

# Titus Brandsma

## Carmelite and Martyr

### EDUCATION

Anno Brandsma was born in the Dutch province of Friesland in 1881. He joined the Carmelite Order in 1898 taking his father's name, Titus, as his religious name. He made his First Profession in October 1899 and was ordained priest on 17 June 1905. As an academic Titus specialised in philosophy and mysticism. He helped to found the Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1923 and later served as *Rector Magnificus*.

In the years before the Second World War Titus was openly critical of the Nazi ideology. During the occupation of Holland, he defended the freedom of the Press and of the Catholic Press in particular. Titus was arrested in January 1942 and sent to Dachau Concentration Camp where he was killed by lethal injection on 26 July 1942. He was beatified as a martyr in 1985 and canonised on 15 May 2022.



### Titus' Education

Titus was a good student who understood from early on the value of education. As a child he read widely and had a particular liking for literature and history. After entering the Carmelite Order in 1898, Titus continued to read widely and began to publish. Taking his doctorate in philosophy at Rome's Gregorian University, he also took courses in modern sociology.

### Catholic Education

Titus reformed the programme of studies for Carmelites in the Netherlands. Education for the laity was a priority for Titus. At Oss a library with attached reading room and lecture hall was established which was open to the general public. Through Titus' efforts, two Carmelite schools became the very first private schools in Holland to receive government support. He founded the Union of Secondary Schools in 1925, serving as its President.



◀ Titus Brandsma with journalists

### University Professor

With the founding of the Catholic University at Nijmegen in 1923, Titus was nominated Professor of Philosophy and the History of Mysticism. In 1932 he became its *Rector Magnificus*. Titus' courses left an 'unforgettable' impression; he was effectively rediscovering the spirituality of their country. Titus was kind and students at the university constantly sought him out. He sought scholarship funding for the less well off. Titus subjected National Socialism to rigorous critique as part of his university teaching. He kept his feet firmly on the ground. Titus was known to assist an old man in pushing his junk wagon up the hill between the university and the Carmel, placing his professorial briefcase on top while he did it.

### The Call to Mysticism

Titus was always keen to educate people regarding their call to be mystics. He defined mysticism as: 'a special union of God with human beings, whereby they become aware of God's presence and also become one with God.' Titus understood mysticism as a call directed to all and spoke of an everyday mysticism, convinced that God is the ground of our being and can be encountered always and everywhere and in our neighbour. His lectures on Carmelite mysticism, delivered in the United States in 1935, are a true classic of twentieth-century spirituality.

# The Journalist as Educator

Titus undoubtedly saw journalism as a form of education. His accessible articles in the Catholic press were effectively 'short courses' of their own.

## Philosophy of Education

For Titus it was important for the educator to respect each student individually: *'... people are not simply all alike and do not comply with a casual construction or idea. The human being, and even the child, is in each person different in nature and it does not help us when we would like to see beyond all the differences ... We must take young people as they are.'* It was important for Titus that students thought for themselves, saying to one group: *'We do not impart philosophical knowledge to you, because you must first and foremost develop it in yourselves ... We do not ram the truth or knowledge of the truth into you, we only draw on the wondrous passion for knowledge of what is true, which lies hidden in you.'*

## Resourcing Education

Titus was convinced of the importance of the proper resourcing of education. He also underlined the need for continuous professional development of teachers: *'a justified ideal for the teacher is continuous further development ... A trained teacher is a blessing.'* Titus had a particular concern for providing for children from underprivileged backgrounds: *'Attention at school to the underprivileged child, that is where true love reveals itself.'*

## Care for Jewish Students

Titus took a particular stand on Jewish students, refusing to remain silent when they were excluded from attending Catholic schools, even making enquiries about placing them in the care of the Carmelites in Brazil.

## Carmel as a School of Mysticism

Titus speaks of *'the apostolate of Carmelite mysticism'*, using the image of a school. Carmelites are to teach people to pray, helping them know they have been found and loved by God. For Titus, Carmel is like a school, *'a school of mystical life'*, and insists: *'in the spiritual life, no more than in ordinary life, can we dispense with education, with teachers and with guidance.'*

Photo courtesy of Jim Forest ►



## Prayer to Titus Brandsma

God our Father, your servant,  
Saint Titus Brandsma,  
laboured zealously in your vineyard and  
gave his life freely because of his faith in you.  
Through his intercession I ask for your mercy  
and help.

Father Titus never refused when he was asked  
for help by your people.  
In his name, I come to you with my needs ...

Lord, help me always to imitate the great faith,  
generous love and burning zeal of Saint Titus.  
Glorify your servant as he strove to glorify you.  
Amen.

Mary, Mother of Carmel, pray for us.

Titus Brandsma, Carmelite martyr,  
intercede for us.



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[carmelites.org.au/titusbrandsma](http://carmelites.org.au/titusbrandsma)

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