used, among other things, by Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) (see Zhukovskyy 2023, 693).

³² In the original: "Non si deve porre nei nostri cuori una divisione tra Dio e il mondo. Ma si deve guardare il mondo avendo Dio sullo sfondo [. . .]. La preghiera è vita, non un'oasi nel deserto della vita."

and guarantees its quiet permanence. God dwells within us and opens the eyes of our mind to what is important; he whispers his word within us and pushes us to fulfil it.” (Brandsma 1985, 189)³³ He also states, referring to Thérèse of Lisieux, that her peculiar greediness in contemplating the beauty of flowers or the starry sky is understandable, but that it is nevertheless necessary, like her, to understand this beauty as an aid to elevating one’s thoughts to God; for it is not an end in itself, but a means to that end. The macrocosm and the microcosm serve the contemplative in knowing and showing admiration for the Wisdom of God (cf. Brandsma 1994, 108; 2022b, 11, 13).

Man perceives that the animate world is a kind of a succession, from less perfect beings to animals, endowed by the Creator with consciousness and feelings in order to make their existence more beautiful. The whole world—inanimate and animate—culminates in human beings, endowed with immortal souls, made in the image of God and destined—according to the Genesis revelation—to reign over creation. Animals are to serve and please man, but at the same time man needs to develop a wise and healthy love of nature. This means that man must give the animals the same affection that God had for them when he created them—love and kindness. The point is that man should not succumb to hardness of heart, that he should learn to protect creatures weaker than himself (animals) from unnecessary suffering. The relationship with weaker creatures is in a sense a “school” of human sensitivity. This sensitivity, in turn, helps to build relationships with other human beings, the foundation of which is to be God’s love. It is obvious to Fr. Titus that God should be the first addressee of human love, then other people, and only then the whole of creation (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 14, 18).

Therefore, through the contemplation of God’s plan contained in creation, man can come to know his identity, distinction and dignity, as well as the fields of responsibility. His mental horizons are broadened and he can enter into proper coexistence with the world. A proper shaping of the relationship with all creatures serves the rapid development of man and the realization of his vocation to love God and neighbour (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 12). God’s love allows us to love everyone, but love for creation also allows us to love God in a nobler and deeper way (Brandsma 2022a, 19).

The Dutch Carmelite relied on biblical passages (Deut 25:4; 1 Cor 9:9; 1 Tim 5:18) emphasising that, although they stand in defence of animals, above all they protect human beings from evil, from depersonalisation. He was convinced that in the upbringing of young people we must not forget to teach them the responsibility and care for weaker living beings. By caring for animals, young people become sensitive and noble feelings are awakened in them. Brandsma was concerned that modern

³³ In the original: “Dio conduce stelle e pianeti nella loro orbita; donna vita a piante e ad animali. Egli porta il mondo nella sua mano e ne garantisce la tranquilla persistenza. Dio abita in noi ed apre l’occhio della nostra mente su ciò che conta; sussurra in noi la sua parola e ci spinge ad eseguirla.”

civilisation is infected more and more with an attitude of boorishness and coarseness. God, on the other hand, desires that through man's reason and intellect, through his love, creation should develop in order and in its beauty (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 14–16).

Brandsma's presentation of the care of animals as a *sui generis* means of spiritual development is undoubtedly original and may seem too novel, but it is nevertheless defensible once clarified. It should be added here that Fr. Titus did not, of course, mean any exaggerated love for creatures, any morbid display of affection for them, or any excessive sentimentalism. He had no doubt that love for animals must be subordinated to love for human beings (see Brandsma 2022a, 20), and that this love is to be subordinated to love for God.

An inquisitive analyst might ask here whether Brandsma isn't losing his Christian Christocentrism here. This concern is dispelled by his words about man caring for the world of creatures in imitation of the Good Shepherd. The Carmelite also points out that since early Christianity Christ has been portrayed as the friend and caring guardian of animals. Therefore, this way of relating to nature was imitated by many saints, which was a manifestation of their innocence of heart, filiality of God, understanding of the work of creation and love according to the Spirit of God (Brandsma 2022a, 21).

Brandsma's Christocentrism can be seen in the fact that the Carmelite, following the suggestion of John of the Cross, presents the entire created world in the light of three great mysteries related to the Person of the Logos; these mysteries are: the creation of the world by the Word of God (cf. John 1:3); the incarnation of the Word of God; the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Along with man, the whole of creation is also—in some mysterious way—ennobled and clothed with beauty in the Incarnation and Resurrection.³⁴ Father Titus wrote that in contemplating this truth, the soul is “wounded by love” (Brandsma 1994, 88), experiences the love of God and desires to love like Him.

Approaching the conclusion, it is worth noting that the entire teaching of the Dutch Carmelite, although written in difficult times, was full of peace and joy. He was convinced that Christian love, formed in contemplation—towards God, towards other people and towards all creatures—should be actually symptomatic. If it is to conquer the world, it must be strong and courageous, ready to die with Jesus on the cross. Contemplation makes one look at one's own suffering in the light from above, understanding it as a gift from God. This, in turn, is the motive for joy, which is not a virtue but the fruit of love (Brandsma 1985, 200–201).³⁵ He identified his life with

³⁴ It is interesting that Brandsma—not being strictly a theologian—intuitively came to the conviction that the great works of God are to be understood as events-symbols in the light of which the whole of reality is to be understood (for more on theological axiological-symbolic interpretation, see Nadbrzeźny 2024, 707–9).

³⁵ *Nota bene*, even when in prison, he described himself as an optimist and tried to write with humour (cf. Brandsma 1985, 152–53).

this teaching, based largely on the rule of the Carmelites, Fr. Titus became a prophet for the present times (cf. Strzelecki 2022, 6), which—similarly—are marked by various threats.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis presented above, it can be confirmed that the Dutch Carmelite considered contemplation to be a rescue for man threatened by evil, as well as an opportunity for the correct development of humanity. Therefore, the verification of the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this study—based on the source items—yields a positive result. We still need to answer the important questions that arise:

- 1) Was Brandsma not an excessive idealist?
- 2) Was his thought original and if so, what are its characteristics?
- 3) Was there anything that he failed to include; what research directions are worth undertaking?

To conclude we shall try to answer these questions.

Re. (1): Brandsma's writings often contain parenetic elements, models of behaviour; nevertheless, elements of idealism are closely linked to realism. Mysticism is portrayed on the basis of historical testimonies as well as in the concrete social context of the Dutch interwar period. What is important here is that Brandsma understood contemplation not only as extraordinary states of ecstasy (passive contemplation), but also as a simplified meditation, an intellectual focus on divine reality (active contemplation.), accessible to everyone.

Re. (2): The originality of Brandsma's thought consists in the skilful combination of themes, including: the transcendence of God with His immanence (the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul); love for God with the affirmation of His works (creatures); the calonic dimension (from Greek *kalos*—beauty) with the reality of suffering; the mysteries of salvation (especially: Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection) with the history of the world (theology of history); individual history with social history; contemplative life with social commitment; philosophical language with theological and poetic language; the spiritual tradition of the Reformed Carmel (the so-called "Discalced Carmelites") with the legacy of the non-Reformed Carmel (the so-called "Calced Carmelites"). The *novum* in his thought seems to be the presentation of the relationship between contemplation and the formation of a mature attitude of love in a human being involved in the world, and presenting the mystery of the Incarnation as a model and hermeneutical key for understanding contemplation as the "incarnation" of transcendence in material reality.

Re. (3): In the writings of Fr. Titus, little thought can be found on the subject of proper love and self-acceptance; this subject was later developed by psychology, and Brandsma did not address it, perhaps in order not to be misunderstood—as encouraging selfishness. Perhaps the hitherto unpublished writings of Fr. Titus will also contain reflections on this topic. It would certainly be interesting and necessary to reflect on the proper formation of self-love as well—through contemplation. The same can be said of the teaching of Fr. Titus’ on love for people, especially the social dimension of love, family life or work.

The analysis of Fr. Titus’ writings leads to the conclusion that his teaching is very tightly linked to the Carmelite tradition, which is closely associated with the Mother of God and such figures as: Elijah, the first eremites of Carmel, St. Simon Stock, Henry Hane (de Hanna), Blessed John Soreth, Frances d’Amboise, St. Teresa the Great, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, John of St. Samson (Jean du Moulin) and many others (see Brandsma 1994; cf. García 2002, 69–72). At the same time, it is worth noting here that in Brandsma’s thought a strong influence of Teresian and San-Juanist mysticism can be seen.

The Carmelite tradition focuses attention on the power of God’s love. It is therefore worth concluding the analysis with the words of Fr. Titus: “We must flee from all honour and personal glory, seek nothing for ourselves. Instead, we are to win souls for Christ. Our love must be extreme, excessive: mad as the cross of Christ was mad. [...] Love is the first, greatest and most divine of virtues.” (Brandsma 1985, 195)³⁶ Love shaped in contemplation conforms man to God.

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³⁶ In the original: “Noi dobbiamo fuggire ogni onore e gloria personali, non cercare nulla per noi stessi. Ma dobbiamo guadagnare anime a Cristo. Il nostro amore deve essere estremo, eccessivo: folle, come fu folle la croce di Cristo. [...] L’amore è la prima, la più grande e la più divina delle virtù.”

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