

# EXORDIUM PARVUM

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1 *Here begin the customs of the Cistercians*

## [Prologue]

2 **On the Origins of the Monastery of Cîteaux**

3 **W**e Cistercians, the first founders of this church,  
4 by the present document are notifying our  
5 successors how canonically, with what great  
6 authority, and also by whom and by what stages their  
7 monastery and tenor of life took their beginning, so that,  
with the sincere truth of this matter made public, they may  
the more tenaciously love both the place and the  
observance of the Holy Rule there initiated somehow or  
other by ourselves, through the grace of God; and that they  
may pray for us who have tirelessly borne the burden of  
the day and the heat; and may sweat and toil even to the  
last gasp in the strait and narrow way which the Rule  
points out; till at last, having laid aside the burden of flesh,  
they happily repose in everlasting rest.

## Here Begin the Chapters.

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- 3 Molesme, and of their Coming to Cîteaux, and of
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## Chapter One

## The Origin of the Monastery of Cîteaux

1

**I**n the year of the incarnation of the Lord 1098, Robert  
2 of blessed memory, first abbot of the church of  
Molesme, founded in the episcopate of Langres, and  
3 certain brethren of that monastery came to the venerable  
Hugh, who was then legate of the Holy See and  
archbishop of the church of Lyon, declaring their intention  
to order their life under the custody of the Holy Rule of  
our Father Benedict, and therefore, to carry this out more  
freely, steadfastly soliciting him to extend to them even  
4 the firm support of his help and apostolic authority. Gladly  
giving his favour to their request, the legate laid the  
foundation of their origin with the following letter.

5

### Chapter Two

#### The Letter of Hugh

1

*Hugh, archbishop of Lyon and legate of the Apostolic See,  
2 to Robert, abbot of Molesme, and to the brethren with him  
desirous of serving God according to the Rule of Saint  
Benedict.*

*Be it known to all who rejoice at the progress of holy  
3 Mother Church, that you and certain sons of yours,  
brethren of the monastery of Molesme, stood in our  
presence at Lyon and professed that you wished from then  
on to adhere more strictly and perfectly to the Rule of the  
most blessed Benedict, which till then you had observed  
lukewarmly and negligently in that monastery. Because it*

4 *is clear that this cannot be fulfilled in the aforesaid place  
for a number of impeding causes, we concluded, making  
provision for the welfare of both parties — those, namely,  
who withdraw from there and those who remain there —  
that it would be useful for you to turn elsewhere, to some  
other place which the divine bounty will designate, and to  
serve the Lord there more advantageously and in greater  
quiet. Even at that time we advised you who were then  
5 present — you, Abbot Robert, and also Brothers Alberic,  
Odo, John, Stephen, Letald, and Peter, but all those, too,  
whom you would decide in keeping with the Rule and after  
consultation in common to add to your company — to  
keep this holy resolve. and we command you to persevere  
in this; and we confirm it in perpetuity by apostolic  
authority through the impression of our seal.*

1 *That profession which I made in your presence in the  
monastery of Molesme — I confirm before God and  
his saints, and in your hands, that I shall keep that  
same profession and stability in this place which is  
called the New Monastery, in obedience to you and  
your successors who will take your place in  
conformity with the Rule.*

## **Chapter Three**

1           **Of the Departure of the Monks of Cîteaux from  
Molesme, and of their Coming to Cîteaux, and of the  
Monastery which they Began**

2           After these things, supported by so distinguished and so  
important an authority, the aforesaid abbot and his own  
returned to Molesme, and from that fraternity of monks  
selected for their company devotees of the Rule, so that  
between those who had spoken to the legate in Lyon and  
the other called from the monastery, there were twenty-one  
monks; and thus escorted by so goodly a company they  
eagerly headed for the desert-place called Cîteaux. This  
3           place, situated in the episcopate of Chalon, and rarely  
approached by men back in those days because of the  
thickness of grove and thornbush, was inhabited only by  
4           wild beasts. Understanding upon arrival that the more  
despicable and unapproachable the place was to seculars,  
the more suited it was for the monastic observance they  
had already conceived in mind, and for which sake they  
5           had come there, the men of God, after cutting down and  
removing the dense grove and thornbushes, began to  
construct a monastery there with the approval of the  
bishop of Chalon and the consent of the owner of the  
place.

6           For while still at Molesme, these men, breathed on by the  
grace of God, among themselves often used to speak of,  
complain about, grieve over the transgression of the Rule  
of the most blessed Benedict, Father of monks, seeing that  
they and other monks had promised by solemn profession  
to obey this Rule, yet had by no means kept it, and on that  
account had knowingly incurred the reproach of perjury;

and this is why they were coming to this solitude under — as we have touched on earlier — the authority of the Apostolic See, to carry out their profession by observing the Holy Rule.

- 7 Then the Duke of Burgundy, Lord Odo, delighted by their holy fervour, and being asked by letter from the aforesaid legate of the holy Roman Church, completed from his own resources the wooden monastery they had begun, and for a long time provided them there with all things necessary, and abundantly helped them out with land and livestock.

## **Chapter Four**

### **1 How that Place Rose to Become an Abbey**

- 2 It was also at that time that the abbot who had come there received from the bishop of that diocese, at the order of the aforesaid legate, the pastoral staff together with the care of monks; and he had the brethren who had come there with him make their stability in the same place according to the Rule; and thus that church grew up to become an abbey canonically and by apostolic authority.

## **Chapter Five**

### **1 That the monks of Molesme Disquieted the ear of the Lord Pope**

## for the return of Abbot Robert

2 Not much time had elapsed before the monks of Molesme,  
with the approval of Dom Geoffrey—the abbot who had  
succeeded Robert—went to the Lord Pope Urban in  
3 Rome, and began petitioning that the oft mentioned  
Robert be restored to his former place. Moved by their  
importuning, the Pope sent word to his legate, the  
venerable Hugh, that if it were possible the same abbot  
should return, and that the monks who loved the desert  
should stay there in peace.

## Chapter Six

### 1 **The Letter of the Lord Pope for the Abbot's Return**

2 *Urban, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his  
venerable brother and fellow bishop Hugh, representative  
of the Holy See: health and apostolic blessing.*

3 *We have received in council a mighty outcry from the  
brethren of Molesme, who so vehemently petition the  
4 return of their abbot. For they have been saying that  
monastic observance has been overthrown in their place,  
and that, because of that abbot's absence, they themselves  
are held in hatred by the lords and other neighbours.*

5 *Compelled at last by Our brethren, We are sending word  
to your Grace through the present writing, signifying that  
We should be pleased to have that abbot brought back  
6 from the desert to the monastery, if that can be done. If*

*you are unable to carry this out, take care that both those who love the desert live together there in quiet, and that those in the monastery observe the practices of the Rule.*

7

The legate read the apostolic letter, convoked ecclesiastics of high authority, and issued the definition drawn up below about the present affair.

1

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Decree of the Legate on the Whole Affair of the Monks of Molesme and the Cistercians**

2

*Hugh, servant of the church of Lyon, to his most dear brother, Robert, bishop of the faithful of Langres: greeting.*

3

*We have deemed it necessary to notify your Fraternity of what we have defined about the affair of the church of Molesme at the colloquy held recently at Port d'Anselme. Monks from Molesme came before us there with your letter, drawing attention to the destruction and desolation of their place incurred by them through the removal of Abbot Robert, petitioning earnestly that he be given back to them as father; for not otherwise had they any hope of peace and quiet being restored to the church of Molesme, or of the vigour of monastic order being recalled there to its former condition. Brother Geoffrey, whom you ordained as abbot of the same church, was also there in our presence, saying that he would willingly give up his*

6



*place to Robert, as to his father, should it please us to send him back to the church of Molesme.*

7

*Having therefore listened to your request and that of the brethren of Molesme, and having reread the letter about this affair addressed to us by the Lord Pope, who commits the whole to our disposition and judgment, and, firmly, upon the advice of numerous ecclesiastics — bishops as well as others — who were present with us, acquiescing to*

8

*your pleas and theirs, we decreed to restore him to the church of Molesme: in such wise, namely, that before he returns he is to go to Chalon and give back the staff and care of the abbey into the hand of our brother, the bishop of Chalon, to whom, in keeping with the usage of other abbots, he had made his profession and promised obedience; and that he is to release the monks of the New Monastery, free and absolved, from their profession and obedience — the profession they had made, the obedience they had promised him as their abbot; and thus he is to be*

9

*released by the bishop himself from the profession made to him and to the church of Chalon. We have also given leave to go back with him to Molesme to all those brethren of the New Monastery who would follow him when he leaves the New Monastery — but on the following condition: that thenceforth neither of the two presume to solicit or receive the other except in accordance with what the blessed Benedict lays down for the reception of monks*

10

*from a known monastery. After he has done all the above, we are sending him back to your Grace, for you to restore him as abbot to the church of Molesme; in such wise, however, that if afterwards he ever desert that church with his usual inconstancy, no one may be substituted for him*

*during the lifetime of the aforesaid abbot Geoffrey. All this we command as having the force of law by apostolic authority.*

11

*Concerning the church furnishings of the aforesaid abbot Robert, and all the other objects he took with him when he left the church of Molesme, and with which he journeyed to the bishop of Chalon and to the New Monastery, we establish that everything is to remain intact for the brethren of the New Monastery, with the exception of a certain breviarium, which they shall retain until the feast of Saint John the Baptist for copying, with the consent of the brethren of Molesme.*

12

Present at the making of this definition were the bishops Norgaud of Autun, Walter of Chalon, Béraud of Macon, Pons of Belley; and the abbots Peter of Tournus, Jarente of Dijon, Gaucerand of Ainay, as well as the papal chamberlain Peter, and many other honourable men of good testimony.

13

All these things that abbot agreed to and performed, absolving the brethren of Cîteaux from the obedience they had promised either in that place or at Molesme; and Lord Walter, bishop of Chalon, released and freed the abbot from the care of that church; and thus he returned, and with him certain monks who did not love the desert.

14

By this arrangement and apostolic enactment, therefore, those two abbeys have remained in peace and sovereign liberty.

- 15 Upon returning, however, the abbot took along this letter to his bishop as the shield of his defence.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **1 The commendatory letter of Abbot Robert**

2 *To his most dearly beloved brother and fellow-bishop, Robert, bishop of Langres, Walter, servant of the church of Chalon: greeting.*

3 *Be it known to you that brother Robert, to whom we had committed that abbey located in our episcopate, and called the New Monastery, has been released by us, in accordance with the definition by the Lord Archbishop*  
4 *Hugh, from the obedience promised to us. He himself has released and freed those monks who have decided to remain in the aforesaid New Monastery from the obedience they had promised him and from their profession.*

5 *Do not be afraid, therefore, as of now to welcome him and treat him with honour. Farewell.*

## **Chapter Nine**

### **1 On the Election of Alberic as First Abbot of the Church of Cîteaux**

2 Widowed, therefore, of its shepherd, the church of Cîteaux assembled and through an election according to the Rule promoted a certain brother, Alberic by name, to be its

abbot: a learned man, that is to say, well versed in things divine and human, a lover of the Rule and of the brethren, who had for a long time been carrying out the office of prior in the church of Molesme as well as in this one, and who had striven and laboured much and long so that the brethren could pass from Molesme to this place; and who, for the sake of this affair, had to endure many insults, imprisonment, and stripes.

## Chapter Ten

### 1                   **About the Roman Privilege.**

2                   Having accepted the pastoral charge, albeit with much resistance, the aforesaid Alberic, as a man of admirable foresight, began thinking of what storms of tribulations might sometime shake and afflict the house entrusted to him; and taking precaution for the future, and after consultation with the brethren, he dispatched two monks, John and Ilbodus, to Rome, entreating the Lord Pope Paschal through them that their church might sit beneath the wings of apostolic protection, quiet and safe from the pressure of all persons, ecclesiastical or lay, in perpetuity.

3                   Relying on sealed letters from the aforesaid Archbishop Hugh, from John and Benedict, cardinals of the Roman church, and also from Walter, bishop of Chalon, these brethren prosperously went to Rome and returned—this was before Pope Paschal, imprisoned by the Emperor, had committed his sin—bringing back an apostolic privilege

from him, drawn up in every detail in keeping with the wishes of the abbot and his companions.

- 4 We have deemed it appropriate in this little work to leave to our posterity these letters as well as the Roman Privilege, so that they may understand with what great counsel and authority their church was founded.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **1           The Letter of Cardinals John and Benedict**

- 2 *To their Lord and father Pope Paschal, everywhere indeed to be extolled with highest praise, John and Benedict: their very selves in everything.*

- 3 *Since Yours is the governing office to provide for all the churches, and to extend a hand to the just wishes of petitioners, and since Yours is the justice through whose supporting help the Christian religion should take its increase, we insistentlly plead with Your Holiness to deign to incline the ears of your piety to the bearers of this letter, who, upon our advice, have been sent to your Paternity by certain religious.*

- 4 *They are requesting that the precept which they received from your predecessor, our Lord Pope Urban of blessed memory, concerning quiet and stability of their monastic observance, and which, in keeping with the tenor of that same precept, the archbishop of Lyon, who at that time*

was legate, and other fellow-bishops and abbots, defined between them and the abbey of Molesme from which they had withdrawn in the interests of monastic observance—that this precept may through the privilege of your authority remain inviolate in perpetuity. For we have seen and do bear witness to their true monastic observance.

## Chapter Twelve

### 1                   **The Letter of Hugh of Lyon**

2           *To his most revered father and Lord Pope Paschal, Hugh, servant of the church of Lyon, his very self in everything.*

3           *These brethren, carriers of the present letter, passed by here on the way to the Loftiness of your Paternity; and because they have their residence within our province, namely, in the episcopate of Chalon, they have requested to be recommended to your Holiness by a letter from our lowliness.*

5           *Know then that they are from a certain place which is called the New Monastery; and that they left the church of Molesme with their abbot and went to live there for the sake of a stricter, more secluded life according to the Rule of the Blessed Benedict, which they had resolved to observe, having set aside the customs of certain monasteries — judging their frailty no match to bear with so great a burden. As a result, the brethren of the church of Molesme and certain other neighbouring monks will*

6 *not stop troubling and disquieting them, reckoning that, in the eyes of the world, they themselves will be held the more commonplace and despicable if these monks — so singular, as it were, and novel — are seen dwelling in their midst.*

7 *For this reason we humbly and confidently beseech your Paternity, for whom we so yearn, to receive kindly, as is your wont, these brethren who put all their hope, after the Lord, in You, and who are therefore fleeing for refuge to the authority of your apostolic office; and that You protect them with a privilege from your authority by freeing both them and their place from this trouble and disquiet. For, as the poor of Christ, they can prepare no defence against*  
8 *their rival by means of riches or power, but have their hope solely in God's clemency and Yours.*

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **The Letter of the Bishop of Chalon**

1 *To his venerable father, Pope Paschal, Walter, bishop of Chalon: greeting and due submission.*

2

*As your Holiness ardently desires that the faithful make progress in true religion, so also is it not expedient for*  
3 *them to lack the shelter of your protection and the warmth of your consolation.*

4 We humbly therefore request You to approve what was done in keeping with the precept of your predecessor, and with the definition and rescript of the archbishop of Lyon, then legate of the Apostolic See, and of his fellow-bishops and abbots — we ourselves were present for this, and ratified it with the others — concerning those brethren who, in their desire for a stricter life, upon the advice of holy men withdrew from the church of Molesme. God's loving kindness has placed them in our episcopate; and it is from them that the bearers of the present letter were dispatched and are standing in your presence. We also request that You deign to corroborate this by a privilege from your authority, so that that place may remain a free 5 abbey in perpetuity — saving, however, the canonical reverence due to our person and to our successors. The abbot, too, whom we ordained for that same place, and the rest of the brethren, solicit this confirmation from your loving kindness with all earnestness as a safeguard of their quiet.

## Chapter Fourteen

### The Roman Privilege

1 Paschal, bishop and servant of the servants of God, to the venerable Alberic, abbot of the New Monastery in the diocese of Chalon, and to his successors who according to the Rule, will be substituted for him: in perpetuity.

2 A desire shown to pertain to a religious resolve and the salvation of souls should, with God as its author, be



fulfilled without any delay. So it is, O sons most beloved  
3 in the Lord, that We admit without difficulty every petition  
in your request, for We congratulate you on your monastic  
4 observance with fatherly affection.

We decree, therefore, that the place where you have  
chosen to dwell for monastic quiet is to be safe and free  
from all mortal molestation, that it shall exist there as an  
5 abbey in perpetuity, and that it shall be specially  
protected under the guardianship of the Apostolic See —  
saving the canonical reverence due to the church of  
Chalon. By writ of the present decree, then, we forbid  
anyone whomsoever to change the state of your way of  
6 life, or to receive monks of your monastery by any ruse or  
act of violence whatsoever. Indeed, we confirm as  
reasonable and praiseworthy the decision in the  
controversy between you and the monks of the cloister of  
7 Molesme, which Our brother, the archbishop of Lyon, at  
that time representative of the Apostolic See, enacted  
together with bishops and other ecclesiastics in accord  
with the precept of Our predecessor of apostolic memory,  
Urban II.

You ought therefore to be mindful, O sons most beloved  
and longed for in Christ, that for some of you, it was the  
broad ways of the world that you left, while for others, it  
8 was the less austere narrow ways of a laxer monastery. So  
that you may be considered ever more worthy of this  
grace, then, endeavour always to have the fear and love  
9 of God in your hearts, so that the more free you are from  
the tumults and delights of the world, so much the more

*you may yearn to please God with all the powers of mind and soul.*

10 *Accordingly, if later on any archbishop or bishop, emperor or king, prince or duke, count or viscount, judge or any other person, ecclesiastical or lay, having knowledge of this present constitutional writ, attempt to contravene it, and having been warned two or three times, should he not amend by appropriate satisfaction: Let him be deprived of the dignity of his power and honour; let him know himself liable to divine judgment for the iniquity perpetrated; Let him be excluded from the sacred Body and Blood of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and let him be subject to strict vengeance at the Last Judgment. But as*

11 *for all who deal justly with that same place, may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon them, so that, receiving even here the fruit of these good deeds, they may find, in the presence of the stern Judge, the recompense of eternal peace.*

## **Chapter Fifteen**

### **The Institutes of the Monks of Cîteaux who Came from Molesme**

1 Thereupon that abbot and his brethren, not unmindful of  
their engagement, unanimously enacted a statute to  
2 establish and keep the Rule of the Blessed Benedict in that  
place, rejecting whatever offended against that Rule:  
namely, coats, fur garments, linen shirts, hoods, too, and  
drawers, combs and coverlets, mattresses, and a variety of

dishes in the refectory, as well as lard and all else that was  
contrary to the Rule in all its purity. So that, directing the  
3 whole course of their life by the Rule over the entire tenor  
of their life, in ecclesiastical as well as in the rest of the  
observances, they matched or conformed their steps to the  
footprints traced by the Rule. Having therefore put off the  
4 old man, they were rejoicing to have put on the new.

And because neither in the Rule nor in the *Life* of Saint  
5 Benedict did they read that this same teacher had ever  
possessed churches and altars, or offerings or burial dues,  
tithes of other men, ovens and mills, or manors and serfs,  
or again, that women had ever gone inside his monastery,  
or that he had given anyone burial there, except his sister,  
they accordingly renounced all these things, saying:  
Where the blessed father Benedict teaches that a monk  
6 should estrange himself from secular conduct, there he  
clearly testifies that these things should have no place at  
all in the conduct or in the hearts of monks, who ought to  
pursue the etymology of their name by fleeing these  
things.

They also said that the holy fathers, who were instruments  
of the Holy Spirit, and whose statutes it is a sacrilege to  
7 transgress, had divided tithes into four parts: namely, one  
for the bishop; another for the parish priest; a third for  
guests coming to that church, and for widows or the poor  
without other source of sustenance; a fourth for the repair  
of the church. And because they found in this accounting  
no mention of the monk, who possesses his own lands and  
8 lives off them by his own work and that of his farm

animals, they accordingly declined all these things as an unjust usurpation of the rights of others.

9 Having spurned this world's riches, behold! the new soldiers of Christ, poor with the poor Christ, began discussing by what planning, by what device, by what management they would be able to support themselves in this life, as well as the guests who came, both rich and  
10 poor, whom the Rule commands to welcome as Christ. It was then that they enacted a definition to receive, with their bishop's permission, bearded laybrothers, and to treat them as themselves in life and death — except that they may not become monks — and also hired hands; for without the assistance of these they did not understand how they could fully observe the precepts of the Rule day  
11 and night; likewise to receive landed properties far from the haunts of men, and vineyards and meadows and woods and streams for operating mills (for their own use only) and for fishing, and horses and various kinds of livestock useful far men's needs. And since they had set up  
12 farmsteads for agricultural development in a number of different places, they decreed that the aforesaid laybrothers, and not monks, should be in charge of those dwellings, because, according to the Rule, monks should reside in their own cloister. Also, because those holy men  
13 knew that the blessed Benedict had built his monasteries not in cities, nor in walled settlements or villages, but in places removed from populated areas, they promised to follow his example in this. And as he used to set up the  
14 monasteries he constructed with twelve monks apiece and a father in addition, they resolved to do likewise.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **Of Their Sorrow**

1

It caused some little dejection to the aforesaid man of  
2 God, the abbot, and to his own, that only rarely did anyone  
come there in those days to imitate them. For the holy  
3 men, having by heavenly inspiration come upon this  
treasury of virtues, eagerly longed to pass it on to the  
successors, so that it would be of profit for the salvation of  
4 many. But almost all who saw and heard about their  
unusual and, as it were, unheard of harshness of life,  
hastened less to approach them than to distance  
themselves in heart and body, and ceased not to be  
perplexed that they were persevering. But the mercy of the  
5 God who inspired his own to this spiritual warfare ceased  
not to develop it remarkably and to bring it to perfection  
for the profit of many, as what follows will show.

## **Chapter Seventeen**

### **Of the Death of the First Abbot and the Promotion of the Second and of their Institutes and their Joy**

1

2

Now the man of the Lord, Alberic, happily and well  
exercised by the discipline of the Rule in the school of  
Christ for nine and a half years, went forth to the Lord  
glorious in faith and virtues, and therefore deservedly to  
be rendered blessed by God in eternal life.

3 He was succeeded by a certain brother, Stephen by name,  
English by birth; he too had come there from Molesme  
with the others, and was a lover of the Rule and of the  
4 place. It was in his time that the brethren, together with  
that same abbot, forbade the duke of that region or any  
other Lord to hold court in that church at any time, as had  
formerly been their practice on solemnities.

5 Next, lest there remain in the house of God, where they  
wished to serve God devotedly day and night, anything  
smacking of pride or superfluity, or anything that might at  
any time corrupt the poverty—guardian of the virtues—  
6 which they had voluntarily chosen, they resolved to retain  
no crosses of gold or silver, but only painted wooden  
ones; no candelabra except a single one of iron; no  
thuribles except of copper or iron; no chasuble except of  
plain cloth or linen, and without silk, gold, and silver; no  
albs or amices except of linen, and likewise without silk,  
gold, and silver. As for all mantles and copes and  
7 dalmatics and tunics, these they rejected entirely. They  
did, however, retain chalices, not of gold, but of silver,  
and, if possible, gilded; and a communion-tube of silver,  
and only gilded, if that could be so; only stoles and  
maniples could be of silk, without gold or silver. As for  
8 altar cloths, they explicitly decreed that they be of linen,  
without pictorial ornamentation, and that the wine cruets  
be without gold or silver.

In those days that same church increased in lands and  
9 vineyards and meadows and farmsteads, nor did it  
decrease in monastic observance. God therefore visited  
10 that place in those times, pouring out the bowels of his

mercy upon those who were petitioning him, crying out to him, weeping before him heaving sighs long and deep by day, by night, and well nigh approaching the gateway to despair in that they were almost entirely lacking successors. For the grace of God seat to that church at a single time so many clerics, learned and noble, so many laymen, powerful in the world and likewise noble, that thirty simultaneously and with alacrity entered the novitiate, and by battling well against their own vices and the enticements of malign spirits, were able to finish their course. Encouraged by their example, the old and the young, men of every age in every part of the world, seeing in these that what they had once dreaded as impossible in the observance of the Rule was, in fact, quite possible, began running thither to bow their proud necks under the sweet yoke of Christ, to love ardently the hard and harsh precepts of the Rule, and wondrously to gladden and invigorate that church.

## **Chapter Eighteen**

### **Of the Abbeys**

1 After that they established abbeys in various episcopates,  
2 which under the bounteous and powerful blessing of the Lord so grew as days went by that within eight years, between those which had issued directly from the monastery of Cîteaux, and the others which had originated from these, the monasteries that had been constructed numbered twelve.





# THE CHARTER OF CHARITY

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## 1 On the Charter of Charity

### [Prologue]

2 **B**efore the Cistercian abbeys began to flourish, the  
abbot, Dom Stephen, and his brethren ordained  
that, in order to avoid any cause of conflict  
between bishop and monks, in no way would abbeys be  
founded in the diocese of any bishop before he had ratified  
and confirmed the decree drawn up and confirmed  
3 between the monastery of Cîteaux and the others which  
had issued from it. In this decree, then, the aforesaid  
brethren, taking precaution against future shipwreck of  
their mutual peace, elucidated and decreed and left for  
their posterity by what covenant, or in what manner,  
indeed, with what charity their monks throughout abbeys  
in various parts of the world, though separated in body,  
4 could be indissolubly knit together in mind. They  
considered that this decree should be called the Charter of  
Charity, because, averting the burdensome levying of all  
exactions, its statute pursues only charity and the  
advantage of souls in things human and divine.

1

## Here begin the chapters

- 2 I. That a Mother Church is Not to Require from a  
Daughter Church the Exaction of any Material  
Advantage
- 3 II. That the Rule is to be Understood and Kept by All  
in One Manner
- 4 III. That All are to have the Same Liturgical Books  
and Customs
- 5 IV. Of the General Statute between Abbeys
- 6 V. That the Mother is to Visit the Daughter Once a  
Year
- 7 VI. What Kind of Reverence is to be Shown the  
Daughter when she Comes to the Mother Church
- 8 VII. Of the General Chapter of Abbots at Cîteaux
- 9 VIII. Of the Statute between Those who Issued from  
Cîteaux and Those whom they have Begotten;  
and that All are to Come to the General Chapter;  
and of the Punishment of Those who do not Come
- 10 IX. Of Abbots who Show Contempt for the Rule or  
the Order
- 11 X. What the Law is to be between Abbeys of  
Different Filiations [*literally*: which did not Beget  
the Other]
- 12 XI. Of the Death and Election of Abbots

1                   **Here begins the Charter of Charity.**

## **Chapter I**

2                   **That a Mother Church is Not to Require**  
                      **from a Daughter**  
3                   **the Exaction of any Material Advantage**

3                   **B**ecause we know full well that all of us are  
servants, albeit useless servants, of the one true  
4                   King and Lord and Master, we therefore impose  
no exaction of earthly advantage or of temporal goods on  
our abbots and brother monks whom, through us, the most  
wretched of men, God in his loving kindness has  
5                   established in divers places under the discipline of the  
Rule. For, desiring to profit them and all the children of  
holy Church, we purpose to enact in their regard naught  
which will burden them, naught which will diminish their  
substance; lest, while wishing to gain abundance from  
their poverty, we be unable to avoid the evil of avarice  
which is, as the Apostle attests, a “serving of idols”. We  
do wish, however, for the sake of charity, to retain the care  
of souls, so that should they ever attempt to turn aside ever  
so little — which God forbid! — from their holy resolve  
and the observance of the Holy Rule, they may be able to  
return, through our sollicitude, to the straight path of life.

## **Chapter Two**

1                   **That the Rule is to be understood and kept  
                          by all in one manner**

2                   Now, however, we will and we command them, that they  
3                   observe the Rule of the Blessed Benedict in everything  
                          just as it is observed in the New Monastery. Let them not  
                          introduce a different meaning in the interpretation of the  
                          Holy Rule; but as our predecessors, the holy fathers—that  
                          is to say, the monks of the New Monastery—understood  
                          and kept it, and as we today understand and keep it, so let  
                          them too understand and keep it.

### **Chapter Three**

1                   **All are to Have the Same Liturgical Books  
                          and Customs**

2                   And because we receive in our cloister all their monks  
                          who come to us, and they likewise receive our monks in  
                          their cloisters, it therefore seems to us opportune, and this  
                          also is our will, that they have the usages and chant and all  
                          the books necessary for the day and night Hours and for  
                          Mass according to the form of the usages and books of the  
                          New Monastery, so that there may be no discord in our  
                          conduct, but that we may live by one charity, one Rule,  
                          and like usages.

### **Chapter Four**

## 1                   **The General Statute between Abbeys**

2           When, however, the abbot of the New Monastery comes to any of these monasteries to make a visit, the local abbot should give him precedence everywhere in the monastery, in token of the fact that the church of the New Monastery is mother of his church; and, as long as he remains there, the visiting abbot should take the place of the local abbot, except that he eats, not in the guest house, but with the brethren in the refectory in order to preserve discipline—unless the local abbot is absent.

3           Indeed, all visiting abbots of our Order should do likewise. But if several should be visiting, and the local abbot is absent, the senior of them should eat in the guest house.

4           This too is an exception: the local abbot should bless his own novices after the [period of] testing prescribed by the Rule, even in the presence of his abbatial superior.

5           Also, the abbot of the New Monastery should take care not to presume to deal with anything or to give orders about or handle anything concerning the material goods of the place to which he has come, against the will of the abbot and the brethren. But if he realises that the precepts of the Rule or of our Order are being violated in that place, then, with the advice of the abbot and in his presence, he should charitably apply himself to making correction. But if the local abbot is absent, he should nonetheless correct what he finds amiss.

## **Chapter Five**

### **That the Mother is to Visit the Daughter Once a Year**

1

Let the abbot of the senior church visit once a year all the  
2 monasteries he has founded; and should he visit more  
often, let them for that reason rejoice all the more.

## **Chapter Six**

### **What Kind of Reverence is to be Shown the Daughter when she Comes to the Mother Church**

1

Now when an abbot of any of these churches comes to the  
2 New Monastery, let him be shown the proper reverence;  
let him occupy the abbot's stall, receive the guests, eat  
with them—but only if the abbot is absent. Should he be  
3 present, however, let him do none of these things, but let  
him eat in the refectory. However, let the local prior  
4 manage the affairs of the monastery.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Of the General Chapter of Abbots at Cîteaux**

1

- 2 Let all the abbots of these churches come to the New Monastery once a year on the day they decide among themselves, and there let them treat of the salvation of their own souls; if something is to be emended or added to in the observance of the Holy Rule or of the Order, let them so ordain it, and let them reestablish among themselves the good of peace and charity.
- 3 But if any abbot proves to have been less zealous for the Rule or too intent on things secular, or habitually prone to any vice, let him there be charitably proclaimed. Let the one proclaimed prostrate and fulfil the penance assigned him for the fault. But only abbots are to make this proclamation.
- 4 But should any church fall into intolerable poverty, let the abbot of that monastery take care to make this matter known before the whole chapter. Then let the abbots, one and all, enkindled by the most intense fire of charity, hasten to relieve the penury of that church, according to their resources, from the goods bestowed on them by God.

## **Chapter Eight**

- 1 **Of the Statute between Those who Issued from  
Cîteaux  
and Those whom they have Begotten;**

**and that All are to Come to the General Chapter,  
and the Punishment of Those who do not Come**

2

But when any of our churches has grown by the grace of God to such an extent that it can construct another monastery, let them observe between themselves the same agreement we observe between ourselves and our brethren.

This, however, we do will and do reserve to ourselves: that all the abbots from every region are to come to the New Monastery on the day they decide among themselves, and there they are to obey in everything the abbot of that same place and the Chapter in the correction of things amiss and in the observance of the Holy Rule and of the Order.

3 But they do not have an annual chapter with those whom they have begotten.

4 However, should on occasion bodily infirmity or the blessing of novices prevent one of our abbots from being able to come to the aforesaid place of assembly on the appointed day, he should send his prior thither, who will take care to make known to the Chapter the reason for his staying away, and who will also, should we decree or change anything, bring this information back home to his abbot and brethren. But should anyone for any other

5 excuse ever presume to stay away from our General Chapter, let him prostrate for his fault at the Chapter of the following year, and make satisfaction by the penance for a less serious fault for as long as the master of the Chapter judges.



## Chapter Nine

### Of Abbots who Show Contempt for the Rule or the Order

1

2 But if any of the abbots is found to show contempt for the Holy Rule or for our Order or if he is found to be consenting to the vices of the brethren committed to his care, let the abbot of the New Monastery personally, or through the prior of his monastery, or else through letters, apply himself to warn him four times to emend.

3 But if he show contempt for this, then the abbot of the senior church should take care to make his error openly known to the bishop in whose diocese he lives, and to the canons of his church. Upon summoning him, and upon diligently examining his case with the aforesaid abbot, let him either correct him or else remove him from the pastoral charge as incorrigible. But if the bishop and clergy attach little importance to the violation of the Holy Rule in that monastery, and are unwilling to correct and depose that same abbot, then the abbot of the New Monastery and some abbots of our congregation whom he takes with him should go to that monastery and remove from office the transgressor against the Holy Rule; and the monks of that place, in the presence of the abbots, and with their advice, should elect as their abbot another who is worthy.

But should the abbot and monks of the local church be contemptuous of the abbots who come to them, or be

4 unwilling to emend in deference to them, let the be  
subjected to excommunication by the persons present, and  
from then on, should one of these wrongdoers come to  
himself and wish to flee the death of his soul, and desiring  
to change his life for the better, come to his mother,  
namely, the New Monastery, for permanent residence, let  
the monk be welcomed as a son of that church. When,  
however, this is not the case—and our brethren should  
5 make every effort to avoid it!—we receive no monk of any  
of these churches for permanent residence without the  
consent of his abbot. For neither do they welcome our  
monks for permanent residence. We do not introduce our  
monks into their church for permanent residence against  
their will, nor do they introduce theirs into ours.

But if the abbots of our churches see their mother, that is  
the say, the New Monastery, growing listless in her holy  
6 resolve, and swerving from the most straight path of the  
Holy Rule or of our Order, let them, through three of their  
fellow-abbots, and in the name of the other abbots—that  
is to say, the abbots of la Ferté, Pontigny, and  
Clairvaux—admonish the abbot of that place up to four  
times to emend, and let them zealously carry out in his  
regard the other things which we have judged should be  
done in the case of other abbots if they stray from the  
Rule—except that, even if he does yield, they are not  
themselves to replace him with another; nor, if he resists,  
are they to impose an anathema upon him. For if he does  
not acquiesce to their advice, let them not put off notifying  
the bishop and canons of the church of Chalon of his  
7 contumacy, asking that they summon him into their  
presence, and that, after having examined the complaint,

they either send him back utterly rebuked, or else expel him from his pastoral charge as incorrigible.

8 Upon his expulsion, the brethren of the same place are to send three messengers—or as many as they like—to the abbeys immediately founded by the New Monastery, and these are to convoke as many abbots as they can within a two-week period; and with their advice and assistance, let them elect for themselves an abbot, as God has foreordained. In the meantime, the Lord abbot of la Ferté should preside over the church until the shepherd, having  
9 been converted from his error, has been restored to it through the mercy of God, or else has himself become subject to another chosen to replace him according to the Rule.

10 But if the bishop and the clergy of the aforesaid city neglect to examine the person committing the violation in the manner we have said, then all the abbots [of those houses] which have originated directly from the New Monastery are to come to the place where the transgression has occurred, and depose that transgressor from office; and straightaway, in their presence, and with their advice, the monks of that church are to set an abbot over themselves. But should that abbot and his monks be unwilling to receive our abbots and obey them, let these  
11 not fear to strike them with the sword of excommunication, and cut them off from the body of the Church catholic. But afterwards, should any of those who have committed such violations, recover his senses at last and, wishing to save his soul, flee for refuge to any of our  
12 three churches—la Ferté or Pontigny or Clairvaux—let

him be received as a member of the household and fellow-heir of the church, until eventually his own church has been reconciled, and he can be restored to it, as is only just. In the meantime, however, the annual Chapter of abbots will not be celebrated at the New Monastery, but wherever it shall be provided for by the above named three abbots.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **What the Law is to be between Abbeys of Different Filiations**

1

This will be the law between those abbeys of different filiations. Each abbot is to give precedence everywhere in the monastery to any of his fellow-abbots who come there, so that the text may be fulfilled: In honour outdoing one another. Should two or more come at the same time, the senior of those arriving will take the higher place. All except the local abbot shall eat in the refectory, however, as we have said above. Otherwise, wherever they assemble they will take their rank according to the date of the abbeys, so that the one whose church is older will be the senior, but with this exception: that should one of them be vested in alb, he will carry out the function of the senior in its entirety, standing ahead of them all in the left-hand choir, even should he be junior to all. Wherever they sit down together, however, they make a bow to each other.

3

## **Chapter Eleven**

## Of the Death and Election of Abbots

1 Upon the death of their father, the brethren of the New  
Monastery are to send three messengers to the abbots, as  
we have said above—or more should they so wish—and  
2 are to gather there as many as they can summon within  
two weeks; and with their consent, let them appoint as  
their shepherd one whom God has foreseen. In the  
meantime, however, the Lord Abbot of la Ferté is to take  
the place of the deceased abbot in everything, as we said  
earlier regarding a different matter, until another abbot  
3 may, upon being elected, receive with the help of God  
both the place and its pastoral care. Also in the rest of the  
monasteries widowed in whatever manner of their own  
pastor, let the brethren of that place convoke the abbot of  
that church which gave them birth, and in his presence and  
4 with his advice let them elect for themselves an abbot from  
among their own brethren or those of the New Monastery  
or from the other churches. For Cistercians are not  
allowed to take to themselves an abbot from churches  
outside [the Order], or to give their own monks for the  
same purpose. But whatever person the monks elect from  
5 whatever monastery of our Order, let them receive him  
without opposition.

# THE EXORDIUM CISTERCII

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*Here begin the Usages of Cistercian monks*

## Chapter One

1

### Of the Departure of the Monks of Cîteaux from Molesme

2

**I**t is well known that in the episcopate of Langres there is a monastery, Molesme by name, of the most celebrated renown, and remarkable for monastic

3 observance. From its origin, God's clemency within a  
short while made it illustrious by the gifts of his grace, and  
ennobled it with illustrious men; nor did he render it less  
ample in possessions than resplendent in virtues.

Still, because association of possessions with virtues is not  
usually long-lasting, certain men from that holy  
congregation — men undoubtedly wise and of deeper  
4 understanding — chose rather to be occupied with  
heavenly pursuits than to be entangled in earthly affairs.  
So it was that the lovers of the virtues soon enough began  
thinking upon poverty, fruitful mother of a virile stock, at  
the same time perceiving that, though one could live there  
5 in a holy and respectable manner, this still fell short of  
their desire and purpose to observe the Rule they had  
professed. They speak to one another about what is  
moving each of them, and likewise discuss together how  
they may fulfil that verse, I will pay you my vows, which  
6 my lips have uttered.

Need more be said? Twenty-one monks together with the  
father of the monastery itself, that is to say, Robert of  
blessed memory, having departed by common counsel, by  
7 common assent strive to bring about what they conceived  
through one spirit.

After many labours, therefore, and exceedingly great  
difficulties, which all who will to live in Christ must needs  
suffer, they at length attained their desire and arrived at  
8 Cîteaux at that time a place of horror and of vast solitude.  
But judging that the harshness of the place was not at  
variance with the strict purpose they had already

9 conceived in mind, the soldiers of Christ held the place as truly prepared for them by God: a place as agreeable as their purpose was dear.

## Chapter Two

### Of the Origins of the Monastery of Cîteaux

1 And so in the year of the incarnation of the Lord, 1098,  
2 relying on the advice, and strengthened by the authority of  
the venerable Hugh, Archbishop of the church of Lyons  
and, at that time, Legate of the Holy See, and of the  
devout man, Walter, Bishop of Chalon, as well as of the  
illustrious Lord, Odo, Duke of Burgundy, they found a  
desert place and began building it into an abbey. The  
aforesaid Abbot Robert received the pastoral staff from the  
bishop of that diocese, that is, of Chalon; and the others  
bound themselves to stability under him in the same place.

However, it came to pass not long afterwards that, at the  
demand of the monks of Molesme, and on the order of  
Pope Urban II, and with the leave and consent of Walter,  
Bishop of Chalon, the same Robert was brought back to  
3 Molesme; and Alberic, an observant and holy man, was  
put in his place. For the sake of a truce and peace between  
the two churches, this was stipulated, and confirmed by  
apostolic authority: that from then on neither of them  
would receive a monk of the other into community without  
4 the commendatory letter provided for by the Rule.



This done, and through the solicitude and industry of the new father, the New Monastery in a short while made no little progress — God working withal — in its holy way of life; it shone in popular esteem, it grew in necessary resources. But the man of God, Alberic, who for nine years had been running there toward the prize of the upward call—and not in vain—in the tenth year laid hold of it.

He was succeeded by Dom Stephen, of English nationality, a most ardent lover and most faithful promoter of religious observance, of poverty, and of the discipline of the Rule. In his days it truly became manifest how true is what stands written: The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayer. For since the little flock had this alone to lament, the fact that it was little, this alone did they fear, and fear it, I say, well nigh to desperation: that Christ's poor could leave after them no heirs to their poverty; for neighbouring folk, while honouring in them holiness of life, shrank from their austerity; and thus they recoiled from imitating those to whom they were drawing nigh by devotion.

God, for whom it is easy to make great things from small, many things from few, beyond all hope stirred up the heart of many to imitate them, so that in the cell for the testing of novices, counting both clerics as well as laymen — and these, according to the world, noble and powerful — thirty were dwelling together. As a result of this visitation from on high — so sudden, so joyous — the barren one who had borne no offspring now began at last, and not without

10

reason! to rejoice: for many were the children of the desolate.

11 Nor did God cease to multiply a people for her day by day, and to increase joy, until, within the space of some twelve years, the joyful mother, counting only those who were fathers of monasteries, could gaze upon twenty sons of her own as well as sons of her sons, like olive plants round about her table. For she thought it not incongruous were she to imitate the examples, too, of the holy Father, Benedict, whose institutes she was embracing.

12 Moreover, from the very beginning, when the new planting had begun burgeoning with new branches, the venerable father Stephen, with a keenly watchful sagacity, had provided in advance a document of admirable discernment, as a sort of pruning-hook, namely, to cut off, namely, the budding shoots of schism which, springing up, could at some time choke the burgeoning fruit of mutual peace. So it was that he wished this document to be given the appropriate name: Charter of Charity — because its  
13 every article is redolent of only what pertains to charity, so that well nigh nothing else seems to be pursued in any of its parts, save this: Owe no one anything, but to love one another. Now this charter, as set down by the same father, and confirmed by the aforesaid twenty abbots, was  
14 safeguarded by the authority of the apostolic seal; it contains in greater detail what we have said, but here we shall touch only briefly on a summary of them.

[The *Exordium Cistercii* is followed at this point by the *Summa Carta Caritatis* and the *Capitula*.]

