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# A Spiritual Directory of the Order of Prémontré

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**A SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY  
OF THE ORDER OF PRÉMONTRÉ**

# INTRODUCTORY LETTER

of the Illustrious and Most Reverend

**Monsignor Hubert Noots, S. T. D.**

Abbot General of the Order of Prémontré

*The General Chapter of 1937 (4<sup>th</sup> session) had expressed the desire that renewed Statutes be drafted in a clear and concise style from which should be extracted all that deals with the Book of Ceremonies and ascetical theology, which have no direct relationship with the prescriptions of the Statutes. Subsequently, in the first session of the General Chapter of 1947, it is said that, in keeping with the norms of the preceding General Chapter, “all that deals with the ascetical and spiritual in the text proposed to the Chapter, has been removed; nevertheless material of this sort will be gathered together, even amplified, in a book entitled ‘The Spiritual Directory’, in such a manner that it would be useful for providing unity in the formation of novices and professed juniors in our Order.*

*At the meeting of the Definitors on November 23, 1948, it was announced that the publication of a “Spiritual Directory of the Order” is a work of the greatest importance, and all members of the Definitory agreed that, in accordance with what was expressed at the last General Chapter, the work should include: 1. the spiritual admonitions formerly contained in the Statutes with respect to exercises of piety, and also the qualifications which the officials of the Order ought to have; -- 2. an explanation of the spiritual doctrine of our Order as it is found in all the documents that we possess since the beginning of our Order; -- 3. a method of conducting the novitiate and forming the novices in the spiritual and regular life; -- 4. the norms which the Novice Master or Prefect of Clerics ought to follow; -- 5. instructions about ministry and the care of souls in our Order; -- 6. and whatever else which may be useful in a book of this kind.*

*It is clear from the above that this work is not meant to be a complete exposition of Christian spirituality but one which would show what is proper to the religious life in general, and to Norbertine life in particular.*

*We were happy to entrust the drafting of this book to the Most Rev. Emmanuel Gisquière, Abbot of Averbode, who could choose all necessary staff and useful collaborators to assist him in his task.*

*The issue of working on a “Spiritual Directory of the Order” was brought up again at the meeting of the Definitors on September 28, 1949, specifically under the leadership of the aforementioned Abbot of Averbode and his assistants. It was decided “that a plan would be drawn up and submitted for review to the Abbots of the various Circaries who could make their observations. Then the Directory in its final form would be subject to the approval of the Abbot General of the Order of Prémontré.”*

*Finally, in the third session of the meeting of the Definitors of the Order held on November 26, 1958 the Most Reverend Father Abbot of Averbode announced that he had finally finished the composition of the Spiritual Directory of the Order of Prémontré which he had been commissioned to*

*write, and that he had considered all the observations that were directed to him after he had sent a first draft to the Abbots of the Order.*

*The Definitory very cordially congratulated Abbot Gisquière and expressed their thanks for this long and difficult labor, accomplished with such zealous results and decided to entrust the book for printing to the press of the Abbey of Averbode.*

*No one will doubt the great importance of this work, especially in these troubled times, for it shows us the safe roads we must follow if we wish to preserve the true spirit of Norbertine life in the observances of our religious vocation. These observances have already been placed in danger by some thoughtless imprudent innovators and have already been denounced by our Holy Father Pope Pius XII, of happy memory, in his speech addressed to Superiors General on February 11, 1958.*

*In this address, the Pope expressed how important it is that the Superiors General exercise their governing authority according to their own approved rules and that of the Church so that the example of their life rather than their speech allows the splendor of the Gospel to shine forth. Thus the Pope intended in a few words to define how superiors were to lead their subjects. It is their task to take a firm and strong hand if it is necessary, clearly expressed in order to lead their subjects on the safe path of truth, without deviating from one side or the other, and without losing sight of the beginnings of their religious life in the spirit and the rules of each Institute.*

*As in matters of faith, so also in matters of religious perfection and regular observance, superiors should draw the norms of their Statutes of perfection not from what the majority may think, nor from those who reject the rules and observances of the past for that which is more recent and which seems more consonant with the ways of the world. Rather they should draw on the pure and well balanced source of doctrine which was given to us by the founders and long sanctioned by the Church. Nor should they be drawn away from them by these recent novelties.*

*We are pleased to present this Codex or "Spiritual Directory" to all the sons and daughters of our Holy Father St. Norbert, urging them to receive it joyfully and read it frequently. Superiors and subjects both will find in it a safe guide and a valuable advisor to live their own Norbertine life, together with salutary advice.*

Given at Rome, February 10, 1959 on the feast of

Blessed Hugh, first Abbot of Prémontré.

**+ Hubert NOOTS,**

**Abbot General of the order of Prémontré.**

# **PRELIMINARY CHAPTER**

## **ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION**

### **OF THE ORDER'S OWN SPIRITUALITY**

#### **Purpose of this Introduction.**

The rules that members of any religious family observe to achieve perfection would be handed down falsely unless they were in conformity to the mind of the founder and the spirit that prevailed in the early days of the institute and gave impulse to subsequent development.

It therefore seems opportune, prior to dealing with particular issues, to point out at the very beginning of this Spiritual Directory – insofar as historical sources allow – what the formation of the particular spirituality of the Premonstratensian Order was at its inception and its evolution over the following centuries.

We will briefly set out the reasons and purposes for which our father Saint Norbert was led to establish a new religious family. This was certainly by personal intuition, but also because of favorable conditions at the time. After that, we will add a few considerations on what were, over eight centuries, the theory and practice of the spiritual life in the Norbertine Order both as they were and those that still exist.

#### **The Initial Mind of Saint Norbert.**

The ancient Vita of St. Norbert refers to how he was affected at the time of his so called conversion, and shortly before he received Holy Orders and notes: "Filled with a new grace of inner strength, even before having stripped off the old man, he wanted to put on the garments and ornaments of the new man, in other words the religious habit and priestly dignity", persuaded that the gifts would be even more fruitful as they materialized in this double conferral.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after receiving Holy Orders as he desired, he retired to the famous monastery of Siegburg to "learn how to perform the duties of the priesthood he received and apply himself to living as a true religious".<sup>2</sup> These texts show us unequivocally the dual concern of our father Saint Norbert, of leading an interior life along with apostolic activity, by the practice of asceticism for a more perfect life, while exercising his priestly functions with more care. Thus, we see germinate in the soul of Norbert, the new priest, that which will characterize the Order that he would soon found.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is found in many manuscripts of Vita B, chap. 1, Migne, PL 170, col. 1261f.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., col. 1263.

## **Elements Added by the Time Period.**

Our founder had to rely also on other sources in order to promote his projects: the ecclesiastical authority, the aspirations of the faithful as well as already existing institutes.

### *Gregorian reform.*

During the century before the ordination of Saint Norbert, a very profound reform of the clerical state already occurred. This reform was widespread. It was called "The Gregorian Reform" because its principal initiator was Pope Gregory VII. At this time decrees had already been promulgated, both by the sovereign pontiff himself and by many bishops and synods, to root out many abuses and serious disorders among the clergy, to instill in those who were to lead the faithful to a true and pure apostolic spirit, together with the seeking of their own perfection. In fact, this reform progressed slowly. But already at the time when Saint Norbert was young, older canons were encouraged to follow this better life, and new ones were moving forward. There was no lack of fervent clerics whose hearts urged reform. There were also here and there itinerant preachers who championed the apostolic life, living their apostolic work "according to the Gospel of Christ", i.e. fulfilling the command of Christ our Lord, that when travelling they should take with them neither satchel nor bread nor money nor two tunics.<sup>3</sup>

### *Apostolic movement.*

It was the custom at this time to designate under the name of "Apostolic Movement" the tendency to return to the perfection of the early Church when, under the direction of the Apostles, "the multitude of believers had one mind and one heart; no one claimed anything as his own, rather everything was held in common."<sup>4</sup> Many lay people wished to achieve this perfection and very often sought as groups to embrace the religious life. Hence in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries there arose an extraordinary increase and expansion of monasteries. These were assemblies of choir monks or canons around whom there lived under the same rule lay brothers or "conversi" and nuns. Often, the radiant holiness or the lively eloquence of some preacher ignited the crowd of candidates toward the perfect life and attracted them to the cloister.

### *Canons regular.*

There flourished also at that period an institution whose character and makeup contributed much to the form and spirit of the Order that Saint Norbert founded. I speak of the institution of the canons regular.

Very quickly, of course, there had appeared in the Holy Church a specific form of life suitable for those engaged in clerical functions, for those who were called to lead the faithful eager to practice Christian perfection. For some holy bishops, emulating the poor and chaste life of the Apostles living together in Jerusalem, have almost imitated the common life of monks with their clerics. Among these bishops St. Augustine stands out. He established a "monastery of clerics" in his episcopal home, thus securing a clerical perfection and promoting an asceticism that was almost monastic. Others here and

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 9: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 4: 32.

there later followed this example imposing common life on their clerics. In the 8th century Saint Chrodegang, Bishop of Metz, wrote a rule for the clergy of his Church. In the 9th century the Council of Aix la Chapelle promulgated ordinances to which clerics of the Kingdom of the Franks were subject. Others, going even further, imposed on their clergy a common life, strictly led as at the time of Saint Augustine, with the surrender of their patrimony. Pope Nicholas II did likewise at the Roman Council of 1059. Hence gradually there arose the distinction between the "secular" canons, who did not renounce ownership of their property and eventually abandoned the common life, and the "regular" canons, who, on the contrary, strictly practiced a community of life and of property as the Apostolic community and the monks did.

Thus, under the impulse of the Holy Church, a notable part of the western clergy tended toward a more perfect life by the most appropriate means. In the 11th and 12th centuries, there not only were more monasteries of clerics attached to the churches engaged in ministry, but also churches were established specifically for the sole purpose of providing clerics wishing to live a more perfect way to do this without having to abandon their apostolic ministry.

The canons regular were accustomed to justify their way of life by referring to the Institutes of the Fathers of the Church and the Councils which, one way or another, had recommended the common life and poverty to the clerics or others who were looking for perfection. But when Augustinian doctrines were in vogue, attention was particularly drawn to his examples and writings. Also, from the middle of the 11th century, the "Rule of St. Augustine" was very frequently chosen as the standard of living by the canons regular. However, it cannot always be determined whether the type of common life lived at Hippo and described in Possidius' Life of St. Augustine is intended or is the reference rather to the book which was published under his name and contained the "*Ordo Monasterii*" of uncertain origin, as well as the "*Regula Tertia*", or Letter 211 (formerly numbered 109) of Saint Augustine written to the nuns of Hippo.<sup>5</sup> This last document is currently called simply the "Rule of St. Augustine".

### **A Premonstratensian Community is Established by Saint Norbert.**

Let us turn back now to our Holy Father Norbert. On the one hand knowing his deepest desire and on the other hand the circumstances of the time, we will easily understand with what spirit the founder and his first companions were imbued.

After his ordination, Saint Norbert made a forty day retreat at the monastery of Siegburg and exercised his priestly duties. Then he returned to Xanten, his birthplace, where there was a chapter of secular canons to which he had been enrolled from childhood. After a vain attempt to recall his colleagues to a better and more fruitful life he led a solitary life for three years near the church of Xanten. But when he had the opportunity he taught the people and spread his ideas for reform of the clergy.

Then after obtaining from the sovereign pontiff Pope Gelasius II the faculties to preach the Word of God everywhere, he took up the life of an itinerant preacher, after renouncing his patrimony and all stipends and adopting a very austere lifestyle. After a year of hard work, he went to Pope Callistus II, the successor of Pope Gelasius, and sought from him confirmation of the aforementioned faculties. Most

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<sup>5</sup> Migne PL 33, col. 958-965.

likely he received these faculties from the new Pope. Several bishops, however, tried to persuade him to lead a less harsh life for his body appeared to be broken. Especially Bartholomew, the Bishop of Laon, probably inspired by the Pope, in person invited him to exercise his apostolic zeal locally rather than as an itinerant preacher, by attaching him canonically to a church. Bartholomew himself, seeking to retain Norbert in his diocese it seems, proposed to the Pope that he offer Norbert the position of provost of the collegiate church of Saint-Martin on the outskirts of Laon. Though somewhat reluctant, Saint Norbert agreed in a spirit of prompt obedience to the orders of the Pope. According to the testimony of an ancient *Vita* we read: "I assent to your wish lest I be accused of insisting on my rights in anything."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless he added two conditions which seemed necessary, namely: "I choose to live the evangelical and apostolic life as soundly understood,"<sup>7</sup> and: "I did not leave great wealth at Cologne to come in search of lesser wealth at Laon. I do not want to stay in cities but in deserts and uncultivated areas."<sup>8</sup>

The austerity of life preached by Saint Norbert had quickly alienated the canons of Saint-Martin of Laon. Hence he was forced to withdraw. Nevertheless, the Bishop of Laon, unwilling to give up his desire to have this man of God in his diocese, showed Norbert various places in his diocese that were suitable for religious life and finally, in the forest of Vosges, a solitary place called Prémontré. Saint Norbert did not readily agree to tie himself down to some place; however, overcome by the urging of Bartholomew and many others, both religious and noble laymen, and no doubt moved by the Holy Spirit, he chose Prémontré and accepted the task of founding a monastery there.

Thus, after the winter ended he went to gather colleagues resuming his role as an itinerant preacher. Because of the circumstances which have been described above his mission succeeded very well, so that around Easter, 1120, he returned to Prémontré with thirteen companions, and the following year with forty, both laymen and clerics. It is quite certain that Norbert imbued these early confreres with his own spirit, holy zeal and the spirit of penance.

But there soon appeared the need to give a rule this community which increased rapidly. Indeed, our holy father Norbert thought that "without order, without a rule, without the institutions of the Fathers, it was not possible to observe the apostolic and gospel mandates,"<sup>9</sup> i.e., the practice of austere poverty and the common life according to the example of the Apostles and early Christians. He rejected suggestions from some proposing that he adopt the eremitic or anchorite life, or even embrace the order of Cîteaux. He chose the Rule of Saint Augustine, which appeared to him suitable for leading the apostolic life in all its rigor, without prejudice or injury to the exercise of the canonical life to which many of them were enrolled from childhood.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Vita A*, n. 9, Monum. Germ. Histor., Scriptores Tom. XII, p. 678.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Hermannus Laudunensis. *De miraculis S. Mariae Laudunensis*, Lib. III, N. 3, Ibidem, p. 656, or Migne PL 156, col. 991.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita A*, n. 12, as above, p. 683.

<sup>10</sup> It seems that the "Regula S. Augustini" chosen by St. Norbert relying on the ancient documents viewed the type of life of the community of Hippo rather than the written text of the holy Doctor. This is suggested by the following text from *Vita A*: "(Norbert) now wished to live (the apostolic life), which he heard had been assigned and renewed by that same holy man (S. Augustine) after the Apostles." (Monum. Germ. Histor., as above.)



It is therefore evident that we had been destined by our holy Founder for a life that was properly clerical, which means a canonical life, according to the example of the Bishop of Hippo in poverty and austerity, such that ascetical practices are naturally directed to a more perfect exercise of the clerical life as such.

### **The First Development of the Order.**

After the foundation of Prémontré Norbert remained an itinerant preacher. But from now on, noting some easing up of life among clerics in many places, he reformed chapters, would often convert castles into monasteries, and also chose as companions clerics who were concerned about a more perfect way of life. For all of these projects he used brothers of the newly established Premonstratensian Order, but did not impose the same discipline everywhere, but rather adapted to the local situation. He wanted his religious to embrace the clerical life in every aspect of its activities, be they variable to some extent, contemplative or active, whether they lived in out of the way places or among the people, even in large cities and towns. But in any case he held that they should be really worthy of the name religious, imbued with the spirit of evangelical self-denial and the apostolic tradition.

Thus our Founder already launched this religious Order whose members have at heart to be always "prepared for every good work".<sup>11</sup>

A few years later, in 1126, Saint Norbert was appointed Archbishop of Magdeburg. Until then the Abbey of Prémontré and other abbeys founded by him were also governed by him and there was no close connection among them. Moreover, it seemed necessary to enact detailed rules for everyday life. Since Norbert had now been called to other duties, all of these abbeys found themselves unexpectedly deprived of a father, so it is not surprising that various difficulties and deficiencies resulted from this situation. Various measures to deal with this situation were devised, which did not fail to exercise some notable influence on the spiritual doctrine and practices of our Order.

### **The Government of Blessed Hugh Inclined Toward Contemplation and Austerity.**

First of all, Norbert allowed the brothers of the Church of Prémontré to elect their own shepherd. They chose Hugh of Fosse as their abbot. Likewise in other houses also Norbert, and soon even Hugh, appointed abbots for the other houses. These abbots from then on met annually to suitably restore matters in the various monasteries.

Hugh, a man very focused on contemplation and asceticism, had his heart set not only on restoring the canonical life of the confreres according to the apostolic practices revived by St. Augustine, but also as far as possible shaped by monastic practices. Therefore when he wrote the first Statutes of our Order under the inspiration and the guidance of Saint Norbert he borrowed much from the Cistercian Usages and the Constitutions of Cluny. Therefore, it happened that while canons, even regular canons, were frequently accused of living a life less austere and harsh than the monks, the Premonstratensians, with their kind of very severe life, escaped such a charge. Among other things such as poverty, so greatly recommended and practiced by St. Norbert, they were acquitted not only by community of goods but moreover marked by extreme simplicity of life and a strict diet. It was in some respects the tendency of

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Tim. 2: 21.

the "Apostolic Movement" of the 11th and 12th centuries that would eventually lead to the creation of the mendicant orders. But unlike the latter, the Premonstratensians were not seeking to obtain their necessary material sustenance by begging but by their labor. Thus a sort of transition was made from the monastic Orders, which practiced a harshness of life without assuming clerical duties, and the canons, who took on here and there the service of churches but without the austere practices, to the mendicant Orders which would combine a rigorous life and apostolic ministry.

For this reason it is perhaps due more to the example of our Holy Father Norbert that our Order was always imbued with an intense zeal for souls, while to Blessed Hugh – whom we rightly honor in the liturgical office with the title “Father” – that the contemplative and ascetical nature has been introduced to the Premonstratensian Order from its beginnings. At least it seems to be so. In practice however this characteristic double aspect of our Order is manifested with more or less evidence depending on the country in which it was established. Parish ministry quickly took precedence in the German countries, while that remained more subordinate to monastic practices in the regions closest to Prémontré. But everywhere, the primitive impetus toward apostolate, adapted to a variety of forms, flourished, animated and made fruitful by holiness and strictness of life.

### **Further Development of the Asceticism and Piety in the Order of Prémontré.**

The above shows sufficiently the essential character of the Order to which it had to remain faithful if it wished, not only in word but in reality, to perpetuate the spirit in which it was founded by the Patriarch St. Norbert and Blessed Hugh.

In fact, at the very beginning of its existence and during its eight centuries, the Order of Prémontré received, both in events and in personnel, a number of imprints even though minor but which have contributed to what it is now.

#### *The Influence of St. Augustine: the primacy of charity.*

We will first deal with the influence of Augustinian spirituality. Our forefathers had for their religious life the Rule or Charter of the Doctor of Hippo. This Rule mainly formed the Premonstratensians in their desire for perfection, in leading a common life and the strict demands of poverty, as described in the Rule and as it was practiced in the monastery of Hippo. Moreover, whereas they acknowledged Augustine as their father and legislator, they persistently read his writings in preference to other Fathers of the Church, holding him in greater esteem, so that the notion of the primacy of charity, so often and constantly found in the works of Saint Augustine, was imprinted deeply in their hearts.

This is made clear both by the history of the Order and its works as well as by the ascetical books left by the Norbertine communities, so that Adam the Premonstratensian could say correctly: “Our Order directs its whole intent to this end that it can campaign in charity”<sup>12</sup>; and George Lienhardt more seriously: “The love of God and neighbor is the goal of the Rule of St. Augustine and the Norbertine Order.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *De tripartito Tabernaculo*, proem. I, 10, Migne PL 198, col. 615.

<sup>13</sup> *Disciplina tyrocinii... Exhortator domesticus II*, Augustae Vindelicorum 1761, p. 385.

### *Personal devotion to the humanity of Christ.*

At the time when the Norbertine Order began to spread far and wide, a new form of more affective and personal devotion appeared among the Christian people toward the most sacred humanity of Christ. This devotion at the time had Saint Bernard as its chief preacher and propagator, and later it found remarkable expression in the book entitled "The Imitation of Christ", whose author belonged to the Canons Regular.

Our Order obviously could not remain indifferent to this new form of devotion. And indeed, truly affective, vivid and profound devotion toward Jesus Christ is found in the writings of blessed Hermann Joseph, of Philip of Harvengt, Abbot of Bonne Espérance, and of Adam the Premonstratensian (Adam Scot), to name only the earlier protagonists. This devotion did not lack deep roots everywhere in Norbertine hearts.

A harmonious synthesis was thus established between elements of the so-called objective piety, such as the Holy Scripture and the liturgy, which are our food in the Divine Office, and more subjective and more affective items, subject certainly to the former, but providing "Interior striving of our souls"<sup>14</sup>, without which it can hardly produce the fruits of salvation. A strong liturgical piety, relying on the splendor of worship, flourishes vigorously in our Order, both nourishing and directing the meaning of devotion, so moving the mind to perform generous and salutary acts.

### *Eucharistic devotion.*

The immemorial tradition passed on to the sons of St. Norbert is that he used to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice very devoutly.<sup>15</sup> This celebration was always the center of his apostolate. It was during Mass or at least in close connection with it that he accomplished his major miracles. And finally it was to restore honor in particular to the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist that he and his followers came to Antwerp to end the sacramental heresy of Tanchelm. Thus, Eucharistic worship, especially with regard to the Mass, has always held a privileged place from the beginning, both in tracts about spirituality and in daily life. As early as the year 1290, the first chapter of our Statutes was entitled: "Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar". It was therefore not extraordinary that the new form of Eucharistic devotion in the 13th century was greeted with eagerness and adopted solemnly in the churches of our Order. Pope Pius XI gave witness that the Norbertine family did not swerve from this tradition, declaring in an audience with some Premonstratensian abbots that our Order is "gloriously Eucharistic and eucharistically glorious."<sup>16</sup>

### *Marian devotion.*

What shall we say about our Marian piety? Indeed, many indicators both liturgical and literary of the Order show clearly that the sons of Saint Norbert willingly adopted practices which at various times tended to express or to strengthen Marian devotion. We have a shining example in our founder who

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<sup>14</sup> Encyclica of Pope Pius XII *Mediator Dei*, AAS XXXIX (1947), p. 574.

<sup>15</sup> *Testimonium Fratrum Capenbergensium*, in *Analectis Norbertinis* I, 4, Migne PL 170, col. 1347.

<sup>16</sup> These words were spoken in an audience granted after the Eucharistic Congress held in Rome in 1932. They were later reported in a newsletter dated January 25, 1934 sent to the whole Order by Abbot General Gummarus Crets.

placed the Abbey of Prémontré under the patronage of our Lady and our Order has always remained in the doctrinal line and the practice of a subsidiary piety towards the most sweet Virgin Mary. The issue will be taken up again in the course of this book.

#### *More Recent Ascetical Practices.*

It suited the nature of the Premonstratensian Order to assimilate the asceticism and devotional methods which appeared over time provided that their practice fit in organically with that which had been entrusted to us by our former fathers. So it was with various practices from the 16th century from Jesuit writers and preachers, such as spiritual exercises lasting over several days, daily meditation at a fixed time, and frequent examination of conscience. These and other similar things often enough were accepted by Premonstatensians fairly quickly and remain until today. There can be no doubt that these had a considerable influence on our modes of devotion and asceticism as has become more evident in the last four centuries.

#### **Conclusion.**

It does not appear that the Premonstratensians were ever concerned about forming a special school of spirituality. It was enough for them to use simply and generously the Evangelical Counsels and other means of perfection approved and recommended by the Church; furthermore they followed the examples of the “Fathers rightly honored”<sup>17</sup> who had preceded them on the way.

But this could not be done without the mindset of the holy founder and his first disciples imprinted circumspectly on their spiritual offspring. On the other hand, the external conditions that led to the birth and the evolution of the Order helped develop our spiritual doctrine and practice.

Because Saint Norbert founded an Order of canons regular seems to us to include these essential features:

- That the public worship be celebrated with suitable splendor, work is carefully given to the divine office and all of this to be done in a church to which we are attached by close connection.
- Because the same holy patriarch of ours burned with a great love of souls, this in turn brings about our aspiration to perfection by the vows and religious discipline, all of which is ordered to the priestly life as such, ensuring its sanctification and enriching our ministry.
- The reason why we devote ourselves to the austerity of the cloister and the exercise of mortification is because the same holy Father Norbert and Hugh, the first abbot of Prémontré, wanted their sons to imitate the monks by the rigor of penance and strict discipline.
- The reason we give primary place in our spiritual life to the exercise of charity that the Bishop of Hippo so extolled and practiced, is because we recognize St. Augustine as father and legislator.
- Because diverse circumstances have led our Fathers to promote a devotion, both tender and strong, toward the Holy humanity of Christ and the Sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist, in

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<sup>17</sup> “Patres merito colendi” – Vesper hymn from the Feast of All Saints of our Order.

which He dwells in an ineffable manner, as well as to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ and our own Mother; this indicates the direction we ought to give to our piety if we want to remain faithful to the eight century tradition of our religious family.

These are the principles, along with a few others of the same nature, that should be highlighted in the advice that there will be given in this present Spiritual Directory to be given to the sons of Saint Norbert so that each will be able to care for them in his own life and ensure his ascetic discipline. Keep in mind the monitum of Pope Saint Pius X urging religious to "follow the footsteps of the very holy men whom they venerate as founders and fathers of their Orders; no one is unaware that the purer and more copious sap that the tree draws from the roots, the broader the branches and richer the fruit that is promised."<sup>18</sup> Pope Pius XI spoke similarly to religious in these words: "First we urge the men of religious orders to consider as examples their founders and legislators if they want to move forward in the graces of their vocation and surely extensively as participants.... This is why religious, like excellent sons, must put all their care and concern into honoring their law giving Father...drinking in his spirit, because they will never be cut off from him as long as they follow in his footsteps."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Letter of August 4, 1913, AAS V (1913), p. 387.

<sup>19</sup> Letter of March 19, 1924, AAS XVI (1924), p. 135; or *Enchiridion de Statibus perfectionis* I, n. 348, p. 402.

**FIRST PART**

**THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE**

**OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**IN OUR ORDER**

## First Section

# THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL END OF THE ORDER TO BE PURSUED

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## FIRST CHAPTER

### SEEKING AFTER INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION

#### **The Tendency to Perfection in General.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ presented as a goal for all people to strive for the perfection of the spiritual life: "Be perfect," he said, "as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, nobody is entitled to stop in his spiritual ascent by claiming to have done enough. In this, also, the Apostle Paul had "the spirit of God"<sup>2</sup> when he urged his followers to grow "into the perfect man, who is Christ come to full stature."<sup>3</sup> Do we not read in the final pages of the Holy Scriptures this pressing exhortation: "The virtuous must live on in their virtue and the holy ones in their holiness?"<sup>4</sup>

Yet no one is unaware that most Christians are slowed in their march to perfection by the wiles of the devil and the temptations of the world and the desires of our fallen nature. In addition they are deterred by the multiple concerns of physical life, seeking food for themselves and others, "with necessary concerns for many things of this world and how to please a spouse; and they are divided."<sup>5</sup> All these concerns very often make them neglect the care of their spiritual life, and unless they strive with almost heroic efforts, they will arrive at the end of life without having achieved the degree of perfection which God had intended for them and for which He no doubt provided abundant graces. Not to mention those - many or not, we don't know - who die in a state of rebellion against God and who are, unfortunately and for eternity, deprived of this final end that alone could have given them supreme happiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 5: 48.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 7: 40.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 4: 13.

<sup>4</sup> Apoc. 22 : 11.

<sup>5</sup> I Cor. 7: 33.

### **The Path of Counsels, the Shorter Way to Perfection.**

In the Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed giving precepts, and also indicating means by which people could strengthen themselves and pursue the fight against the enemies of the soul. But in addition to the more common precepts to be observed by all in order to avoid falls and advance on the way to God, here and there the divine Master indicates for us a path that leads more quickly to perfection. However, "not all grasp these norms, but only those to whom it is given."<sup>6</sup>

This privileged teaching is helped by counsels which lead in that direction so that those who generously follow these counsels are freed from the things that usually bring delay and impediment to the pursuit of perfection. The Evangelical counsels include voluntary poverty, perfect chastity and full obedience. Whoever undertakes the way of perfection soon realizes that there is no other way to arrive faster and more surely at Christian perfection and to follow Christ more closely than giving up for God material goods, carnal pleasures and independence in the conduct and organization of his own life. In fact, there has always been in the Church of Christ those faithful who preferred the more perfect way of Evangelical counsels over common discipline: certainly virgins and ascetics, anchorites and the early cenobites – witnesses who acted on such reasoning in the early Church.

However, for the pursuit of this perfection to really exist as a state of life public profession of perfection helps. This dedicates a person once and for all to that sublime intent. This began to be celebrated when holy men began to impose on their disciples a common life and various disciplines by which diverse effort could be coordinated for conforming life to the Evangelical counsels. The religious state was thus properly made distinct from other states of life, including those faithful who openly – in a society approved by the Church – bound their whole life to God to serve him in works of perfection.

This consecration characterizes and guides all life. Therefore those who feel called by Christ to follow closely and come into religion are required, lest their offering of themselves be vain and illusory, to strive carefully toward an ever greater perfection. Indeed full consecration of oneself to God on the day of religious profession is itself not perfection but presupposes a generous decision to pursue the work of perfection with determined measures. However the fullness of consecration is destroyed and immediately the promise is voided in the very profession. It is never right to pull back from a desire for further perfection, but it is fitting on the contrary that the desire to advance remain constant. The Code of Canon law and even religious Constitutions offer much in pointing to juridical order. They are a framework without which religious life can certainly not even be considered. But the spiritual fervor of our Premonstratensian life requires something more.

### **A Double Fundamental Arrangement.**

It is of the utmost importance, on the one hand, that our dedication and renunciation be complete and truly whole and, on the other hand, that our desire for perfection be constantly maintained.

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<sup>6</sup> Mt. 19: 11.



### *Total consecration.*

Under the Old Law, there were various kinds of sacrifices. In many of them only a portion of the victim was burnt, while the remaining parts were given to the priest or given back to the one who offered the sacrifice. In the holocaust, which was the noblest sacrifice, the offering was completely consumed to show that everything was given to the Lord.

In the New Testament, besides the unique sacrifice properly named the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross and which is constantly renewed on our altars, what is required of every Christian is improperly called a sacrifice. The victim in this case would be the very person who offers it. But sacrifice is not sought equally from all because of the completeness of the gift. For the most part God asks only that they deny themselves as much as is needed and sufficient to keep the commandments and to not misuse created things contrary to the will of the Creator. The offered victim in part remains the property of the one who offers it. But from some God requires not any sacrifice of oneself whatever but actually a holocaust, that is, that they give the full and total gift of themselves in his honor. Among these are found, without doubt, those who give themselves by religious vocation and renounce publicly – declaring by vows – the threefold form of goods which, owned or used, usually hinder people in their search for God, their supreme end, because the acquisition or conservation of these properties seems too desirable. Such a holocaust is very closely united to the holocaust of Christ who, on the cross, offered Himself totally to His father and whose sacrifice is continuously renewed on altars.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly they intend to observe faithfully the strict obligations of their religious profession. But if they wish to respond fully to the spirit of their vocation, there is no concern to seek how far the vows obligate. Rather they have in their heart to give themselves totally out of love, holding nothing back, ready for anything that the Lord might ask of them as he speaks to the soul in secret or through the voice of superiors. This total giving of oneself is well expressed by the words of King David after he had spent so much for the building of the Temple of God, a work that would be completed by his son Solomon: "With a sincere heart, I willingly offered all."<sup>8</sup> "Everything", without restriction or limitation, and this "willingly", without wailing or looking back with regret, because "God loves a cheerful giver"<sup>9</sup>, and in simplicity of heart that excludes all pharisaical boasting and seeking the approval of others.

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<sup>7</sup> Someone wrote correctly: "Religious profession is a sacrifice, a holocaust, by which a person immolates and consecrates himself to God. There is therefore reason to draw an analogy between the Premonstratensian rite of profession on the altar with the sacrifice of the Mass: in the religious profession there evolves a certain spiritual sacrifice represented as a kind of oblation, an image of the Eucharistic sacrifice by the offering and the immolation of the victim. As a preparation of the Mass of the catechumens precedes the actual Mass, the novitiate prepares for religious profession. And as at Mass all those assisting as a royal people of priests, unite their offering to that of the priest, so the young newly professed places his own offering on the altar, written in his own hand, by which, renouncing his freedom and attached to the Order, i.e., a presentation of a sacrifice to God. And as at Mass, so also at religious profession, Holy Communion is the ultimate act of sacrifice, and the new religious, by participating in the Holy Table, professes himself most beautifully united to the Order and already to Christ." (A. Palodini, *Ephemerides liturgicae*, 1935, p. 387 f.)

<sup>8</sup> 1 Paral. 29: 17.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor. 9: 7.

It is extremely important that the original donation of self is made generously, out of love of God, and the desire to imitate more perfectly the example of Jesus Christ, with all self-interest excluded. Let each religious be and remain aware that by his profession he had made an eminent act of the virtue of religion. Thus, if he acted only out of reasons from the natural order or sensitivity or because of law, he needs to fear something is missing in his consecration to God and thus he is denied many salutary fruits. Therefore, it should be clear then, that he should strive to give himself irrevocably and totally out of genuine supernatural motives, and give himself up totally to the mind of Christ the Lord.

*The Constant Desire to Move Forward.*

Nevertheless there are many obstacles by which the self- donation, by total affect on the day of profession, is hindered in effect from being truly total. One's whole life is already certainly consecrated to God, but by that law that we only tend toward perfection, rather than having already attained the desired end. We are not dealing with a gift offered once forever, about which no further care is needed. Until death, we have to seek ever higher by means of renunciations, denials, sacrifices again and again. These are due to God by reason of our initial offering. Thus, and only thus, the mind remains faithful to the God inspired intent, conceived at the beginning of one's "conversion."

This persistent will to give oneself over totally, solicitous to avoid the least "violation in the offering"<sup>10</sup> made at the beginning, and always prompt to add new attempts to continually cut off the shoots of egotism that keep sprouting up again, this is the source of burning and efficacious desire toward an even greater perfection. In this condition is found a means – not to be rejected – of constantly progressing. The greatest care must henceforth be made to foster such a disposition without which a religious necessarily begins to grow tepid and harvest few of the fruits from the state of perfection to which he pledged himself.

It cannot be denied that first fervor and a burning desire for the sublime are often lessened because of studies or some other external reason and not infrequently destroyed. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that a high regard for perfection, nurtured at the beginning of religious life, is always kept burning, and the desire for such should be cultivated. For this purpose, daily spiritual exercises, well established, and periodically renewed should be cultivated, such as days of recollection and holy retreats.

It follows from the above that it is necessary to deal with the striving for perfection from the very nature and demands of the religious state, like a river following its course, according to the nature and the requirements of the religious State. But the specific character of our Order of Prémontré gives us an additional reason for tending to a higher degree of perfection. Our Order is essentially canonical and priestly and assumes a dual role, as it will be set out in the next chapter: dealing with the worship of God in liturgy and zeal in the exterior apostolate. But everyone knows that praise offered to God is made all the more honorable the holier we are and when we ourselves are more pleasing and more acceptable to the Lord.

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<sup>10</sup> Is. 61: 8.

Who doubts that one is more effective in working for souls when his life is more united with God making him a better tool in the hand of the Lord? So let us seek a high degree of perfection, whereby our praise will rise most purely to God and our apostolate will be more successful.

Furthermore if we pursue the Norbertine Order, our mother, with due affection, fostering a pleasing and dedicated spirit toward it, we will desire that it be more acceptable to God and, making itself fruitful, it may hold an honorable place in the Church of Christ.

Therefore, enough incentives are ready for us to make progress in our fervor and ongoing perfection. Let us not pass over them, but rather reach out for them with docile hearts. Let us not be afraid to seek great things in this task, not trusting in our own power, even though it might seem strong to us. Let us use only divine help. Such help is obtained through prayer and generous striving. Let us engrave deeply in our hearts that saying of St. Augustine: “My will is not enough for me, Lord, unless you lead me in what I desire.”<sup>11</sup> For that reason, “we can do anything in Him who strengthens us.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Enarr.* 11 in *Psalm*. CXVIII, n. 5 Migne PL 37, col. 1530.

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 4: 13.

## SECOND CHAPTER

# THE SOCIAL ROLE OF OUR ORDER

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## ARTICLE 1

### OUR ORDER AS CANONICAL

#### § 1. In general.

##### **The Place of Religious Orders in the Church.**

In the previous chapter, we considered the religious state in so far as it offered support to one who embraces it to pursue perfection. But it is also well known that, in the present economy of salvation, it is not possible to achieve sanctification without being in a relationship with a community instituted by Christ, in which the faithful become participants in the fruits of the Redemption. Jesus Christ has been made known to all people throughout the centuries, through the Church, his Spouse; namely, the virtues shine forth of which He is the exemplar, and which he even now continues to exercise in His members.

But the Holy Spirit, who governs the Holy Church invisibly, always raises up many souls in it who are fully open to the reception of divine gifts and "*without the involvement of creatures*".<sup>1</sup> These souls united to Christ live practicing the evangelical counsels. In addition, when the time is right, He raises up holy ones who gather together in groups, approved by Church hierarchy, whose members tend toward perfection and who are ready at the same time to cooperate with the Church in carrying out the duties given to it by Christ. Led by the same Holy Spirit, Holy Mother Church watches over, with particular attention, these children of choice, their way of life, their rules, their works, and their development. It is, as Anselm of Havelberg notes in one of his Dialogues, "that from generation to generation, by the raising up of new religious orders, the Church is renewed like that of the Eagle, to fly with a more sublime impetus to contemplation and watch more subtly the true Sun, with eyes that can gaze on its true rays."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *De Imitatione Christi*, lib. 2, cap. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Anselm of Havelberg, O. Praem., *Dialogi*, lib. 1, cap. 11, Migne PL 188, col 1157.

Members of those societies which are called religious orders publicly engage perpetually in the practice of the evangelical counsels. They thus give an overt example of Christian perfection to which all the faithful are called. Thus the religious by their very life become a light for the faithful, as reflecting that of Christ, and indicate for them the right way in the darkness of the world.

Not only do these religious families meet the transitional needs of the times in which they began, but in addition, each of them represents virtually one of the aspects of the virtues and examples of Jesus Christ over the centuries, with only minor changes. Each fills a role in the Church that is assigned to it and particular ministries and duties are determined accordingly.

### **Nature and Place of the Order of Prémontré.**

Our father Saint Norbert himself heard the voice of Christ and was inspired by the Holy Spirit calling him to make the Church “fruitful with a new family”.<sup>3</sup> Anselm of Havelberg writes about this: “Norbert founded many congregations (i.e. monasteries) and he formed them for the perfection of the apostolic life by word and by example. He himself had such favor before God and men that those who joined him were considered truly blessed.”<sup>4</sup>

It remains to be asked what specific missions he sought for his followers, what he asked of them to be done in and for the Holy Church; therefore to what should our exterior work be directed, and to what ends.

The answer to this question is almost entirely contained in what was said of the origin of our order and canonical character in the introduction to this book.<sup>5</sup> A dual mode of life is offered by St. Norbert in his desire to lead the “apostolic life” with his members, either by itinerant preaching in poverty which he had done up till this time after the example of Christ and his disciples or living life in a fixed location as it is in canonical life. We know that Norbert chose the latter under the persuasion of the pope and Bartholomew, the bishop of Laon, however much it differed from his previous way of life.

Let us briefly explore what kind of ministry this canonical way of life involves in the Church of Christ.

## **§ 2. Independent Canonries.**

### **We are directly incorporated into a canonry.**

It should be noted that the Premonstratensians are not incorporated directly into a religious order as is the case in some other orders and in all modern congregations, which allows

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<sup>3</sup> Oration from the feast of St. Norbert.

<sup>4</sup> Dialogues, book 1, chap. 30, Migne PL 188, col. 1155.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above pp. 5-7.

religious belonging to one house to transfer periodically from one house to another. Premonstratensian on the other hand are directly incorporated into a canonry and thus at the same time become members of the order to which this canonry pertains. This is clearly stated by this text at the beginning of the Statutes: "The Order consists of independent houses to which the confreres are incorporated directly by the solemn profession of their vows of religion and the promise of stability in place".<sup>6</sup>

### **"Stability in place".**

In that way is explained the special importance ascribed to the promise<sup>7</sup> of stability in place which is inserted in the formula of profession from the beginning of the Order. Lairvelz explains the nature and efficacy of such a promise in this way: "Between those who make the vow of stability in place and those who do not make it there is the following difference. The latter by their profession do not acquire *filiation* in this or that monastery, but may be sent to this or that place at the will of the superiors. The former, however, by the vow of stability in place acquire the right of *filiation* in the monastery in which they made their profession. Thus they cannot be deprived of that right unwillingly unless they are incorrigible. And although they may be sent elsewhere due to situations that require it, nevertheless they always possess the right that they are sons of the monastery of their profession and have the right to seek it anew and to demand food and clothing from it unless the time of their punishment or obedience, or their own safety or that of another impedes this, or unless they have waived their right."<sup>8</sup>

An old biography speaking about the profession of Saint Norbert and his first disciples says: "Immediately, on Christmas day which was at hand, like the description of the Lord,<sup>9</sup> one by one they register themselves for that city of eternity both for the sake of profession and stability of place."<sup>10</sup>

These last words indicate that any Norbertine Abbey should be seen as a sort of spiritual paradise in which the three religious vows emulate in some way the state of primitive integrity. Moreover they refer to the ancient city of Jerusalem with its temple on the Sacred Mount. In a compendium they exhibit the form of the Catholic Church itself and at the same time offer a foretaste of a dwelling in the celestial Sion where God himself will dwell with men exhibiting

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<sup>6</sup> Statutes 2.

<sup>7</sup> We do not raise the question here of whether stability in place is for our Order something distinct from the three essential vows or if it only involves a more explicit pledge to observe a special point of discipline particularly important because of the nature of the Order but something serious, of course, under the vow of obedience.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechismus Novitiorum*, Tom II, lectio 112, doc. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Id est, as is seen: as is told in the Gospel of the Mass *in nocte Nativitatis Domini*, the Lord Jesus submitted himself to the requirements of Caesar Augustus that the world be registered (Lk 2: 1), so Norbert and his disciples on the same day took care to be registered to another city, namely the house of their profession and at the same time to the heavenly Jerusalem which is built in heaven at the end of the ages.

<sup>10</sup> *Vita B*, chap. X, n. 51, Migne PL 170, col 1292.

the society of the three persons in one divine nature as the most sublime exemplar of the community of life in the unity of property and souls.

### **That which is signified by the rite of profession concerning the bond with one's own house.**

This solid bond with one's own canonry is signified several times during the profession ceremony, especially solemn profession.

First of all, to the abbot asking what they seek, those to be professed reply: "The fellowship of this church", i.e. a definitive enrollment in a specific community, the center and symbol of which is the temple of stone that gives the idea of stationary stability by its mass.

In the formula of profession "on the altar", during Mass, the one professing gives himself directly and explicitly to his canonry: "Offering, I give myself to the Church of...". And shortly thereafter he promises, just as explicitly, together with a conversion of his ways and a change of his life "stability in place"<sup>11</sup> as well. According to the Processional, "the incorporation of the newly professed into the community and gathering of the canons of his abbey and the Order" follows. And there is granted to them according to the example of the primitive Church and "the apostolic life" "the common company of living with us". And then, the "kiss of peace" clearly expresses their assumption into the spiritual family, with whom there is from then on a benevolent and stable bond. For this reason, for the next week, the community recites Psalm 126 for the newly professed: *Unless the Lord builds the house*, that God may give them abundant graces, without which those who labor would work in vain, but by the help of which *their good work is perfected in them until the Day of Christ Jesus*,<sup>12</sup> when the Lord will come to judge them.

Thus, each canonry grows into a family, whose father is the abbot and all the members mutually are brothers, whose spiritual bonds are strong like the bonds of corporal consanguinity. Life proceeds under a community of goods, clothing is provided, and alms are given from the common funds, the works of the members tend to be, at least indirectly, toward one goal.

### **§ 3. The Clerical Character of our Order**

A canonical Order, as indicated in the introductory chapter, was essentially intended for clerics, according to the norm of the monastery of Hippo presided over by St. Augustine, and only secondarily did it open its doors to others who, as *conversi*, helped the clerics in their work.<sup>13</sup> We should not lose sight of this character of the canonical state in determining its social role in the Church of God, and its suitable spiritual practices.

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<sup>11</sup> Concerning this formula and its history, cf. G. Van den Broeck, *De professione solemn in Ordine Praemonstratensi*, Romae, 1937, pp. 76-80.

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 1: 16.

<sup>13</sup> In today's Code of Canon Law, Book II "De Personis" is divided into three parts: "De Clericis", "De Religiosis", "De Laicis". Material on Canons Regular other than on Canons Secular, otherwise very sparse, is found in the second part, "De Religiosis". Formerly three orders of the faithful were distinguished: canonical, monastic, lay, and

When St. Norbert chose the canonical life for his followers, to which “they were accustomed from their youth”,<sup>14</sup> he did not intend to change it, but to seek its genuine practice “according to the teaching of the ancient Fathers and our predecessors” as he explained.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Premonstratensians are first of all clerics, devoted to the service of Christ and His Church, and thus, are to be priests. Did not Norbert, after his conversion, seek the priesthood so much that he insisted on being ordained deacon and priest on the same day?

Therefore, “canonical profession”, to which Norbert intended to remain faithful, included duties and obligations which flow from the clerical state or are presupposed by it. Norms of this sort were determined by the Church only gradually; it imposed a minimum requirement on its clerics and left further items to the free choice of those who were desirous of greater perfection. This choice gave rise to various compilations and rules, known as the “Institutes of the Fathers”, but later formed into such documents as the “Rule of St. Augustine”, the “Rule of St. Chrodegang”, the “Rule of Aachen”, etc., which included the rudiments of the teaching and spiritual practices of the canons.

Indeed in rules of this sort which are composed for the use of clerics striving for the perfection of their state such things are frequently imposed or recommended that are more suitably and easily practiced in the priestly order – celibacy, obedience to the bishop, poverty and common life – while similar things in the rules for monks look rather toward the pursuit of one’s own perfection. Therefore the practice of the evangelical counsels is common to both canons regular and to monks but its proximate end is different for each of them. Among the canons it is intended that the ministers of the altar and sanctifiers of the people of God not only take the place of Christ the priest by the sacred power given them through the sacrament of Holy Orders, but also that they express more perfectly and vividly by their life, both individually and conventually, the dignity and sanctity of men consecrated to God.

In our canonical Order, therefore, there must be a tendency to the service of Christ and the Church “through priestly duties” as “an end to which” other things are proximately directed. Thus it is easily deduced about what our social duties consist: clerical actions. The principal priestly functions are without doubt the public celebration of the Eucharist, the administration of the Sacraments and preaching the Word of God; both are fitting for canons and priests with and under some hierarchy.

Now, concerning both of these tasks which are essential to canonical life, namely liturgical worship and ministry of souls, we must now deal distinctly in two articles about the practice in our Order.

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no doubt canons, regular as well as secular were assigned to the first category; this would place in better light the clerical character of the canons regular in opposition to monks for whom the clerical aspect is not essential but more extraordinary.

<sup>14</sup> *Vita B*, chap. 24, Migne PL 170, col. 1292.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1293.



## ARTICLE 2

### Liturgical Worship in our Order

#### § 1. Importance of Divine Worship in the Premonstratensian Order.

The holy Church expects above all that the sacred functions and the holy office be carried out publicly by each group of canons or canonries with a devotion and care by which the devotion of the faithful might be encouraged and the Christian people learn to conform their own religious concepts to the liturgical spirit and express praise, thanksgiving and petitions in union with the Spouse of Christ, the holy Church. The ancient rules of the canons regular were insistent on this as a fundamental point. The whole life of the canonry was based on this, even the sanctification of souls, which is associated with its very basis and is carried out specifically as a function of the Holy liturgy, was not made an exception. The annual Passover, Passion and Resurrection, center of the liturgical year, constitutes the crown for the Premonstratensian canon in whom Christian, priestly and religious life flourishes.

Our abbeys are often referred to simply as "churches" and according to the formula of our profession we give ourselves to this or that "church" in particular. And rightly so. For the life to which we hand ourselves over by profession in our Order is determined first by the functions that we do in the church of our house. The walls of the church, its vaults, its columns, its stained glass windows surround, cover, protect and magnify the altar of sacrifice, around which places are prepared for the canons and clerics for whom it is fitting that they raise their voices and modulate the chant in praise of God. Other buildings of the monastery are virtually appendages of the church, providing a roof for those serving the nearby sanctuary. This indeed is the true image of Norbertine life; it is so ordered to divine worship that everything finds its reason for being in that it allows the exercise and praise of the Creator and Redeemer. For us, the church is not made for the community, as among the monks, so much as the community for the church as among canons.<sup>16</sup> Since the early years of the Order, magnificent churches were built close to our monasteries, even at a time in which there were still no accommodations for conventual buildings.

Henceforth it is now understood that a stabile bond exists between the abbot and the church to which in a certain way he devotes a conjugal faithfulness; between the same church

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<sup>16</sup> « The difference, which is rightly suitable, must be noted in the formula (of profession) itself between the usage of monks and the usage of canons regular; monks say : 'I give myself in this *monastery* or in this *congregation*...' ; canons regular, however, 'I give myself to the *church*'. The reason for the difference is clear ; canons bind themselves to the church, to which they are bound through the divine office ; on the other hand monks as such are not ascribed to a church but are associated in the monastery so that, leading a cenobitic life, they may acquire perfection. » G. Van den Broeck, *De professione solenni in Ordine Praemonstratensi*, Romae, 1937, p. 76f. – Indeed in doubts regarding decisions to be made about certain documents, the following criterion is given : « It concerns canons regular if the word *ecclesia* is there and the document does not concern something pertaining to the church directly. » (Kuyters, in *Commentarius pro Religiosis*, XXXVI (1957), p. 362).

and those who are dedicated to the sacred ministries to be performed in it; between the members mutually, all of whom forever belong to the one church of their profession; indeed between the canons and the region in which their church is located, as well as its people and customs. All these things are closely connected with “stability in place” to which from the beginning of the Order a particular importance was given as was explained above.

It is useful that we now deal more fully with the principal liturgical functions that are under our care, namely the sacrifice of the Mass and the Divine Office.

## **§ 2. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.**

### **Excellence of the Mass.**

In any religion, sacrifice is the principal act of worship, namely an act which is undertaken as a sign of adoration and subjection due to God alone.

In the Christian religion, where the "*Blessed Passion*" and the "*Glorious Resurrection*" of the Savior is the crowning of the economy of salvation and the center of the supernatural history of the human race, the Eucharistic Sacrifice claims the principal place. It is the commemoration of these mysteries, or much better, it is the non-bloody renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross. It is the source of every grace of Christ, so that all the supernatural life of religious, the faithful and priests is constantly found in this food. This is what Pope Pius XII expressed clearly when he wrote: "The mystery of the Holy Eucharist is the supreme head and the center of the Christian religion. Christ the priest instituted and ordered it to be renewed in the Church perpetually by his ministers."<sup>17</sup>

### **Public Celebration of Mass, the special Duty of our Order.**

In the Order of Prémontré, essentially canonical, in which we claim that the most sublime function is divine worship,<sup>18</sup> the life of the canonries is ordered almost spontaneously around the daily *Missa Summa* as around its center par excellence. Without it, genuine abbey life cannot be understood. Our various activities throughout the day must turn and reflect on it.

At the time of the *Missa Summa*, the Norbertine community exercises that supreme conventual action, responding in the best possible way, both honoring God, its cultic end, and obtaining grace and divine gifts for the faithful, its apostolic end. Note that our canonical Order differs from many religious institutes which were founded later. The particular marks of their piety are derived from extra-liturgical devotions, while those of the Premonstratensians – as

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<sup>17</sup> Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*, AAS XXXIX (1947), p. 547.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. § 1.

such, being the nourishment of spiritual life – essentially consist of liturgical piety, the summit of which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Hence we understand the reason why our Statutes consider the *Missa Summa* "the main work of the day" and prescribes that, whenever possible, it be solemnly sung daily.<sup>19</sup> It is good to remember that all professed are obliged in conscience, under pain of venial sin, to attend the *Summa* actively.<sup>20</sup> In fact, some ministries of obedience can prevent priests, even those living in the abbey, from attending the *Summa*; thus, the Statutes provide that the prelate may grant a dispensation for valid reasons.<sup>21</sup> This does not prevent the *Summa* from being the sacrifice of the entire community, offered on behalf of all. These exemptions should be used only for really serious reasons, even at the cost of a few difficulties or inconveniences. Whoever enjoys a general dispensation should attend the conventual Mass not only on days when no member is permitted to be absent without the prelate's permission<sup>22</sup> but also – from his own piety – on those days on which minor works or other circumstances remove or lessen the difficulty of attending. Nor should it be forgotten that the *Liber Ordinarius* prescribes that the bell of the Church be rung during the Consecration of the conventual mass, "so that all the brothers, even those that are exempt because of duties can, on hearing the bells, unite themselves to the Holy Sacrifice."<sup>23</sup>

By the solemn offering of the sacrifice of Christ and the Church, through the moral person of the canonry, our Order fulfills that required social function of publicly offering the Christian worship not only for the entire people but openly in the sight of all who have open access to our churches.

The primary place of the Mass in the social life of our Order necessarily includes a corollary, that in the individual life of each Premonstratensian the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which he celebrates or attends, should occupy a similar central place. Should it be otherwise, a duality or opposition would occur in elements of the "hierarchy of values" between his public life and his personal life. Elsewhere<sup>24</sup> we will discuss the Holy Eucharist with respect to the individual spiritual life. For the moment let us take a further look at the conventual gathering of canons who offer the august sacrifice of the New Law.

### **The Assembly of the Premonstratensian Canons Offering the Conventual Mass:**

#### *1. Commemorates the mysteries of Christ.*

Under the Old Law, burning and the eating of the Passover lamb renewed the invigorating recollection of the benefits of God at the exodus from Egypt of the people of Israel

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<sup>19</sup> Statuta 434, § 1.

<sup>20</sup> Statuta 435, § 1.

<sup>21</sup> Statuta 435, § 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> *Ordinarius*, n. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Part I, Sect. II, Chap. 4, Art. 2, § 2.

and also the choice made by God to identify the Jewish people as the chosen people. But the great gifts of God thus recalled were only a shadow; they were the forerunner of the wonders that God intended to work through Christ until the end of time for the salvation of mankind. Whatever religious and social value the Passover rite of the Jews had, the Sacrifice of the Mass is more sublime and more faithful. Therefore the canons, in celebrating the sacrifice, must show and express the same fervor as that which the Jews expressed in celebrating the Passover.

Has not Christ commanded us to do this “in memory of him”<sup>25</sup>, that is, remembering Him and the things that He endured for us? Rightly therefore at the altar, after the consecration of the Mass, we say: “therefore remembering... the blessed passion of your Son, our Lord, as well as His resurrection from the dead and his glorious ascension into heaven...”<sup>26</sup> by which phrase the entire redemptive work of the Savior is not only recalled but truly present in this Mass according to the clear text of a certain Secret Prayer: “Every time that the commemoration of this sacrifice is celebrated, the work of our redemption is accomplished”.<sup>27</sup>

### *2. Renews the unique sacrifice of Jesus, the Savior.*

However, it is certainly clear that in a very special way in the Mass the sacrifice that our Lord began in the upper room and completed on the cross is renewed; on this sacrifice the Eternal Father decreed that the entire economy of salvation would depend. The renewal is indeed *sui generis*, since the one Sacrifice of Christ is renewed on our altars where He becomes present to us in a mysterious manner. Certainly the Sacred “action”, as we read in liturgical books, infinitely surpasses any other act of religion that can be imagined. In the name of Christ himself, in the name of the Holy Church, in the name of our community gathered around the altar, in the name of the faithful people, it is given to us to offer again the divine victim, present before us under the external likeness of a violent death. The assembly of those who participate at the Mass conventually co-offer in an ineffable manner; and individually they offer together, each according to the level of his participation in the priesthood of Christ and his function in this Mass. What conventional work could be both so noble and so sublime?

### *3. Offers an act of thanksgiving worthy of divine benefits.*

Our sacrifice is also “*Eucharistic*”, i.e. an act of Thanksgiving, not only by the offering of bread and wine, as in the banquets of the Jews, but especially because of the marvelous deeds of God which are commemorated here. The entire supernatural order is restored by Christ, and we participate freely in a way that inspires our action of Thanksgiving. How happy we are who are able to offer to God, in the Mass, the expression of our gratitude, in a way that is worthy of the

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor 11: 24f.

<sup>26</sup> Canon of the Mass, Anamnesis.

<sup>27</sup> Secret of the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.

infinite Benefactor and His divine Majesty, since it is "through Christ, and with him, and in him... all honor and glory".<sup>28</sup>

#### *4. Unites itself closely with Christ the Lord.*

How does one explain properly the union we have with Christ the Lord, whenever it is given to us to participate in the sacrifice of the new Law? The Incarnation of the Son of God is described in the liturgy as an "*admirable exchange*", in so far as the Creator of the human race has taken a body from a daughter of our race; in return he gave us his divinity.<sup>29</sup> In the Mass something similar is found: we offer to God something of our food and our drink, namely bread and wine and in return, in the banquet of the sacrifice that completes the Mass, we receive a spiritual food, the Body and Blood of the divine victim. This indeed is an "admirable exchange!" What more complete participation in the sacrifice of the Lord can there be than this sacrosanct real eating.

It is certainly desirable in any case, as more than once expressed in Chapters of our Order that members of the community participate in His Sacrifice through Holy Communion within the conventual Mass so that they may attain more abundant fruit of this sacrifice offered in the name of the community.<sup>30</sup> How clearly the social character of the Mass is manifested! How clear it is that Christ, the victim of our sacrifice, is the mystical bond between those who offer the collegial sacrifice – such is our Missa Summa! Formerly inconvenient practices were an obstacle to this; the new laws for the Eucharistic fast fortunately render it easier for those who have not received priestly ordination.

#### *5. Participating in the triumph of the Risen Christ prepares for his Parousia.*

From the above, it is clear that in the Mass an extremely close union is established between us and the risen Christ: not only is the triumphant Christ present on the altar, and then also in our hearts, but the liturgical function makes tangible this spiritual presence of which the early Christians had a very strong consciousness and that Christ himself has promised by saying: "*where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst.*"<sup>31</sup> Whenever the celebration of the Last Supper is renewed, the resurrected Master sits as it were with us at the same table, as he liked to do with his banqueting disciples after his Resurrection. Never is a group of religious closer with its Head, the triumphant Christ, than happens in this celebration.

Nor is the eschatological aspect lacking, since the offering of the Mass strongly raises in us the expectation of the return of Christ in His glorious parousia, in his triumphal appearance. Nor is that affect lacking that filled the primitive Church, and which is inculcated in us in the

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<sup>28</sup> Conclusion of the Canon of the Mass.

<sup>29</sup> First antiphon at Lauds, Feast of the Circumcision.

<sup>30</sup> Council of Trent, Session XXII, chap. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Mt 18: 20.

Mass, as the Apostle reminds us: *"Whenever you eat this bread and drink of the chalice, you announce the death of the Lord until he comes."*<sup>32</sup> How easily the mind turns to the eternal banquet about which Jesus said at the last supper: *"I give you the kingdom my Father gave me; you will eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom."*<sup>33</sup>

It is therefore correct to say that the Missa Summa is the high point of conventual life each day, since its actions bring forth such beautiful and great things, because the symbolic and the sacrificial Act pervades all and the benefits extend also to relatives and benefactors, indeed to all the faithful. What solicitous care is needed by ministers, ordained or not, not as mere formalities, but as of the means recommended by a centuries-old practice, imposed by hierarchical authority and which allow us to participate with reverence, dignity and devotion in these sublime mysteries.

### **§ 3. The Divine Office.**

#### **The Recitation of the Divine Office, an Excellent Part of the Norbertine Vocation.**

##### *Praise of God in the Old Law.*

Among the chosen people of the Old Testament, the Levites, especially dedicated to the service of God, were prominent; they were a select part of the holy people. But if we are looking for what was the most important aspect of their office, God himself gives us the answer in the Holy Scriptures: *"That the Levites serve me for Israel and pray for the people."*<sup>34</sup> *"That they get up each morning to praise and sing to God and, likewise at night, to be constantly present before God."*<sup>35</sup> In another place we also find this sentence on the Levites: *"...that serve the Lord of Israel - recall his works and glorify and praise the Lord God of Israel because His mercy is eternal."*<sup>36</sup>

##### *Praise of God in the New Law.*

However with the death of Christ the Old Law is revoked and the New One begun and the service of God's praise is transferred to others. And indeed, how much more urgent are the motives for praising God after such new and more magnificent benefits given through Christ. How much more worthy is the praise which is now offered by the same Christ, His only begotten Son? It is offered for all time, until the return of Christ, by the voices of lowly and imperfect men. The voice of the Church ascends to God, always acceptable, always pleasing to God, the voice of praise, of thanksgiving, of petition.

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor 11: 26.

<sup>33</sup> Lk 22: 29f.

<sup>34</sup> Num. 8: 19.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Chron. 23: 30f.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Chron. 16: 4, 41.

However this “voice of the Spouse” resonates especially in the divine office, which is correctly described as the “mystical prayer of the Body of Christ, a prayer to God in the name of all Christians and for their benefit.”<sup>37</sup> Our supplication is the prayer of Jesus Christ himself, for it is by this prayer that the “Word of God, taking on human nature brought to our terrestrial exile this hymn which is sung in the dwellings above for all eternity.”<sup>38</sup> This word “is expressed in the bosom of the Father from all eternity” and the sovereign pontiff adds: “It brings together the universal human community around Him and participates in the divine song of praise”.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Who is Responsible in the Church for this Divine Praise?*

The important support of prayer obligates the universal Church of Christ, and even more so the College of bishops in union with the Roman Pontiff. Indeed, this “work of God” is an eminently priestly function although in its place, the holy people, the royal priesthood of Christians, can participate.<sup>40</sup> This applies also to particular churches, where bishops have taken through the ages as their co-operators some priests who form a part of this contemplative obligation; these priests formed chapters, i.e. colleges of clerics, to offer a more solemn worship to God in their churches.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore the task of these clerics, in addition to the daily celebration of the Mass in cathedrals or collegiate churches, to sing the divine office, the prayer of the Church, in whichever church they belong.

And we also, canons regular, have our assigned place in this secular and universal concert. Pope Pius XI said knowingly to the Abbot General of our Order: “You are my order; just as the bishops have their canons to perform public prayer on behalf of their diocese, so you are my canons, not for one diocese only, but for the universal Church”.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore above all fitting that we Premonstratensians devote ourselves to this contemplative priestly function. It is the more sublime part of the Norbertine vocation. Without doubt the Divine Office seen among the obligations of the state of each individual member of our Order. In celebrating the divine praise, we as individuals are united to all the members of our canonry, and through them to the whole Order, as well as to the universal Church and finally to the sovereign pontiff, the Pope. What is more sublime?

Let us rejoice, therefore, that our Norbertine vocation imposes on us such and so great an important work, as clerics, as canons, as professed religious. We should always do our best, as if we were already established in the pursuit of our last end: to give glory to God, to praise and exalt Him above all. We can do this already here on earth by means of the office, in the name of

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<sup>37</sup> Encyclical letter of Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, AAS XXXIX (1947, p. 573.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Peter, 2: 9.

<sup>41</sup> Code of Canon Law, can. 391, § 1.

<sup>42</sup> Cited according to the testimony of Illmi. Dni HUBERTI NOOTS, Abbot General, in *Pro Nostris*, Ephem. Norbert. Trimestr. Circary of Brabant, 1952, n. 1, p. 15.

the Mystical Body of Christ, which, as it were, breathes through us, and we have the high honor and, if God wills it, can be a fount of incomparable interior joy.

### **The Divine Office, Source of Personal Sanctification.**

Although we may be dealing here especially with the divine office under the aspect of "social responsibility" of our Order, it is not irrelevant to add that this provides excellent means of personal sanctification for a Premonstratensian canon. This is so true that even the monks, who are not essentially clerics, nevertheless assumed the "*Opus Dei*", along with manual labor and spiritual reading, among their daily practices, having recognized that this provides a helping and a wonderfully effective stimulation in the search for perfection.

For if *our participation in the divine nature*<sup>43</sup> makes us able to know God as He is and love him with a love of friendship, we can scarcely imagine food more suitable to this divine life that we carry within us than Divine Office.

Does not *our faith* which gives us a first, though still obscure knowledge of God as He is, also nourish and feed and penetrate and lift up our minds by means of the canonical Divine Office, as it further enters our soul? If we become more risk-taking, more knowledgeable and happier in the practice of the virtues by multiplying the acts, there is no doubt that the exercise of faith and its spirit becomes in us quite natural by the daily recitation of the Breviary. So, we receive a supernatural sight that will spontaneously judge and organize our lives according to the principles of the faith, so often envisaged in their various aspects in prayer. The texts of the divine office and Mass of the catechumens are the best school to penetrate the mysteries of salvation, to understand better the dogmas of the faith, to appreciate more the flavor of the texts of the Holy Scriptures. This pleasant variety of texts is offered us in the course of the liturgical year to present to us the various mysteries of the faith. These are not to be seen or celebrated in the abstract but in a concrete contemplation and an invigorating prayer.

The effectiveness of the divine office increases when it is celebrated in choir; then the songs, ceremonies, rubrics, examples of our colleagues, all help us to perform this office "*with dignity, attention and devotion*".

Theological *hope* is also stimulated by the eschatological aspect of revealed truth, expressed by so many texts, and spontaneously there is born in us the desire to see in our chanting a movement toward the day of eternal praise of God, which the elect sing constantly at the throne of God:

"And that last morning,  
Which we offer prostrate,  
May issue forth to us in light,

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<sup>43</sup> 2 Peter 1: 4.



While sounds this song".<sup>44</sup>

And as the Father and the Son, in the unity of the Spirit of love, communicate with one another, in an unceasing exchange, so it is that all who participate in the praise of Christ to the heavenly Father are taken into their communion of divine love.

Thus it is clear that the canonical Office, with its center which is the Summa (or at least, failing that, the private Mass), is the high point of the virtue of religion for the sons of Saint Norbert. All other exercises of piety are in close relationship with this beautiful liturgical function, either depending on it, or leading to it. Thus, daily meditation is very often on the liturgical texts of the day or the mysteries of the annual cycle. Lectio Divina will frequently be in relation to the canonical hours, developing the text of the day from the Breviary: Holy Scripture, writings of the Fathers, lives of saints. Elevations of our heart to God throughout the day do not risk falling into false sentimentalism if they are inspired by the prayer of the Church itself, especially the Psalms, the work of these old Levites to whom we are fortunate successors.

How great a help to our Norbertine apostolate is the offering of the canonical Hours for these apostolic intentions; by performing the Office worthily and devoutly, so that the faithful may be further drawn to the praise of God and the veneration of the supernatural, and finally, by drawing teaching and understanding from the divine office, they can then use this to nourish souls.

### **Practical Conclusions.**

#### *The Practice of attendance in the choir.*

Because of our religious profession, we are dedicated to the sublime duty of choir night and day. We should have in our hearts the intention to frequent the choir not looking for futile excuses for staying away, but rather organizing our daily work so as to leave as little excuse as possible for missing this holy function. Let us seek to earn the compliment an ancient Chronicler has given to Sifrid, prior of Wittewierum (13th century.), who "*was never absent from choir*", as well as to brother Thitard, "*who was an enthusiastic zealot on behalf of the Order and who, by his manual labor in which he excelled, often improved new plantings and yet never found a reason to neglect his presence in the choir; on the contrary, he always made it to vigils.*"<sup>45</sup>

#### *Proper preparation.*

Since the Church asks us to recite our canonical hours "with devotion and care and respect", we should be ready to exercise the greatest care to bring to this office all suitable reverence and devotion; this preparation should be not only proximate, but remote. Remote

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<sup>44</sup> Ferial hymn of Saturday, at Lauds.

<sup>45</sup> Chronicon of Menko, MGH, SS XXIII, p. 526.

preparation is first an understanding of the texts: study of the Psalms, the composition of the breviary, the spirit of liturgy, the rubrics, so as to not get lost in the difficult passages, etc. Proximate preparation on the other hand demands recollection of the mind and a lively faith in the presence of God before beginning the recitation. This is the purpose of these prior gatherings, called "*stations*", where the mind is disposed to sing devoutly to God, as prescribed by the book of Wisdom: "*Prepare your soul before prayer and do not be like a man who tempts the Lord.*"<sup>46</sup>

*Attentive and accurate recitation.*

Let the confreres perform this angelic office of divine praises, with all negligence aside, and without reluctance or weariness, but with zeal and dedication, always recalling that, according to the Prophet, "*cursed be the man who fraudulently, i.e. negligently does the work of the Lord.*"<sup>47</sup>

In the course of liturgical prayer, according to the Rule: "*When you sing to God with psalms and hymns, meditate in your hearts the words on your lips.*"<sup>48</sup> But we are only human and internal distractions come now and then and distract our mind from God. Our Father Saint Augustine said: "*Look, a man stands there and sings to God at some length; his lips are moving according to the chant but, his thoughts take flight to I know not what desires. Our mind is somewhat ordered to praise God, and our soul floats away with daydreams and the problems that beset us on all sides.*"<sup>49</sup> Let us, in any case, try to sing the psalms as attentively as possible, but not be disturbed by involuntary or semi-voluntary distractions; this is a tribute paid to our human fragility which God knows.

We must always carefully avoid as much as possible all confusion and disturbances which dissipate the spirit of devotion and offends those who are listening. And especially, in the divine office, neither laughter nor talk, nor nonchalance should be tolerated; all this would be absolutely inappropriate during so holy a duty.

Strictly observe the rules of the "*Ordinarius*" and also the directives of the cantor, because good chanting promotes good prayer of the choir and also the edification of those who listen. In addition, sacred music showcases the voices of the priest celebrant and the Christian people singing the praises of the Most High. The splendor of the melodies delights the mind with its strength and power, and makes the liturgical prayer of the Christian community more alive and more fervent.<sup>50</sup> We must therefore make the necessary effort so that, in our churches, our beautiful vocal ensembles are directed toward God. Therefore, each one should submit

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<sup>46</sup> Sirach 18 : 23. – Cf. Stat. 439.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremiah 48: 10.

<sup>48</sup> Rule, chap. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Enar. in Psalm. 145, n. 6, Migne PL 37, col. 1888. – Cf. also the beautiful passage: Enar. in Psalm. 85, n. 7, Migne PL 37, col. 1086 f.

<sup>50</sup> Liturgical Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Musicae Sacrae*, AAS 48 (1956), p. 12.

willingly and comply with the directives of the choir and conform by denying his own preferences.

*Purity of heart when singing the psalms.*

Any attachment to the "old man"<sup>51</sup> should be strictly avoided in the choral office. It is God that we praise in the choir. Let us have only God before our eyes. We do not have the right, for example, on the pretext that we don't like the direction given by the cantor, and decide to adopt another way; such would disturb the choir. On the pretext that our neighbor seems to be singing too slowly or too quickly, we should not respond in an angry manner and cause disorder by an excessive reaction, resulting in confusion. It is no reason to keep quiet in the choir under the pretext that we would incur blame or reprimand from the superior. We would have in all this too much attachment to our own will; this would result in detraction from the service and honor due to God. This is surely inordinate.

If we are generous, we fight these temptations victoriously. Adam the Premonstratensian imagined the following soliloquy between the soul and reason:

**Reason:** *"Why are you sad?"*

**The soul:** *"Because of the way the choir is singing the psalms, too drawn out, too sadly, too tedious and ponderous".*

**Reason:** *"But don't you know, my soul, that among all the exercises of holy religion in which you participate, this is specifically the work of God? For here you present yourself to God; here you are presented to Him and you speak with him. How holy, how devoutly and how blameless should be all your actions during which you are in the presence of God! How wise should be any words that you speak to him, any reflection of your heart before it passes through your lips!"*<sup>52</sup>

This is an example of tediousness overcome merely by consideration of the sublimity of divine praise.

### **Conclusion.**

With all our heart, therefore, we Norbertines should give ourselves over to this duty of our calling, sparing nothing of ourselves. Let us burn with desire that a pure and excellent praise may ascend to God from the choir of our canonry; a praise pleasing to him in every way, a chanting where all are harmonious in the work of God is as the image of harmony of souls in

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<sup>51</sup> Col. 3: 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Soliloquiorum de Instruct. Animae*, Lib. I, chap. 7, Migne PL 198, col. 855.

God. As our Father Saint Augustine said: "*One who does not have love may carry the Psalter but he cannot sing to God.*"<sup>53</sup>

Would that what was said of the first Premonstratensians could be said of us: "*They seek nothing other than to praise the name of the Lord and to sing him a new song*".<sup>54</sup> And would that this song from the liturgy could be said of the church of our profession:

All that city sacred and  
loved by God  
Sings with fervor to the one and triune God  
With praise full of harmony and joyous melody.<sup>55</sup>

## ARTICLE 3

### Zeal for Souls

#### § 1. Parts of Zeal for Souls in the Order of Prémontré.

When the Premonstratensian Order began, the expression *apostolic life* applied to monastic life commonly designated the imitation of the life practiced under the leadership of the Apostles in the Church of Jerusalem. It dealt primarily with community and poverty of life, fraternal charity, and manual work.

At the time of Saint Norbert, during the Gregorian reform, this common and austere lifestyle was fairly widespread among clerics and especially among canons regular. Indeed, they intended not only to imitate the primitive community life in poverty and prayer, as the monks did; they also wanted to focus on the care of souls and the ministry of preaching, after the model of the Apostles in the primitive Church.<sup>56</sup> Thus, soon after the time of Saint Norbert, the term "*apostolic life*" included especially this last activity, and is still in use today. Subsequently, sometimes quite serious controversies arose between monks and canons on the inclusion of the priestly roles in religious life. Among others, Anselm of Havelberg, a canon of our order, strongly defended against Rupert of Deutz the excellence of canonical life, which in addition to the monastic practices also included concern for souls.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, did not Saint Augustine endeavor from the beginning of his pastoral activity to closely unite monastic life and pastoral activity, basing it in his Episcopal house "his monastery of clerics)? His example very deeply affected the institutes who took it as a guide in instilling

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<sup>53</sup> *Enar. in Psalm.* 143, n. 16, Migne PL 37, col. 1866.

<sup>54</sup> *Annales Laudunenses*, S. Norberto coevae, Migne PL 170, col. 1249.

<sup>55</sup> Hymn for the dedication of a church, at Lauds.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Acts 6: 4.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. his *Epistola apologetic pro Ordine Canonicorum regularium*, and his *Dialogorum Liber primus*, Migne PL 188, col. 1117 – 1160.

this concern for souls. Thus the canonical status of our Order, under the Rule of St. Augustine in the Church of Christ, in and of itself, invites the Premonstratensians to the works of an active apostolate, in the current and dynamic sense of the term.<sup>58</sup>

## **§ 2. Ways of elaborating spiritually the good of souls.**

Each of our abbeys virtually in miniature presents a image typical of the Holy Church as bride of Christ, and remains united to Him and with Him and through Him carrying out the office of prayer, but at the same time, tirelessly feeds the flock of Christ committed to it.

### *1. The example of a life dedicated to God.*

Our abbeys already fulfill this role of sanctifying the Christian people in large part by the example they give of a life fully consecrated to God, consistent, not only to Gospel precepts, but also to its counsels. Visiting or observing a Norbertine House cannot fail to impress by the sight of a liturgy celebrating God and praying with beauty and devotion, and also by an entire life devoted to the service of God and the salvation of souls, directed as well as to the pursuit of Christian perfection. In the midst of human society almost swamped by materialism and trained almost despite her hectic life of this century, a fervent monastery is an eloquent witness of the vanity of everything which is not God and does not lead to him. What silent preaching!

### *2. Power of prayer and good works.*

The outstanding apostolate is prayer offered for apostolic purposes, namely for all the needs and demands of the Church. But the intention of one who prays should not be limited to his personal needs; it should extend widely to the needs of the whole Church. At the times of the Divine Office, the benefits of the canons from the choir spreads widely, deeply and from all sides, for the benefit of all those who need a particular relief so that they may enjoy the fruits of the redemption of Christ. This prayer is therefore especially apostolic.

The same can be said for the offering of good works and the practices of penance that regular life promotes. The devout and zealous religious in the exercise of the virtues can say with the Lord: *"I sanctify myself for them, i.e., for the salvation of all."*<sup>59</sup>

### *3. The activity of the Apostolic Ministry.*

True, the silent preaching of the example of prayer, and penance is common to all religious. But for canons regular, other than for monks as such, there is also incumbent the

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Introduction. – It is not our intention for the present to subject for examination to what extent works on zeal for souls can be called essential to our Order. Father Olaf Klessner, O. Praem. presented this in a beautiful study edited in *Pro Nostris*, a Norbertine trimestrial publication, XXI (1955), pp. 6-33, in which the apostolate tends toward essential importance (in the more recent sense) to be restored in our Order.

<sup>59</sup> John 17: 19.

preaching of the Word in the labors of the active life; for as priests or clerics, they are *dispensers of the mysteries of God*".<sup>60</sup>

This is partly carried out by admitting, even for a few days, either to the monastery guest house, or to some separate building, priests or laity, youth or adults, eager to rekindle their spiritual life through exercises in claustral contemplation, and for whom some priests of the abbey are available who will lead them in the ways of the Lord, by instructions in common or private interviews.

It is not beyond the mission of our Order to send priest confreres out of their Abbey who bring to the faithful of Christ living in the world the Evangelical doctrine and meet their cultural needs. This may be done by entrusting to them some parishes or occasional preaching missions for some periods of time.

Our father Saint Norbert did not exclude such ministry to the faithful. To those who claimed that white wool garments were not appropriate for canons, he replied: *"the white color is suitable for holy preachers who are canons, since they represent the angels who appeared dressed in white at the tomb of the Lord, and they should not despise wool garments if they have the spirit of penance and their mission sends them out to the people."*<sup>61</sup> Didn't Norbert himself, after making profession, undertake several missions to encourage sinners to live better and more fervent Christian lives and to seek even greater perfection?

The prelates will have to determine to what extent the brothers should be sent to perform ministry outside. In past centuries, the best of their priests were involved in parish ministries; in more recent times, canons have been allowed to engage in diverse new apostolic works. The major superiors of the Order of Prémontré perfectly met the apostolic character of our order canonical calling. Would that in the future, with equal care and fidelity to the Norbertine spirit, the Premonstratensian family would show the same zeal for souls and gain much fruit. For this reason, let us keep in mind the words Pope Pius XII addressed to religious: *"Not only must you generously embrace the Evangelical life, not only must you tend, by desire and action, toward virtue and holiness, but you must also be prepared to confront the necessities of your time by adapting your heart to all the apostolates needed by the new age."*<sup>62</sup>

### **§ 3. Promoting an Apostolic Spirit among all Members of our Order.**

Various reasons for supporting our commitment to apostolic work will be dealt with later in the next section of this first part, dealing with the means by which the social aspect of our ministry can be carried out. Here we offer a few notes about the apostolic spirit that is proper for any follower of St. Norbert.

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<sup>60</sup> I Cor. 4: 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Vita B*, chap. 24, Migne PL 170, col. 1293.

<sup>62</sup> AAS 41 (1949), pp. 592 f.

*For the Juniors.*

We address ourselves first to the juniors, who have not yet been sent out to do ministry.

They should foster in themselves a strong desire to engage at some point in a fruitful apostolate. Lacking such a desire, they would also not have the required dispositions for a young priest as well as the spirit of being a genuine Norbertine.

If they are animated by this zeal, they should neglect no means to prepare even better for the various ministries that may be entrusted to them. It is important that they continue their theological studies so that later they can be the spiritual teachers of the people and good directors of souls. They are to be provided with good religious training, so they can become better instruments in the hand of the Lord for the harvest of souls. Fortified by humility, obedience, mortification, strength of character, needed now more than ever, they must be prepared to take up the battle of the Lord. Pope Pius XI admonished religious "to daily present themselves more worthily for the religious state; for by their fidelity they will not be able to function except through the sacred mysteries to which they oblige themselves to perform throughout their lives."<sup>63</sup>

*For those more mature.*

Those who, after completing formation and engaging in some apostolic ministry, should take care to do so always with supernatural intent and with a true self-denial. Is that not what our Father Saint Norbert desired as a goal for his sons in their religious asceticism and their quasi-monastic practice? This intent would be frustrated if in the ministry of care for souls Norbertine confreres would act as if they were acting for themselves, preferring work that pleased them and avoiding other things as much as possible; or if their apostolic works would be too affected by human considerations or even that their ministry is not made fruitful by an effective concern for prayer and mortification.

Let us therefore always cultivate within ourselves the spirit of Saint Norbert. He experienced difficulties and concerns that held him back somewhat but, clearly forgetful of himself, he kept the good and care of souls always before his eyes. Do we not read in the Office for his feast: "neither the bitter winter, nor hunger, or fatigue could ever divert him from his resolution to preach".<sup>64</sup> Let these be the qualities of our apostolic work; for then, and only then, will our Holy Founder recognize us, not only as his sons by canonical profession, but heirs of his spirit and untiring zeal. Only then do we honor him. Only then will his spiritual family be useful in the Church of Christ and bear fruit a hundredfold from the field of the Lord which is entrusted to him. Only then will we, on returning from our apostolic journeys, bring back "the

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<sup>63</sup> Epist. *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, March 19, 1924, AAS XVI (1924), p. 136; or *Enchiridion de Statibus perfectionis* I, n. 348, p. 402.

<sup>64</sup> Responsorium 5 for Matins of the Feast of St. Norbert.

sheaves of what was sown to the house of our poverty – as formerly he did.”<sup>65</sup> Let us therefore watch carefully to ensure that our zeal is in fact pure, immune from any earthly affection, free from all stain of love of self.

### *The Social Exercise of Zeal.*

In the exercise of this zeal, we do not simply act as private persons, but much rather as a member of an organized society in which we find ourselves, as well as with the superiors, cooperators and rectors of our work. Let us always be fully aware of this condition which is ours.

Therefore it is not up to us to take on a priestly ministry independently of our superiors. On the contrary, all our work, while laudable and fruitful, should always be a legitimate mission or at least have the approval of superiors. Thus its value is enhanced in the eyes of God and of Christ, its fruit will grow considerably and we will devote ourselves with greater confidence in our work in the vineyard of the Lord.

But also in the company of our confreres, enrolled with us in the Norbertine militia, we engage apostolic works. This close-knit family of "*comrades*" must work toward a single supernatural goal, so that each has his part in the work of all. This does not mean we should meddle in the tasks of others, but that each of us must have at heart to show, by his feelings words and actions, the part he took in the work or what is yet to be done. What merit is there in expecting a word of exhortation or encouragement, or even congratulations if you are indifferent, or more or less critical?

### **Conclusion.**

Would that every Premonstratensian canon would be imbued with an apostolic spirit so that his life would meet this description, which would be consonant with our Anselm of Havelberg in his *Apologetic Letter for the Order of Canons Regular*: "I, with my poor brothers in Christ, the least of the servants of God, whatever vessel in the temple of God, the last of those serving in the Tabernacle of the Covenant, with all my strength, I will carry with the other priests of God the Ark of the Testament. I will minister faithfully with those who minister, moving the Christian people to the Promised Land; doing away with the carnal demands and the turmoil that weakens our spirituality and I will humbly stir up with the trumpets of Holy Scripture until the enemy is defeated,... let us all ascend to the heavenly Jerusalem".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> Migne PL 188, col. 1138.



## Second Section

# THE MEANS FOR REACHING PERFECTION AND FULFILLING OUR SOCIAL ROLE

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## FIRST CHAPTER

### THE VOWS AND RELATED VIRTUES

To deal with religious vows and the virtues connected with them, we hold it useful to say something first about religious profession, since there is a close bond with the vows, which is not only expressed by a concept. Nor would it be incongruous to deal with the practice of the vows and connect them with the virtues.

#### **Religious Profession.**

*1. As a pact with religious life in order to seek perfection.*

Religious profession is well defined by this formula: "*the act by which someone embraces the religious state.*" However, we have seen in Chapter 1 of the first section that the essence of the religious state is to give oneself permanently to seeking perfection, in excluding obstacles that hinder the soul in the pursuit of that perfection. Therefore, one who makes profession recognizes that he is called to the state of perfection and henceforth intends to obligate himself to whatever efforts are necessary for this and in turn expects the way of life that it includes – in addition to the usual means of salvation – as well as the other helps available to one following this excellent calling.

A great number of faithful of both sexes have for a long time led religious life without having been members of some institute. Thus the first hermits were truly religious because they followed the Evangelical counsels, including obedience to the bishop. Such were the hermits of Egypt in the 4th century, who saw the Patriarch of Alexandria as a sort of an ecclesiastical "Pharaoh". However, they were not joined together as communities. More

recently, the practice was introduced and rules were developed so that religious profession was made by professing vows in the hands of one who had the power; it was explicitly made law that it would be invalid if profession was not made in the hands of one who had the power to incorporate into a specific religious community.<sup>1</sup>

Since this is so, it now allows us to define religious profession as the mutual pact by which the religious obliges himself to seek perfection in the religious Institute of his choice and, conversely, the community is committed to providing the means and support necessary for fulfilling this purpose.<sup>2</sup>

## *2. In so far as it is a gift of self made to God.*

However, if profession is concluded by the contract between the religious and the community, as was said before,<sup>3</sup> are we in agreement with most spiritual authors, ancient and modern, i.e., does that include a self-donation to God, a holocaust offered to God? The answer to this difficulty then is solved because, although "in the strict sense, religious profession cannot be called a gift offered to God,"<sup>4</sup> nevertheless, it introduces the naming of the three substantial vows corresponding to the evangelical counsels, namely obedience, chastity and poverty by which the professed is certainly obligated by a promise made to God. *"For it is fitting that poverty, chastity and obedience are firmed up by vow, because only by a promise made to God is the religious state ensured permanence and strength. For human authority cannot order the observance of these counsels because God himself did not command this observance -- otherwise they would not be counsels but precepts -- and a promise to men would not involve perpetual obligation, every moment being challenged by the free will of men".*<sup>5</sup>

Who then does not see the importance of the profession and its influence on religious life? It establishes the basis of the whole tendency toward perfection, namely the three vows. And it marks the beginning of continual daily practice supported by the virtues, linking the new professed by a perpetual relationship with the religious community, organized for spiritual progress.

## *3. As a manifestation to human beings of Christ living in the Church.*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Canon 572, § 1, 6°. – More at length concerning this CERVIA, *De professione religiosa*, Bologna 1938, pp. 46-50.

<sup>2</sup> We now refer to the question of whether it is a matter of a true bilateral contract or rather a mere contact of incorporation. – Cf. KINDT, *De potestate dominativa in religione*, Bruges, Paris, Rome, 1945, pp. 69-78.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter I of the first section.

<sup>4</sup> Thus PASSERINI, *De hominum statibus et officiis inspectiones morales*, Luca 1732, Q. 186, a. 6, n. 18.

<sup>5</sup> CERVIA, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

In the Incarnation of the Word, *"the grace of God our Savior is manifested to all people, teaching us to deny impiety and worldly desires, to live soberly and justly in this world, awaiting the blessed hope and the coming in glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*<sup>6</sup> Thus the Son of God manifested Himself to our race, showing us by His example how we are to deny ourselves and live a life of mortification, fulfilling the divine will that we may glorify God.

Jesus lived among us poor, chaste and *obedient unto death, death on the Cross*.<sup>7</sup> Exalted by the glory of His Ascension, He then manifested Himself further in His Mystical Body, which is the Church. Filled with the Spirit of Jesus, it never ceases to keep the divine master before our eyes. And behold: the Holy Spirit, who guides it, does not cease to raise up members in it who represent in a special way the self-sacrifice of Jesus, devoting themselves always to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, in imitation of the Savior. In these privileged figures the path that leads to Jesus is more clearly shown; and further, we find in them an image of the eschatological Kingdom and the triumphant Church, after the resurrection of the body, in Christ, only God. As the sons of God are already detached from temporal things, *"being neither married, nor marrying"*,<sup>8</sup> *"like to the Angels"*,<sup>9</sup> perfectly fulfilling the will of God in Christ.

A sublime vocation! Because such is the religious profession: these sons of God are intended to reproduce accurately on earth the image of Christ, by the observance of the evangelical counsels. And such is religious profession...

### **On the vows and associated virtues in general.**

*On vows.*

A vow, in canon law, is defined: *"a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning some good which is possible and better"*.<sup>10</sup> It does not therefore, deal with a single purpose or proposal, but a commitment under penalty of sin. And for that reason, for a vow to be validly taken, a true understanding of what is promised is required, together with a sincere and totally free offering to God, as a contract, at least a unilateral one. The vow is an act of the virtue of religion, such that its violation would be a most sinful offence against this virtue, the most noble of all moral virtues.

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<sup>6</sup> Titus II, 11-13.

<sup>7</sup> Phil. II, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Matt 22: 30.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 20: 36.

<sup>10</sup> Canon 1307, § 1; 1191 in the new Code.

The obligation of religious vows is of its very nature serious. However, it depends on parvity of matter or inadvertence or imperfect consent whether or not the violation is a venial sin or not. Since religious vows are public vows, under ecclesiastical moderation, it is clear that various conditions may be set for the validity of their issuance, by the Church or the authority of our Order.

This is a matter most worthy of deep value in as much as It brings with it a debt of conscience toward God, obliging under serious sin. These are matters more noble and outstanding than common ones. The taking of perpetual religious vows has a meaning that is meritorious and of exceptional importance, so that most authors equate, in a sense, the religious profession to baptism and martyrdom, considering among other things, that it provides remission of penalties due for already forgiven sins. This pious opinion is not unlikely. It is, moreover, certain that the religious profession suspends the duty of any vow issued before the profession, and that as long as the professed remains in religious life.<sup>11</sup>

The vows are therefore, for the religious, the best way to pursue the purpose of his vocation: a very high degree of perfection. They renew the gift of baptism, in an initial consecration of oneself to God, done with full and complete awareness. And in the vows is included a lifelong consecration and the hope of receiving graces necessary for further progress, as it tends more to the generous self-sacrifice and a desire for a particular kind of life.

#### *Virtues related to the vows.*

Each of the three vows issued at the time of the religious profession in our Order of Prémontré presupposes a corresponding virtue. Indeed, each of the vows has a moral object, is in search of some good of a more eminent dignity, which necessarily includes some specific moral virtue. Therefore, the religious, seeking perfection, to which he is bound by profession, gives himself over to the pursuit and exercise of the virtues connected to his vows, to seek perfection toward which he is bound to tend and which the Lord expects.

As has been noted, a virtue, in general, is a habit of the soul, by which one is disposed to pursue some moral good and flee from the opposite evil. How then is virtue related to a vow that seeks the moral good? *By the vow*, the religious distances himself from some laws for which he is naturally competent, but whose pursuit he puts aside for a higher goal. On the other hand, *a virtue* restrains the inordinate passions of the soul. *A vow* deals only with that which the religious intends to bind himself under pain of sin; *a virtue* leads one to an ulterior perfection. *A vow*, faithfully observed, makes it easier to free one's soul from various

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<sup>11</sup> Canon 1315.

difficulties and expedites the practice of the virtue. A *virtue*, rooted in daily practice, offers a safeguard against violations, even small ones, against the vow.

It is understandable that sometimes a religious could get lax, or even backslide, from the way of perfection, without being guilty of violation of his vows, but all simply because he will have failed to establish a solid virtue by the necessary asceticism patiently. But note well, a certain minimum sets the limits in which the obligation of the vow fits, below which one cannot talk about a tendency to perfection. A vow sanctifies a religious in so far as helped by it he tries to develop the related virtue, and thus is really obedient, poor and chaste, free from the threefold desire. The spirit of the vows, vis-à-vis their strict observance, is the readiness, even the co-naturalness of observing the related virtues, without which the donation of oneself, done by profession, can never be said to be total.

### **Conclusion.**

Quite suitably the first draft of the renewed Statutes of the Order strongly warns: "Since the faithful observance of the vows, to which religious are bound on the day of their profession, depends not only on the spiritual progress of each one but also on the progress of the community, superiors as well as their subjects must not only observe everything, but also, by completely and faithfully respecting the spirit of the vows and all the Institute's practices, become religious in fact not only in name and dress, but also in reality and life style. All Abbots and Superiors who do not carry out their duties bring great ruin on their communities and what terrible judgment they will undergo before God if they do not tirelessly, by word and example, exercise a fatherly vigilance so that the flock entrusted to them will be vigorous and flourishing in the observance of the vows according to the spirit of our Order."<sup>12</sup>

## **ARTICLE 1**

### **Obedience**

#### **Introduction: On the special importance of religious obedience.**

It has frequently been asserted that the vow of obedience, and even more the virtue and the spirit of obedience, are the summit of religious life in which the other two vows and their practice are included. This is rightly so. The evidence for this is that at one time the formula of profession did not include them; only the promise of obedience was expressed. Thus it was formerly in the Order of Prémontré where, after having promised conversion of

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<sup>12</sup> *Statuta Renovata an. 1925-1930*, n. 103 sq.

ways and stability in place, there was simply added in conclusion: "I also promise perfect obedience in Christ to you, Reverend Father N... etc."<sup>13</sup> This did not elude our Adam, the Premonstratensian who remarked: "This is probably why at profession you make mention of obedience because all else depends on it, and that everything else that you learn which is useful, will be provided from it."<sup>14</sup>

And indeed, there is no disadvantage if the promises of chastity and poverty imposed on religious are included in obedience. It is easily understood that one who intends to give himself to God by entering a way of life in opposition with its donation, would find himself questioning his own gift. The chief reason for the whole gift is in obedience, since one who renounces his desire to adhere to the will of God, is supposed to just adhere to the will of God.

Lepaige correctly gave first place to the vow and virtue of obedience when he writes: "everyone will admit that the vow of obedience has first place as the Prophet said: obedience is better than any victim offered in sacrifice."<sup>15</sup> Adam Scot writes the following about virtues: "the precious and glorious virtue of obedience has prominent place among the others." He continues, saying that: "it is the apex, since it gives to all the holiness which makes them good, and strength which makes them sustainable. Without it, the virtues can have neither the brilliance of holiness, nor the force of perseverance; without it, the oblation or offering itself may not be perfect, the conversion of one's ways real, or stability in place successful."<sup>16</sup>

One could write a huge treaty about religious obedience; we have tried to do it in a chapter, where we deal with the virtue of obedience, then of the vow, and we will finish with some practical advice.

## **§ 1. The virtue of obedience**

*Obedience in general: concept and consequences.*

Obedience as a special virtue is generally defined as a moral virtue inclining the will to accomplish the order of a superior with the intention of complying with the precept, or because it is a good thing to obey the superior who commands.

The essence of this virtue lies in this, that one does what lawful authority orders, precisely because he orders it, and because it is honorable and appropriate to do so. One has the acquired habit of obedience who has a firm disposition of mind to faithfully fulfill legitimate

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. entire text in VAN DEN BROECK, *De Professione solemnī in Ordine Praemonstratensi*, Romae 1938, pp. 92, 97.

<sup>14</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canoniorum Praemonstratensium*, Sermo XIII, n. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 582.

<sup>15</sup> *Bibliotheca Praemonstratensis Ordinis*, Parisiis 1633, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ubi supra.

commands, because it involves a moral integrity. Regardless of whether the superior presents his orders as a command, request or suggestion; as long as the intent to prescribe is clear, there is an opportunity to exercise obedience.

This virtue operates in many aspects of life. By birth, one is incorporated into a family, and thus, into civil society, and therefore one is already subject to various superiors whom he must obey. By baptism one becomes a Christian and a member of the Church and so is obliged to obey the ecclesiastical hierarchy. By religious profession one is incorporated into a religious institute, promising obedience to legitimate superiors in all which is consistent with the Rule and Constitutions.

#### *Religious obedience concept and scope.*

Religious obedience is distinguished from other kinds of obedience in that the main reason for which the religious obeys is not its obvious usefulness, nor the need to maintain the discipline of a house, or its effectiveness for imposed work. It is more a deeper imitation of the obedience of Christ, a more strict fulfillment of the will of the Savior, which requires all those who seek Evangelical perfection to sacrifice his own will. This mortification of self-esteem removes the major obstacle to this perfection. It is good for a religious to exercise it but not so much because he has chosen it, but because it appears to him as God's will.

Indeed, one who enters religious life with this general purpose – and it is never retracted afterwards – of living according to the obligations of its state, among which he knows that obedience holds a prominent place, then whenever he obeys he cultivates the special virtue of obedience. When he does what the superior commands or suggests, he implicitly does it "because" he was ordered or advised and in doing so, he abdicates his own will, which he intended once and for all on the day of his profession. Religious obedience does not search the why of what is ordered other than the reality of the given order, and to give so-called blind obedience, a qualifier abhorrent to many of our contemporaries because they misunderstand it. It is not called blind because one who obeys considers his belief is better vis-à-vis that which is commanded, but because the importance in the choice to submit is not to find the reason for the order - this is the task of the one in command - but clearly the reason to obey is seen in the light of faith. He perceives God Himself commanding through the superior, here and now, and this is sufficient for him.

#### *The exercise of obedience.*

In the exercise of obedience, different human faculties have their roles to play, so that the full practice of religious obedience submits the whole person to God. The religious applies

his external forces to execute the order; but moreover he conforms his will to that of the one ordering him, and thus, he freely wills what the superior wills and is not unwilling to do what he does not wish to do. He thus subjects his own judgment to the judgment of the one giving the order, at least by thinking, e.g. supporting the superior in certain judgments which may be lacking to the subject. Our Statutes urge us to this perfection of obedience: "religious are bound by the virtue of obedience to observe the requirements both of the statutes and of the superiors. Let them strive to do this as perfectly as possible, submitting their judgment and their will with full docility."<sup>17</sup>

This is how religious obedience can avoid being a true holocaust of a man, by which he reserves nothing for himself, but denies himself completely and consecrates himself to God.<sup>18</sup>

*Distinctions concerning precepts or Statutes that are to be observed or transgressed.*

Any precept of the *Rule* or the *Statutes*, any injunction of a superior or officer having dominant power, offers the religious the opportunity to perform an act of the virtue of obedience, although their transgression is not always a sin against this virtue. The question of "malice" in a transgression of the *Rule* or a command of the superior will be examined later (chapter 2, art. 1), where we deal with the observation of regulations.

Therefore, there must be a clear distinction between the general rule of action adopted by the religious who intends in all circumstances to practice the virtue or the spirit of obedience, even when the superior does not command under the vow, and docility, which every religious is held to show in all activities, by reason of the vows he professed. We've already dealt with the former issue, and now we move on to the latter.

## **§ 2. The Vow of Obedience.**

The religious vow of obedience is: "the free promise made to God to obey the competent superior freely when he commanded legitimately that which is consistent with the Rule and prescribed by the Constitutions."<sup>19</sup>

*The quality of the vow directed to virtue.*

On the other hand, both when only exercising the vow out of obligation and when the superior imposes an obligation, there is virtue. Therefore, any violation of the vow of obedience

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<sup>17</sup> Stat. 468, §§ 2 and 3.

<sup>18</sup> Concerning which there is no lack of material to treat it. Special tracts should be referred to, and notable in this material is the « Letter of St. Ignatius of Loyola to the brothers of the Society of Jesus in Portugal. »

<sup>19</sup> SCHAEFER. *De Religiosis*, Romae 1947, n. 1086. And cf. Stat. 468 § 1.



is contrary to the virtue of obedience, though the converse is not true: some violations of religious obedience do not violate the vow, and as a result are not necessarily opposed to the virtue of religion. There are many occasions for a religious to exercise the virtue of obedience or to sin against it, but few instances of either exercising or violating the vow of obedience. And there are instances of a small violation against the vow, but a serious one against the virtue.

*Limits of the obligation of the vow.*

In our Order, the obligations of the vow of obedience are limited by the Statutes and the juridical commentaries on them. These state when the superiors can oblige under the vow, either with light or serious obligation, whom these oblige and whom and what can be obliged.<sup>20</sup>

All this is useful for forming the conscience of a good religious: it is necessary that he knows well what he is required under the vow to remain always faithful to what he promised solemnly to God on the day of his profession. These circumstances are indeed rare enough, and there is no lack of clerics for whom something will be imposed or prohibited under the vow.

*Extent of the integrity and merit of the vow of obedience.*

It should not be thought that a religious rarely gains merit from his vow of obedience. This vow does much to inform religious life. That is because the vow leads to merit whenever the religious executes an order which, motivated by the virtue of obedience, is imposed by the Rule, even if there is no need to involve the obligation of the vow. Isn't it because of the vow taken that the virtue of obedience becomes in the religious "religious obedience," and that by profession and specifically by taking the vow of obedience, a bond of authority and subjection is formed between the religious and his superior so much so that the learned doctors speak of dominative power of the regular superior over his subjects rooted in the vow of obedience, and therefore the same vow is the foundation of the obligation of exercising the virtue of religious obedience? Therefore, every act of obedience placed by a religious participates in the observance of the vow, though there may not be a sin against the vow unless the superior intends to bind the religious formally. Moreover, the religious who presumes an order of his superior, in accordance with his desire, can gain the merit of the vow, "in so far as he wants to obey what is not actually commanded, to guard against any transgression of the vow and get used to the more perfect observance."<sup>21</sup> It has also been said: "It is not bad that the religious

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Stat. 470-475.

<sup>21</sup> SUAREZ, *De virtute et statu Religionis*, Tract. X, Lib IV, cap. XIV, n. 9.

are often performing acts of this kind to strengthen more and more the promise made to God in their profession."<sup>22</sup>

### **§ 3. Practical admonitions**

A religious must above all hold holy obedience in high esteem in order to be generously devoted to the practice.

#### *Appraisal of Obedience.*

It must be acknowledged that the people of today, especially the young, quite eager for independence, practice little obedience, and still less religious obedience. They despise it to some degree because it leads, they say, to a sort of abdication of oneself, unworthy of a human creature, the male in particular. They consider it "too hard to renounce one's own judgment and abandon freedom that the vow of obedience includes by its nature."<sup>23</sup> They would like to achieve holiness without giving up their own "initiative" even in the smallest things. This kind of thinking prevents many young people from embracing religious life, and penetrates in a more or less creeping fashion, young religious. This is why Pope Pius XII wrote the following: "Disobedience, a most peculiar illness of our times, disperses strength and renders apostolic efforts weak and fruitless."<sup>24</sup> For this reason it would be good to consider often that religious obedience develops freedom, vivifies activity, and develops personality.

For if obedience, as it is a religious virtue, should be distinguished by a mark of abnegation, and indeed more than chastity or poverty inasmuch as it demands the renunciation of one's will in many things, nevertheless it consists not merely of renunciation but on the contrary leads to numerous acts of the will with excellent moral and psychological value, and does not eliminate, but rather directs personal activity.

There is no doubt that one who obeys cultivates his will in conforming it to the superior's, because it requires a more intense willingness to do so than if he were following his own movement. And one who obeys uses his inner freedom excellently in determining actively to do what is commanded him, and especially as it may be overcome by some spontaneous inclination to the contrary. And this is not weakness; a weak person follows the will of another out of his own powerlessness while the religious does what is asked because he sees the will of God Himself in the order of the superior. This motive of faith is held in less estimation in more recent times. It is painful to realize this. Pius XII once reminded us that "the duty of obedience

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<sup>22</sup> RAUS, *De sacrae Obedientiae virtute et voto*, Lugduni 1923, p. 280 (n. 154).

<sup>23</sup> PIUS PP XII, in *Allocutione diei 8 Decembris 1950*, *Delegatis conventui generali ex universis Religiosis Ordinibus*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 30 sq.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of March 25, 1955, to the Master General of the Dominicans, AAS XLVII (1955), p. 270.

is based on reasons not always clear but still firm; they must see God Himself in their superiors".<sup>25</sup>

Nor does obedience suffocate all "initiative" or external freedom. Clearly it limits it somewhat and is not always good in itself; but it does not delete it. For indeed, besides domestic obedience which concerns religious discipline and which entails some passivity, there is functional obedience, by which the religious strives to exercise effectively and with fruitfulness the obedience he accepted. In this, there is a personal activity, for which obedience gives impetus and direction. In our canonical Order, where vows are particularly oriented to a priestly ministry made more perfect under obedience, these opportunities for obedience are made manifest to the benefit of apostolic activity.

### *Generosity in obedience.*

If a religious would hold obedience in due esteem, he would move every obstacle so he could order his life and from that, gain more merit. Philippe of Harvengt, the Premonstratensian, verifies this about such a religious more than any others when he said: "the virtue of obedience is summed up, and so seen, that no other virtue is of perfect merit if it is not aided by its assistance".<sup>26</sup>

One should therefore zealously strive to obey various superiors and officials, who have duties assigned to them, simply and without argument, promptly and without delay. Filial love towards the superior urges this. Our father Augustine, after noting that the Superior will render an account to God for those subject to him, added: "Therefore, obey your superior, not only for your own sake, but for his also, for the higher his position, the greater his danger."<sup>27</sup> Nor should commands be expected all the time. Often the superior asks that something be done without commanding it for some just reason, sort of inviting the subject to act on his own. In such a case, one can exercise perfect obedience by anticipating the will of the superior, by spontaneously proposing some work for which authorization is sought. And although the subject is not required to obey orders unrelated to the Statutes or Rule, it would be evidence of Evangelical self-denial. Anyone who wants to restrict his obedience to the strict canonical limits and demands all the freedoms which the various texts of the Statutes or canon law do not deal with opens himself to the danger of presumption about the spirit of his vocation, which is to give himself totally.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> De obedientia Clericorum, cap. 1. Migne PL 203, col 841.

<sup>27</sup> Regula, cap. 11.

There is on this subject an excellent text of Philip of Harvengt: "One who wishes to be considered perfectly obedient, ought not to be restricted within the narrow limits of the vow, but be drawn to greater things by free will. The author of the Rule, even if he does not wish us to dare to go contrary to it, does not forbid us to go beyond it. Beyond what Augustine prescribed for us, there are other possibilities open to us, not wanting, by lack of generosity, to constrain us within the strict limits of the vow. And in total generosity, it demonstrates, under the influence of charity, that we do what is commanded."<sup>28</sup>

Nothing has been so maligned, especially today, than this concept of generosity and self-sacrifice in obedience. We should realize very well that religious obedience would cease to be the great sacrifice of life and the holocaust of one's own will, and that would be false obedience. Let the religious rejoice if sometimes something painful is imposed on him, e.g. to give up or exchange some duty with another, in which perhaps the years have crowned his efforts with success. Obedience is not tied to some person or work, but only to God, Who is the same for all.

Therefore let us be willing to adapt our will as subject to a superior faithfully nor should we count up the number of times, but only accommodate our will to that of the superior. We can illustrate the will of a superior, and believe in his fallibility, but let us not contend or try to influence him. When the motives he has for commanding this or that are clear to us, let us use this information so that we can do better what he wants done. When we don't know his motives, let us give up our will in a spirit of faith, so that we can give assent with purely open faith. If the superior is truly seen to be in error, do not hesitate to let him know for it is all right for one to have the penultimate word. However, unless the command is patently against the laws of the Church or of God, let his decision stand, since the ultimate word is his. The superior has been placed on a higher level and is presumed to judge and decide more easily and more freely. If sometimes it seems very certain that he is wrong and makes a decision that seems less timely, we are required, not so much to change our judgment of caution, to be persuaded that our act of obedience will be able, in a higher order, to produce with the grace of God, a greater good. God can write perfectly on curved lines.

This would remain true even if the superior, for selfish or even sinful reasons, orders something which, although morally unassailable, would seem awkward. Then we stand here before the wonder of supernatural obedience, because it is clear that the submission of the subject, by means of pure charity and great personal sacrifice that it assumes, is able to cause a great influx of grace than the superior who is wrong, and that flows abundantly to the individual or the common good.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, cap. XL, Migne PL 203, col 932.

The religious will be happy who faithfully follows obedience. He is always and everywhere safe “and has no reason to doubt about his reward”.<sup>29</sup> Lepaige writes that “the one who navigates the skiff of obedience, whether he is idle or eating or sleeping, or even doing the works of religion or penance, always accumulates an increase of merit and will come happily to the harbor of salvation.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Conclusion.*

In conclusion, this excellent advice included in the first edition of the Renewed Statutes states: "Considering carefully the importance for the religious life of perfect obedience promised to God according to the Gospel of Christ, the brothers should organize their lives so that the vow of obedience remains inviolate, even in the slightest things; let the spirit of obedience be present in all their actions, for it is the basis of religious life and the support of union and peace.”<sup>31</sup>

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **Chastity**

#### **Introduction: The parts of chastity in religious life.**

We have already said that religious life is a sacrifice in which a person consumes himself by the fire of love in the service of God. This immolation is made perfect by the three vows which constitute holy profession. Among those vows, obedience and poverty presume common or cenobitic life, and as such under a hierarchical superior is ordered toward the practice of perfection, and all material goods obtained through work are destined not for the individual but for sustaining common life. On the other hand the vow of chastity, with the obligation of celibacy, concerns rather the life of the individual religious in the integrity of the flesh, body, mind and heart totally consecrated to God.

It is chastity which deals with the attraction toward things carnal and helps the person to give himself more readily to God and divine things, and to see other people as their equals in seeking God, and as such, lovable and helpful so as to enable them to say with Paul: “We no

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<sup>29</sup> ADAM SCOTUS, *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praemonstratensium*, Sermo XIII, n. 9, Migne, PL 198, col. 588.

<sup>30</sup> *Bibliotheca Praemonstratensis Ordinis*, Parisiis 1633, p. 40 f.

<sup>31</sup> *Statuta Renovata* an. 1925-1930, n. 105.

longer look on anyone according to the flesh.”<sup>32</sup> Hence it is a matter of special importance in religious life.

Chaste practices bring an effective help to priestly ministry and to the priesthood, toward which our canonical Order is directed. Chastity, in effect gives the priest the purity of soul and body which are fitting for holy functions. Philip of Bonne Esperance writes: “One who is not striving to cultivate continence with other virtues, should not take up the ministry of the altar. Attendance at the altar in effect requires holiness, and one cannot be sanctified unless he is continent.”<sup>33</sup> And similarly, freedom of the heart, which perfect chastity confers, permits the apostle of the kingdom of Christ to work with the same zeal for those souls who have recourse to him or have need of his ministry.

Nevertheless, more than the practice of obedience, and poverty, the integrity of chastity is exposed to many perils, both internal, because of the evil concupiscence which is in us from birth, and external, because of the attractions of passion that beset us from all sides, especially “in these evil times, in which the virtue of chastity is attacked in many ways.”<sup>34</sup>

There is certainly no reason to despair or to be upset as long as the love of God, who urged us to enter into religion, is able to overcome, whenever it is needed any natural propensity even the most violent. On the other hand, we have at our disposal in religious life, the asceticism and discipline which are very significant protections against the attractions of the flesh. As Pope Pius XII, addressing religious, said: “Be certain of this: one who devoted his innocence to God, must by prayer and penance, struggle, as once Jacob did with the Angel, to come out victorious in battle.”<sup>35</sup> It is no less certain that the fervent religious, with the grace of God, will succeed in what the Premonstratensian religious desires in this regard: “That religious chastity, the splendor of Holy Mother Church and our status as religious, should shine and give light in all the religious of our Order.”<sup>36</sup>

## **§ 1. The virtue of chastity.**

*The notion and extent of chastity in general.*

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Cor. 5, 16.

<sup>33</sup> De continentia clericorum, cap. 55, Migne PL 203, col. 733.

<sup>34</sup> Pius PP XII. Litt. Apost. diei 11 Julii 1948, AAS XLII (1950), p. 381.

<sup>35</sup> Allocutio diei 23 Sept. 1951, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 735.

<sup>36</sup> Stat. Renovata an. 1925-1930, n. 119.

The virtue of chastity is aptly defined as follows: A moral virtue, a species of temperance, which inclines a person to govern the sexual appetite and the use of the generative faculty according to right reason, illuminated by faith.

God, in His wisdom, has joined to the carnal act of generation great pleasure, by which is provided appropriately for the propagation and conservation of the human race. These should not be used by humans only because of the delights, nor should he debase such noble ends. This is the area of the virtue of chastity, so that a pure life is developed through habit, which establishes a perfect mastery over baser propensities. The norm to be followed in this matter is abstinence from any carnal enjoyment inordinately sought or agreed to.

This is not the place to propose moral rules which, according to requirements of right reason and Christian holiness, distinguish what is lawful from what is not. Such carnal acts and everything leading to them, either in marriage to serve for the generation of progeny, or out of wedlock, should be avoided.

*The notion and extent of religious chastity.*

On the other hand, besides chastity in general, and what is to be observed in the marital state, there is the so-called "perfect chastity", which is perpetual abstinence in body or mind from any sexual pleasure, including what would be licit in the state of marriage; this is so that the soul can freely be available to God and focus on Him more completely. It certainly happens that such a degree of chastity is attained in the world; but it is entirely essential for the religious state which is totally geared toward the seeking and obtaining of God.

Therefore religious chastity intends to consecrate the integrity of its flesh to God, i.e. to preserve virginity undefiled or, if perhaps it was irreparably lost, to abstain henceforth from every sexual act voluntarily committed or admitted.

But even purity and freedom of heart come under the environment of religious chastity; they consist in this, namely that anyone wishing to lack any inordinate sensible affection for any person whatsoever and all affections and joys which make matrimony perfect and which impede the soul nevertheless from loving God and Jesus Christ totally and exclusively, should be excluded because they do not allow any friendship unless it is of God its author and end.

*The flower of chastity, modesty.*

*Modesty* is both the flower of chastity and its bulwark. As a virtue, it will not be specifically distinguished from chastity, but it assumes the existence of a greater perfection. It is shame, but not spontaneous and instinctive, but is rather voluntary. It can be defined as "the

careful chastity of security and sincerity."<sup>37</sup> It flees from anything suspect or dangerous. Pope Pius XII said well: "To achieve that perfect dominance of the soul in its bodily sense, it is not enough to refrain from acts that are directly contrary to chastity. One should also give up absolutely, voluntarily and generously any offense which, closely affects, this virtue. The soul is then fully with the body and may in freedom and tranquility live the spiritual life."<sup>38</sup> And this brings about modesty which "Prevents the danger that threatens, avoids exposure to danger, and avoids opportunities that face one."<sup>39</sup>

In general, modesty deals not only with prurient acts, with a conscious attachment for carnal pleasures, but also with certain indecent acts, indifferent in themselves, but more or less closely related to lust, because they prepare the pathway, or even assume a more or less conscious influence. Such are the eyes, hearing, touch, words, imaginations, sensuous conditions. All this is to be avoided: we can assume the danger of lust, if not lust itself, hiding under its masks. Under these assumptions, these acts would be dishonest and their gravity would match the seriousness of the fault. If, however, there are serious reasons to act, the presumptions disappear and there is no fault. But the cleric who is also a religious should fear the possibility of scandal, as for any carelessness in sexual matters, or any act that would be only suspect, may cause astonishment of the faithful and harm the standing of our holy Order or religious family of which we are part.

Any indecent act of this kind should be avoided with particular care, but without anxiety or scruple, by those who have vowed perfect chastity, and they are required to refrain from anything relating to the sexual appetite. Adam the Premonstratensian said it well: "chastity is present in actions when, in all external movements, a person appears to be strong and in full possession of his maturity, without ever allowing lascivious harm by inattention to the purity and nobility of his morals."<sup>40</sup>

There are various precautions and prescriptions by which canon law and the Statutes of the Order are meant to defend the chastity of religious: cloister, relations restricted with women, regulations relating to making visits or receive visitors, letter-writing, etc. Their perfect observance brings a greater security in such uncertain matters.

## **§ 2. The vow of chastity.**

The religious vow of chastity is the promise made to God to refrain from any external or internal, illicit carnal delight in itself, or which would be lawful in the conjugal state.

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<sup>37</sup> VERMEERSCH, *Theolog. Mor. IV*, ed. 3a, Romae 1933, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> PIUS PP. XII, *Encycl. De Sacra Virginitate*, AASS XLVI (1954), p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185.

<sup>40</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praemonstratensium*, Sermo 10, n. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 535 sq.



Here, the object of the vow coincides with that of the virtue since the religious who sins against the virtue also sins against the vow; a violation of the vow inures the virtue. In addition, a solemn vow deprives the religious of the ability to embrace the kind of life in which lawful use of the genital faculty with the pleasures attached is permitted, namely marriage. This is clearly stated in our Statutes: "By the vow of chastity, temporary or perpetual, the religious is bound to observe celibacy, and moreover to refrain from any internal or external act opposed to chastity. And by the solemn vow, he becomes incompetent to contract marriage."<sup>41</sup>

Someone could make a vow of perpetual chastity until marriage; or even get married with the intention, confirmed by vow, do not engage in sexual activity: consider for example the marriage of the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Joseph; or even, dedicate himself to perpetual celibacy, without entering upon carnal sin, because of the vow, would be an act against the virtue of religion. But by his profession, the religious promises two distinct things: keeping celibacy during the time that the obligation of the vow endures, and refraining during this time from voluntary carnal acts.

These considerations will be useful mainly to moralists to judge the case and the seriousness of the violations of the virtue or the vow. In the ascetical matters we are talking about, we can see the issue as it is conversely, considering that the religious by his own formal will is fully and exclusively dedicated to God. In these circumstances, he cannot contract any family relationship with a companion or children as the result of his vow. This is the reason for celibacy, requiring him to abstain forever from any carnal act, and it is to this that the vows refer. Thus, as appropriate, the life of the religious, and in particular his purity, is placed under the sovereignty of God's love with a more intimate union with God.<sup>42</sup>

Even in these matters, it is clear that the efficaciousness and merit of a vow taken are not limited to the vow freely taken; if he places a voluntary act, or was victorious over an impure temptation. Indeed, every time the religious refrains for the sake of complete purity from any sensuality, even not guilty, but ones that can give the imagination or the meaning of the elements leading to sexual acts, there is, at least implicitly, a way to observe more fully and more surely this integrity promised to God by the emission of the vow of chastity. All this helps to ensure constant compliance with the virtue of religion, and his life will be deeply impregnated by his vow of chastity.

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<sup>41</sup> Stat. 476 -- §§ 1 and 2.

<sup>42</sup> Sub illo praecipue respect castitatem religiosam spectat et de ea agit CAN. J. LECLERCQ, *La vocation religieuse*, 2a ed., Tournai-Paris 1952, pp. 27-78.

### **§ 3. Practical admonitions.**

#### *Appraisal of continence.*

In these last decades, more accurately than previously, research and studies have been done about the power of Christian marriage for sanctification. It has often been said emphatically that marriage was the "golden way" leading to holiness. The collaboration of the spouses exalted in the procreation and education of children is held in esteem and the union of man and woman as the full evolution of the person, and giving themselves mutually to one another as a means of elevating themselves in a more purely and stronger manner. There is much truth in that to be held in esteem by spouses for holding Christian marriage in esteem and invigorating their own marriage status.

On the other hand, to draw too much attention to such data exclusively, and, to extol the good points of marriage, could give birth to the danger of minimizing the desire and worth of virginity in a large number of Christians and those dedicated to God in virginity or celibate life; this would be a shame. It is necessary to a great degree that consecrated souls develop and maintain deeply within themselves the value of physical and emotional integrity to which God calls them. They should hold Christian marriage in high esteem, but not neglect to thank the Lord, not some creature, for his grace but the one God, the foundation and end of all Goodness, who is the goal of their lives.

It is obviously true that a creature honestly loved can certainly lead to God since God can manifest the divine perfections in him/her; and by sharing love, one can already begin to break free of one's selfishness, which is the first step to loving God. But blessed are those who will have escaped the seduction of creatures, but is guided in a straight line to God and clings to Him directly. And if Jesus Christ wants to reserve exclusive love for some people, blessed are they who are called to this particular privilege!

Pope Pius XII wrote very well: "it cannot be said, as some do that "mutual aid" which spouses seek in Christian marriage is more perfect than the solitude in the heart of the virgin or a celibate person seeking perfection. For those who have embraced the state of perfect chastity and given up human love, could not yet say that, by this waiver, they have diminished or frustrated their human personality. Because they receive that which God confers, that spiritual gift that goes far beyond the "mutual aid" that the spouses give to one another.

Dedicated entirely to Him who is supreme and who communicates his divine life, they enrich themselves to the highest degree."<sup>43</sup>

Those who are called to perfect chastity are not made less because, still being in the flesh, they are capable of acting in the flesh, yet they refrain from acts of sexual pleasures, by which others are somehow dominated and at times overcome.

Religious meditate often in the joy of their hearts about all these thoughts and the huge benefit of their vocation to a life of continence: a benefit to be retained and protected with every effort, certainly, but also with great humility. Frequently they ponder these beautiful words addressed to God in the preface for the blessing of virgins: "without in any way diminishing the value of the conjugal union, which is your divine blessing, your gift, Lord, descended with infinite love on these souls that seek a higher life, who are giving up the carnal to enter into union in a marriage that is the sign of a mystery; do not imitate what is being done in this union, and focus only on its symbol"<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, life in virginity is even more valuable in that it makes our hearts absolutely free and releases our spirit from any worldly concerns. Thus the work of our lives and aspirations of our souls can be directed to the benefit of others. This is what the already cited Holy Father wrote: "By the law of celibacy, the priest is not deprived of paternity; on the contrary it is very much increased, since it leads not to posterity in this life, but rather to heavenly and eternal life."<sup>45</sup>

*Generosity in the observance of chastity.*

There is no more dangerous matter than that of chastity to be strictly observed and to avoid that which is undoubtedly sinful; and obviously that which is mortal sin. Indeed, it is almost impossible to avoid mortal sin if one does not observe with great caution the rules of modesty, custody of the heart and senses – mainly sight, hearing, touch and speaking.

This caution is not primarily out of fear or anxiety, but rather from seeking full integrity. Whenever any occasion presents itself where one discerns or suspects something more or less suspicious, or otherwise useless, let it not be put aside by saying "*I don't dare*", which would be timidity, but rather say "*I do not want*", which is generosity. If there is a legitimate cause or a need to hear, read or deal with something indecent, or even clearly obscene things, e.g., in studies of moral theology or the confessional, one should not decline through timidity that

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<sup>43</sup> Encyclical *de Sacra Virginitate*, AAS XLVI (1954), p. 176 sq.

<sup>44</sup> *Pontificale Romanum*, de Benedictione et Consecratione Virginum.

<sup>45</sup> PIUS PP XII, *Adhortatio* Menti nostrae, AAS XLII (1950), p. 663.

which is one's duty or one's calling, in what is required for the good of souls and bodies. Simply and without worry, it will be necessary to deal with such, but with a right intention: the sincere intention to complete one's workload in an ordinary and secure manner. But even then, do not continue to drag out the sensuality, beyond what is necessary for the legitimate work.

We need to keep a particular vigilance regarding women, as we read in the Rule of Saint Augustine,<sup>46</sup> even those who are good and pious, since neither our baptism, nor religious profession nor even our priesthood is sufficient to extinguish concupiscence. Dealing with women may easily give rise to suspicion about the clerics. Let's not forget that care must be taken in this area regarding the honor of the Holy Church and our Order. Although by our vocation to the apostolate we are required to meet women, and it should certainly be in all charity and kindness, we need to carefully avoid any familiarity and any particular affection. Saint Jerome says: "Either ignore equally or love equally all young girls and virgins of Christ".<sup>47</sup> It can be said with due proportion, avoid all familiarity with "adolescents of both sexes", and any "particular friendships". They are also "dangerous to virtue".<sup>48</sup> Don't take any less care in regard to minors than is taken when it comes to women.

Keeping in mind all the above, let this be a practical conclusion: for keeping chastity, it is sufficient to apply the mind to all things above and keep a constant vigilance. The Spirit strives toward the sublime when chastity is not seen as mere abstinence from any lasciviousness, but much more as a condition equal to and following from the love of God that removes and silences any sensual condition. "Love and do what you will...."<sup>49</sup>

### ARTICLE 3

#### Poverty

##### **Introduction: The importance of poverty in our religious life.**

*Poverty, an essential for religious life.*

Offering oneself to God, which is the essence of religious life, would hardly be honest or sincere if it did not include indifference to material goods. In truth, none of the three Evangelical councils is expressed more clearly by Christ the Lord than that of poverty. Questioned by the young rich man how to gain eternal life, among other things the Savior replied: "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then*

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<sup>46</sup> Chap. VI. – And cf. Stat. 477, § 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Epist. 52, ad Nepotianum*, n. 5, Migne PL 22, col. 531.

<sup>48</sup> Stat. 477, § 1.

<sup>49</sup> S. AUGUSTINUS, *Tract. 7 in Epist. S Joannis*, n. 8, Migne PL 35, col. 2033.

*come and follow me.*"<sup>50</sup> What better example than the word of Christ Himself who "*had nowhere to rest his head*".<sup>51</sup>

*Spirit and practice of poverty by Saints Augustine and Norbert.*

More specifically, with respect to our vocation as Premonstratensians, we need to remember that historically poverty has been the means of distinguishing the canons regular from secular canons. Regular canons are those who, setting aside the rule of Aachen which allowed for the maintenance of one's heritage, adopted the Rule of Augustine, which admits absolutely no personal property.

There is no doubt that at Hippo, strict common life was imposed on the "monastery of the clerics". Two of the most famous sermons of Augustine insist forcefully on this requirement which is his own, deploring and blaming any transgression to this rule: "in our society it is strictly forbidden to possess anything of one's own.... If someone has something, he is doing what is not permitted."<sup>52</sup> This is in harmony with the *Rule*. "*And don't call anything your own, but let everything you have be held in common.*"<sup>53</sup>

Augustinian poverty consists in community of property which is reflected in the expression "*vita apostolica*", because it indeed followed the example of the Church of Jerusalem, founded by the Apostles, where "*everything was held in common*", and where "*one heart and one mind*" flourished.<sup>54</sup> It is one of the main reasons for which our Father Saint Norbert adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, and when speaking of the monastery of Prémontré, he liked to call it "the House of our poverty".<sup>55</sup> For this reason especially, St. Norbert enriched the Apostolic and Augustinian poverty with a new distinction before St. Francis of Assisi by his desire to imitate the poverty of Christ who, though "*rich, became poor for us*".<sup>56</sup> The first Premonstratensians were so affected that they followed a life of poverty in that they endured indigence and "preferred a tunic that was old and patched rather than new and unpatched garments."<sup>57</sup>

*Importance of poverty in clerical life.*

It is right to assign particular importance to poverty in a clerical community such as ours. Pius XI wrote quite rightly: "*Those who are ministers of sacred things must excel in the moderate use of earthly things, no less than in the love of chastity.*"<sup>58</sup>. The Pope immediately

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<sup>50</sup> Matt. XIX, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Luke IX, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Sermo 355, n. 2, Migne PL 39, col. 1570. You should read the entire sermons 355 and 356.

<sup>53</sup> Chap. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Acts IV, 32.

<sup>55</sup> *Vita B S. P. Norberti*, chap. 48, n. 101, Migne PL 170, col 1330.

<sup>56</sup> 2 Cor. VIII, 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Vita B S. P. Norberti*, chap. 25, n. 53, Migne PL 170, col. 1294.

<sup>58</sup> *Litt. Encycl. Ad catholici sacerdotii*, AAS XXVIII (1936), p. 28.

recalled the words of Saint Paul: *"No soldier becomes entangled in the affairs of civilian life, but avoids this in order to please his commanding officer."*<sup>59</sup>

Philip of Bonne - Espérance<sup>60</sup> develops this idea when he writes: "Clerics have to have as their main duty to serve the altar, and look towards God alone; they do not have to search for earthly inheritance, but rather simply a table and poor clothing, so that searching anything beyond, they do not dwell on this subject of external things more than necessary. Not seeking anything fleeting, they will be entitled to possess God as their legacy. In return, they will be able to offer a legacy pleasing to God, so that God is their legacy, and it will be a beautiful, stupendous, extraordinary legacy: God himself."<sup>61</sup> And he adds: "Poverty is the heritage of the clerics and their property."<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, if we know the appeal of spontaneous and voluntary poverty, which was that of Christ, our preaching will be made easier. We know better how to engage fully in the zeal for souls. There is a very close connection between the excellence of his apostolate and the reputation of Saint Norbert the preacher on the one hand, and the fruit of his remarkable poverty on the other hand. Historical testimonials prove it.

Are we therefore not astonished that the first draft of our renewed Statutes presents poverty as something "which, as experience shows, the status of the Order so greatly depends". One would only hope "that the vow and spirit of poverty among our members be considered here in his holy honor".<sup>63</sup>

## **§ 1. The Spirit of poverty**

*What is the spirit of poverty?*

We are not dealing here with a theological question or whether poverty is some special virtue like obedience and chastity or some such or, as some theologians assert, about the "spirit of poverty" because being rich or poor is in itself indifferent, and the rejection of wealth is not for ourselves as religious, but only "as it frees us from those things which hinder us from the spiritual"<sup>64</sup>

In any event, the vow of poverty corresponds to a particular disposition of the soul. To sell one's assets and distribute the results to the poor is a very worthy work of mercy, but it takes all its meaning and value if it is done in a more complete imitation of Christ and for the seeking of perfection that takes precedence for us. Moreover, it would serve nothing toward the personal

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<sup>59</sup> 2 Tim. II, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *De justitia Clericorum*, chap. 42-49, Migne PL 203, col. 718-728.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 42, col. 718.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 47, col. 725.

<sup>63</sup> *Stat. Renov. an. 1925-1930*, nos. 126, 131.

<sup>64</sup> S. THOMAS AQ. *Sum. c. Gent. Lib. III*, chap. 133.

sanctification of a religious if he would give up temporal property or dispose of it freely if, demanding all sorts of permissions from his superior, his heart remains attached to the objects he was given to use. Religious poverty is defined as: the renouncing, voluntarily and in fact, of temporal things in order to follow Christ.

*The spirit of poverty informs external poverty.*

Juridical commentaries on the provisions of the Code of Canon law or Statutes of the Order relating to the vow of poverty suggest at first that there is a mixture of moral issues or law, and therefore do not lead to that freedom of the heart, which is the goal of the vows of religion, but this is a false impression. Nothing will correct this impression unless one insists on the spirit of poverty, which is nothing other than a particular application of those generous souls, who having taken the vow, have renounced everything as vain, promoting sensuality and tend to hinder us on the way to perfection. Thus understood, we will want each day to break the links, even minimal ones, even if they may be pleasant by which we begin to link ourselves here and there to temporal things. In this way, poverty, characterized, not by assignment, but by its spontaneity and its constructive spirit, will marginally mark the person not by some affectation, but as our way of being. It promotes a joy for the soul in his research of religious perfection, to be free from external things by the demands of rules of the exhortations of superiors in this matter. of the exhortations of superiors! The heart is attached to nothing, not the house, the room not books or things used for one's work, not to furniture or art works. It is this spirit which fills with zeal the practice imposed by external poverty. Without it, poverty would be reduced to a narrow and soulless formalism, hardly aimed at sanctification. In those souls hungry for perfection, and who have already reached a high level, the spirit of poverty plays the role of a great fountain of sanctification. Philip of Bonne - Espérance, urging us to poverty, said well: "It is to the extent that you are poor that you will be richer in the merits of perfection."<sup>65</sup>

*Degrees of the spirit of poverty.*

The first degree consists of the freedom of mind concerning things of value. Indeed, religious should "make use of things as if not using them"<sup>66</sup>, as things lent to us rather than owned, and with a spirit of thanksgiving as befits the poor, always ready to abandon them willingly if the superior sees fit, content with what is necessary without wanting the superfluous. "Then, having food and clothing, let us be satisfied with them".<sup>67</sup>

A more perfect degree is not only to develop an indifference to the things we use, but to choose for oneself those which are inferior, and for this reason one approaches a greater resemblance with Jesus, the Savior.

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<sup>65</sup> *De Justitia clericorum*, chap. 45, Migne, PL 203, col. 722.

<sup>66</sup> I Cor. VII, 31.

<sup>67</sup> I Tim. VI, 8.

The religious, however, is called to a still more prominent exercise of poverty, depriving himself of something that he could legitimately enjoy. And more, suffering the lack of what would be legitimate. Then, in such circumstances, one who is truly poor in spirit will bear with patience what so many in the world are forced to endure. He will refrain from quarreling and rejoice in his heart on account of the riches given to him by his abnegation and grow in his love of Christ.

## **§ 2. The vow of poverty.**

We must first distinguish between collective poverty and poverty that is personal or individual.

### *Collective poverty.*

This means that the right to possess or to use something is given up not only by the individual religious, but also by the community as such.

Our Order has never practiced this form of poverty. Its principal proponent and primary preacher was Saint Francis of Assisi, from whose community the idea was passed on to certain other mendicant Orders. Although in itself it is stricter and more severe, there is not a higher degree of perfection in the order of faith to which each religious community tends. As the Angelic Doctor wrote: “It is necessary that religious communities that are intended for corporal works in an active life need to have an abundance of common wealth.”<sup>68</sup> The Council of Trent conceded the right of holding things in common “to all monasteries and houses, both of men and women, even mendicants, except houses of Franciscan Capuchins and those who are called Franciscan Minors of Observance, even those forbidden by their constitutions or if it was conceded to them by Apostolic Privilege.”<sup>69</sup>

With regard to the amount of commonly possession property, information can be found in the ancient traditions of our Order. The spacious and splendid buildings, the magnificence of churches, which would be offensive among mendicants, are considered much less so in our Order. Given stability in place which is required in our houses urges us to this, which they may serve more providently and lovingly, taking care of the hereditage of their Fathers, even increasing and decorating them. Nevertheless, superiors should carefully ensure that personal self-sacrifice is inculcated in them harmoniously with personal sacrifice, which will ensure by word and example consistency with a commitment of this kind. Norbertine abbeys, with the help of God will be both places of claustral austerity and supernatural light to which the faithful may come, seeking divine help.

### *Individual poverty.*

Individual poverty is that by which each religious gives up private property or at least the freedom to dispose of goods, as well as by which the spirit of poverty is fostered by constant practice. This above all is what is practically defined as a religious vow and at the same time guards against human inconstancy.

There are diverse species of the vow of poverty:

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<sup>68</sup> *Sum. Theol.* 2-2 p. 188 a. 7 C.

<sup>69</sup> Sess. XXV, chap. 3, *De Regularibus*.



*A solemn vow of poverty* is had when someone, before the Church and in a religious Order, forever renounces control and possession of goods which he had before profession, the ability to acquire new temporal goods for himself and the use of all things of estimable value independent of the will of the superior. A vow of this sort, responding to the highest grade of voluntary poverty, is taken in our Order after a period of simple vows.

*A simple vow of religious poverty* does not bring about the loss of temporal goods nor the capacity to acquire them, but it removes any free disposal of their use independent of the will of the superior. Such a vow is taken in our Order after the novitiate: for three years for clerics, for six years for lay brothers, and may not be extended beyond a second three year period.

*A third level of voluntary poverty* is imaginable, confirmed by a vow by which one retains the right to dispose freely of material things, while renouncing the use of any superfluous or unnecessary property. It seems that the poverty of some ascetics and monks in the first centuries of the Christian age was thus limited. Subsequently, this vow was not recognized as such by the Church as a public vow, and therefore it is not sufficient today for someone to be considered in the religious State.

#### *Practice of the vow of poverty.*

It is clear from the above that the vow of poverty, besides the exclusion of ownership by solemn vow, includes dependence on the superiors for the use of things of value. The exclusion of any superfluous and unnecessary opulence in the use of things is the purview of superiors themselves, who can be more or less severe in granting permissions. It is not rare for the Constitutions or Statutes to include something on this subject.

#### *Violation of the vow of poverty.*

One sins against the vow of poverty when an act is placed independently of the superior, an act which presumes the right of ownership or free disposition of goods; in other words, when the religious acts as if he had the right to possess material things or use them freely.

Therefore, anyone, under whatever profession, is guilty of breaking the vow whenever he uses or receives, buys or sells, gives or exchanges, secretly dealing or using diverse things with the intent of giving them away. He does not escape a violation if he is constantly neglectful in using or consuming things which are normally available, in such a manner that it forces the community to purchase new ones. It is also lamentable when a religious neglects the care of the goods of the monastery which would be his had he not made the vow.

Moralists deal at length with all this, raising the question of the gravity of the sin against the vow of poverty. Ignoring the disregard of the Rule or the transgression which is explicitly forbidden in the Order concerning poverty, we will only say that the gravity depends on the value of the object which the religious took for himself or used without permission, as well as the nature or the degree of independence of the act committed. One must also consider the lifestyle, more or less parsimonious, that is in effect in an Abbey.

Illégal business (Cf. Canon Law) is especially to be avoided, as can be read in the Statutes of the 16th Century: "The abuse of doing business is to be detested which some of our Canons and Brothers do not abandon after having taken the vow of poverty, going back to the vice of property as a dog to its vomit, looking to their own interest and not that of the community."<sup>70</sup> A decree of the Holy See condemns these abuses and stipulates canonical penalties.<sup>71</sup>

But it is worthy of note that it is much easier than in the matter of the other vows to find sinful violations of the vow of poverty in a religious who has little discipline or is eager to be independent. It is rare that one is ordered by the vow of obedience; rarer still unconscious infringements of the vow of chastity. Through negligence one may not have requested permission, but when abuse is allowed, it becomes almost impossible to keep the vow of Religious poverty. This can lead sometimes, and especially in danger of death, to terrible anxiety of conscience. A fervent religious will frequently review this subject.

### **3. Some Practical Warnings**

#### *Evaluation of poverty.*

Our young clerics and religious are less likely to underestimate the evangelical counsel of poverty than the other two. Aware of the beauty of their vocation, they detach themselves readily from comfort and luxury, and would likely be offended by opulence so that they are sometimes excessive in their own abbey. But with respect to their dependence on superiors for the use of temporal things - which is the essence of religious poverty - they experience the same difficulties as in obedience, and what has been said elsewhere might be repeated.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Generosity in the pursuit of poverty.*

Take care that religious, their youthful fervor lessened, do not again get attracted to amenities and material things, and especially do not give in to the spirit of independence which makes it painful to ask for permissions and to submit to the judgment of the superior for the use of things.

There are several indications of a decrease in the spirit of poverty among religious. First is a fear, not only instinctive, which would be natural, but more affected by his will, not wanting anything to be taken away from him, since if he is not attached, he would not fear this. Another indication, yet more serious is when the superior makes known his intention to remove something, the religious brings forth reasons or strategies for keeping it. He is not yet fully free internally who thinks up artificial reasons for not having things he wants taken away from him. Yet another indicator is if something is taken away, the religious becomes sad about it and that leads to arguments, both internal and external, and results in an offended mind.

One who notices these indications arising in himself, if they are not strongly and generously resisted, will gradually abandon his true religious spirit. The religious must bear his cross and deny his

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<sup>70</sup> *Statuta Ord. Praem.* an. 1505, Dist. IV, chap. 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Decretum S. C. Conc.*, March 22, 1950, AAS XLII (1950), p. 330 f.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. above, art. 1, § 3.

spirit, striving that through transitory things, he can tend to eternal things and not suffer remorse arising from an attraction to created things.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REGULAR DISCIPLINE

Canon law specifies that: "Each and every religious, superiors and subjects equally, should not only observe faithfully and fully their vows, but also conform their lives to the rules and constitutions of their own Order, and thus tend toward perfection of their State."<sup>1</sup>

Having dealt with the obligations of the vows and the practice of the related virtues we now turn to the regular discipline that ought to be observed, as determined by the Rule of our Father Augustine, the Statutes of the Order, the decrees of Chapters and those rules determined by superiors. We will deal first with the rules to be observed in general, and then move on to some more concrete and important issues.

### ARTICLE 1

#### The Observance of Rules in General

##### *The Importance of Discipline.*

There is no founder of an Order or any spiritual writer who has not insisted at length on the obligations on the part of religious relating to regular discipline. Nor is there any religious, unless I am mistaken, who would assert theoretically that the observance or non-observance of discipline in a house is a matter to be taken lightly. But as soon as it comes to practice, our nature is always quick to find accommodations and greater independence, and we incline easily, after the initial period of great fervor, to shake off more or less this daily yoke, and find more or less various excuses to justify our attitude which excuses our faults.

##### *The love of rules.*

We'll never get to observe discipline and truly acquire a respect for the rules unless we first acquire a veneration and respect for them. Thus, we must first appreciate and love our rules since they are certainly a significant part of what we need for the state of perfection we embraced for the love of Christ. They are to be observed, St. Ignatius of Loyola warns us, "in the spirit of love and not with the disorder of fear". For one who loves his vocation, being subject to the rules is not so much a duty or a necessity as an honor and a joy: "*I have loved your commandments*".<sup>2</sup> Should not a religious do what he ought to do here and now and what he knows is, at a minimum, what God wills. He can certainly call himself as did Saint Paul, "*a*

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<sup>1</sup> Can. 593.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm CXVIII, 166.

*prisoner of Christ Jesus*".<sup>3</sup> But if he does this, not out of coercion but out of love, he will enjoy the fruit of spiritual freedom and can say with the Psalmist: "*the Lord led me into freedom*".<sup>4</sup> It is fitting to apply the words of Augustine to discipline imposed by the Rule or Statutes: "The way is certainly narrow for the worker, but wide for the lover; that which is narrow is made wide by love."<sup>5</sup>

### *Difficulties in the pursuit of perfection.*

Let us raise ourselves above too narrow a view of rules, as if they were only for religious, different than the disciplinary rules for students of a college or soldiers in a barracks, and consider them only as to be observed for domestic order in the monastery, as if they were only about inner discipline to be observed in a community. But in a much higher vein, rules play a part in rational life in the parts that tend to encourage contemplation and union with God, austerity of life, and self control. These are offered by our religious and Norbertine vocation as means of sanctification. We intend In accordance with these rules, to surrender ourselves to God on the day of our profession. Any voluntary transgression of the regular discipline would therefore include at least a little infidelity to this whole gift of ourselves once made to God in the generosity of our soul. This is our main reason for observing carefully religious discipline; and this is what said in Holy Scripture when it teaches us that custody of discipline is not an end in itself, but is, as well as with other means of sanctification, the exercise and the increase of charity: "the subject of discipline is love. Love is the keeping of the law; obeying laws, however, is to ensure incorruptibility, and incorruptibility makes one close to God."<sup>6</sup>

As Servais de Lairvelz wrote: "The Statutes and Rules of Religious Orders provide not only the ways of perfection in setting aside the obstacles which delay or stop progress in this way, but they are the summary and the epitome of this perfection."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Sacred Congregation of Rites has said: "Religious who observe with great care the rules of religion, come thereby to the peak of perfection."<sup>8</sup>

### *The dangers of neglected discipline.*

On the other hand, the more a religious moves away from the norms of discipline, the more he alienates himself from God's favors; for neglecting the way given to him by God to strive for perfection, he deserves to be neglected even by the Lord rather than be drawn to the things above to which he has been called. Therefore, if the life of a religious is consumed by

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<sup>3</sup> Eph. III, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm XVII, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Enarrat. II in Psalm. XXX*, Serm. I, n. 15, Migne PL 36, col. 238 f.

<sup>6</sup> Wisdom VI, 19 f.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechismus Novitiorum*, Vol. II, Lesson 147, document 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Decretum Introduct. Causae Fris Mucianai Mariae*, AAS XXIX (1937), p. 216 f.

mediocrity, without any effort toward higher things, he moves meanwhile toward spiritual turpitude and his life lags and not rarely sinks into a neglect of habitual discipline. First he neglects one thing that is prescribed, tomorrow another, then a third, and little by little the help of divine grace is lessened. That leads to laxness and sloth, and eventually even to the loss of his vocation, a truly lax state with all its dangers. In this connection Lairvelz, already cited, tells us: "One who does not take care to observe the Statutes of his Order is exposed to the ravages of the enemies and exposed to an unfortunate path, because he has demolished and upset the most solid ramparts which prevent the enemies from entering."<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore necessary that all religious strive carefully and with perseverance to observe discipline. One should specifically be careful that as one grows older and some relaxation is suggested in little things that he not avoid subjections to the will of another. A certain monk said: "To abandon sweet affections... we were strong, ... and now, due to inclining neglect, we are weak and lazy."<sup>10</sup> St. Bonaventure is not less severe: "Many would die for Christ, but do not wish to suffer lightly for Him."<sup>11</sup> Let us rather emulate the joyful generosity of Saint John Berchmans who exclaimed from his heart: "That I may be torn to pieces rather than willingly transgress the smallest rule!"

*Observance of discipline for the good of others.*

Another reason, likewise valid, cannot be ignored, i.e. to be a strict observer of the rules in order to edify others.

Small individual disadvantages caused by the observance of the rules will be tolerated with a good heart if we consider that this contributes to the common good of the community. This is what is stressed in the Rule. "Prefer the common good to one's own good."<sup>12</sup> What is said by Saint Ambrose applies to the monastery more than everywhere else: "the view of the just is a lesson for reform; for the perfect it is a joy."<sup>13</sup> But, it is unfortunately true that nothing can more effectively ruin conventual discipline than the example of those – even if only one or two – who are careless and negligent regarding the regular observances, looking at every opportunity to do that which is pleasant. The responsibility they incur in the potential effects of their recklessness and bad example should make them think.

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, Lect. 146, docum. 6.

<sup>10</sup> S. EUCHERIUS LUGDUNENSIS, *Homilia 8 ad Monachos*, Migne PL 50, col. 651.

<sup>11</sup> *De profectu religiosorum*, Lib. 11, chap. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Regula*, chap. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Expositio in Psalm. CXVIII*, Sermo 10, n. 22, Migne PL 15, col. 1408.

Also note that in a religious order engaged in the ministry of souls such as our Order of Prémontré, the practice of discipline is not unrelated to zeal for souls. The reason for this is that our priestly ministry cannot be better fostered than by offering our intimate victories and the efforts of a generous will toward an apostolic end. These are necessary for the maintenance of constant discipline.

*Refuting some objections.*

Do not believe someone is weighed down or excused in this concern for small things: there are indeed small things that have a great importance, and vice versa. The soul is indeed constrained by small issues as well as large issues ... but if one is oppressed by small issues, only caring about large ones, as for example the value it attaches to the lower things in contrast to the large. However, if one grows even in small things, he sees the sublime side: God's will, the order of divine Providence in the various circumstances of life that are to be considered or performed in daily acts. Our Holy Father Augustine noted well: "what is small is small; but to be faithful in minor things, is to be great."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, do not judge one to be meticulous where there is only extreme care to performing the duties of office well.

*Dispensations should be sought minimally.*<sup>15</sup>

It is of course very bad to want to obtain exemptions or concessions to lighten the weight of discipline, especially if these favors are obtained by artifice. Thomas a Kempis put it very well: "the tepid seem perpetually crushed under the weight of the discipline, while the fervent person embraces them with joy."<sup>16</sup>

When the exemption appears necessary or fair, it ought to be accepted; but one should never be sought for one's own purposes or received with joy. In this regard, illusions are easy.<sup>17</sup> So that is why a religious should frequently ask whether he really needs the exemptions and the effect on common life and does he have the generous intent to return to the common practice.

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<sup>14</sup> *De doctrina Christiana*, lib. IV, chap. 18, n. 35, Migne PL 34, col. 105.

<sup>15</sup> We are dealing here with *dispensations* in the proper sense of the word, which is a « relaxation of the law in a particular instance », bearing a certain revocation from the will of the legislator, and therefore distinct from *exemption*, by which one is immune from the law according to the mind of the establisher of the law and from *licence* which is a faculty made according to the law, by which an act is permitted by that law.

<sup>16</sup> *De disciplina claustralium*, chap. 1, n. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. S. THERESIA. *De via perfectionis*, chap. 10, nn. 4-6.

## About the guilt of transgressions of the rules.

This question is very important for the practice of our spiritual life: What is the obligation of our rules and what do they require? What guilt will one incur by their transgression?

*What does the law require of one?*

Religious disciplinary standards may establish that the rules be stated in conscience, under penalty of sin, at least venial as among the Carmelites; or under penalty of either mortal or venial sin, according to the importance of the violated precept, as among the Franciscan Friars Minor. But most of the Religious communities exclude obligation under sin. Dominicans, Jesuits, etc. exclude obligation under penalty of sin, and these constitutions are to be obeyed out of love rather than fear.

For us Norbertines, there is no ambiguity since our Statutes state that “the observance of these Statutes does not oblige under sin, but requires an obligation only under penalty.”<sup>18</sup> What about this penalty to be carried out? Is it imposed under penalty of sin or not? Our Statutes here provide a strict obligation, as you can read: “Hence to this penalty, if imposed, there is a real obligation under penalty of sin.”<sup>19</sup> This holds for penalties imposed either in the chapter of faults or by any competent superior acting according to the norms of the Statutes, imposed even outside the chapter.

It is therefore clear that the requirements of the Statutes, -- “and the same is true for decrees of general chapters, circary chapters and decrees of the Abbot General, prelates and visitators”<sup>20</sup> -- while not imposed under penalty of sin, are merely simple advice, but true laws and precepts. Omitting these counsels is not worthy or a penalty nor subject to censure, but the religious breaking the rule is bound to admit it and accept and undergo penalties without resisting or complaining. It happens that at least by means of the Statutes obligations are imposed on one’s conscience concerning all that is prescribed or forbidden, and must, by the prelate, be ordered or forbidden by virtue of the vow of obedience. And certainly, while neglecting good advice is not in itself an agreed upon imperfection, it does stand as contrary, and as such, a transgression of the rules.

The exclusion of an obligation under penalty of sin by force of law concerns only those Statutes that are strictly statutes. Indeed in the text of our Statutes, besides those things “that, because of their bearing for our regular life, are imposed under pain of sin by the Statutes

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<sup>18</sup> Stat. 6, § 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, § 2.



themselves”,<sup>21</sup> there are still two other classifications of prescriptions that bind under conscience.

The first type of these classifications deals with “the three vows of religion ... and statutes which deal with their observance for our members. Basically these have to do with the vows of poverty and obedience.”<sup>22</sup> This applies especially to the vows of obedience and poverty. There are statutes dealing with our relations with superiors who are able to command by virtue of the vow and impose things under the vow. Most especially, the statutes oblige under penalty of sin when dealing with the observance of poverty, both with the confreres living in the abbey and those living outside the abbey.

The second type includes the articles “referring to the requirements of the Code of Canon law or the decrees of the Apostolic See, regarding obligations attributed to such a decree by the Apostolic See,”<sup>23</sup> and on which canon lawyers are to be consulted. In general, it should be noted that articles of the Code of Canon law generally contain real laws and are morally obliging in conscience.

*What if something is an accident?*

Until now, we have considered transgression of rules as such. However, moral and ascetic theology experts insist that many cases arise where violation of rules, which do not oblige under penalty of sin, nevertheless are at least a venial sin.<sup>24</sup> This is what our Norbertine Codex says, where we read: “...unless contempt, scandal or something else causes the transgression to be a mortal or venial sin.”<sup>25</sup>

We should pay attention to this.

*Contempt* in which a transgression of the rule becomes sinful, is not material contempt which is part of every violation, but formal contempt, i.e. by which a rule is violated because the transgressor considered it as minor. Such an attitude can lead to serious fault, if someone does not care to comply with the rule through disdain that one professes in general in its regard. It would only be a minor fault however if he reacts only through some obstinacy of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, § 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, § 4.

<sup>24</sup> We avoid here questions that are extremely controversial regarding imperfection that is agreed upon, namely whether it is of itself a venial sin or not. If you agree that it is a venial sin, then you are forced to say the same thing about a transgression of the rule when there is no doubt about a transgression; unless there is an excusing reason, it is at least an agreed upon imperfection.

<sup>25</sup> Stat. 6, § 1.

judgment or out of some vainglory that leads to making him appear independent and he breaks the rule because of that. Such cases are not unheard of.

It should be noted that repeated minor transgressions can lead to contempt. This is what Lairvelz speaks of: "one who transgresses the rules easily opens himself to the risk of despising them."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore avoid any less than edifying comment, even if spoken as a joke, which treats the rules with derision. Such an attitude can easily lead to at least a material fault.

*Scandal* will be a cause of sin, if someone knows that by his violating a rule, that it will lead others to sin. There is no doubt that one sins by violating the rules many times, e.g., breaking silence, going into the rooms of other confreres, violating the Order's rules of abstinence, disturbing domestic order and relaxing the discipline of the community. Such things cause great detriment and are contrary to the common good, since religious are at least held, sometimes under pain of mortal sin, to act in such a way as not to be a danger to others.

The statutes add: "unless ... *something else* leads to sinful transgression."<sup>27</sup> This "something" will be a frequently inordinate desire by which a brother is led to violate some statute, e.g., for example if he acts out of human respect, undue curiosity, vain glory, idleness to which one succumbs, by irrational inconstancy in neglecting good advice, and so forth. For this reason, the Statutes speak much about one's decorum and reasons for doing things demanded by the religious state, e. g, recollection, modesty, silence, and mortification. In addition the ordinary Statutes often indicate proper behavior demanded by the religious State: contemplation, modesty, silence, mortification. Take care: it is forbidden to omit the demands of religious life, especially when they are related to the honor due to God, as in the religious State.

This allows us to conclude that the transgression of the rules, required by law but not under obligation, nevertheless, if they are really deliberate, fully voluntary, will take little to lead to sinfulness, not against the vow of the virtue of obedience, but against that virtue to which the inordinate transgression gave rise, or against charity in the case of scandal. Many learned teachers hold this, even those suspected of being too rigorous, as for example, Suarez who wrote: "In the breaking of rules, the fault is not from the force of the law. I say: from the force of the law because very often, and more than one might think, the fault will be mixed, because it is difficult, for an honest reason, and with all the circumstances that this requires, to

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<sup>26</sup> Catechism. Novitiorum, Tom. II, lect. 146, docum. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ubi supra.

do something that is against the rules".<sup>28</sup> All religious souls, conscious of their perfection, are strongly encouraged by these exhortations to observe very carefully the requirements of the Rule, Statutes, and the various authorities of the Order.

### **Conclusion.**

All things being considered, we cannot conclude this section more opportunely than by citing the words of the Abbot General of our Order in the introduction to the Renewed Statutes:

"Nothing remains other than asking all our most beloved confreres to pray, and to beseech the Lord, that through prayer they may be able to observe and maintain with good will and receive the discipline of our Order and not dismiss the laws of our Mother, the Order of Prémontré, which teaches us and leads us through the Statutes, in so far as the grace and beauty of our Order is added to our souls."<sup>29</sup>

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **Recollection and Silence**

#### *Recollection and silence in general.*

Solitude and silence are things frequently little held in honor these days, especially when people so often engage in a noisy and hectic life. And nevertheless, even in ordinary life, one needs this quiet from time to time for people to prepare to fulfill some social task. Do not the people of the world also abandon cities at certain times either to rest or to find a quieter place to work?

However, it is essential to spiritual life to frequently go apart from people and the noise of the world in order to listen to God in contemplation; otherwise, the inner life cannot be of any value. This is why all those who want to live the life of perfection are quite calm; and the Fathers, legislators of religious life have never failed to prescribe such.

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<sup>28</sup> De Religione, Lib. I, chap. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Illmus Dom. GUMMARUS CRETS, in limine Dist. Primae Statutorum Renovatorum, an. 1925-1930, p. IX. Verba ista sunt servata ab Illmo Dom. HUBERTO NOOTS, in editione an. 1947.

Yes, interior recollection is really important. Among those who actually tend toward perfection, it can coexist with an external life while engaged in multiple works of duty to their state of life, and while involved in all this activity. But for souls who do not have a long practice of the spiritual exercises, outside silence is a powerful relief for internal reflection, if it is not the essential way.

### *What about in our Order?*

It is clear that the same extent and mode of practicing solitude and silence is not the same in all religious communities. Those dedicated to a more contemplative life dedicate themselves to perpetual silence, like the Trappists; or follow almost a perpetual solitude such as the Carthusians or Camaldolese; or at least strive to avoid contact with the secular world as many Benedictines do. Those who choose an apostolic life are more prone to have contact with the laity and have no reason for solitude or silence, though they do require at least a spiritual life and religiosity. And this is the way things are in many areas these days.

The Premonstratensians, who often have external ministries, nevertheless have some abbeys that practice silence and contemplation like the cloisters of the contemplatives. This is in keeping with the character of an Order according to which the almost monastic austerity of life not only serves the acquisition of personal holiness, but also serves the acquisition of the qualities of a true apostle; the priest gives as much in activity as he receives in solitude.

It said that the first Premonstratensians, contemporaries of our Father St. Norbert and Blessed Hugh, observed silence constantly.<sup>30</sup> If later this rigor was modified, nevertheless solitude was always sought for the houses being built, after the example of the Archabbey of Prémontré. Only exceptionally were houses built in the suburbs when the purpose of the apostolate required this. In this we differ from Mendicants, who preferred locations in the cities.

So let's see how we can and must observe recollection and silence.

### **The Goal of Recollection.**

*Interaction with seculars is to be had sparingly.*

Interaction with profane seculars can be harmful to religious recollection when it gives delight and is done often, as well as frequent journeys. We can set a norm for ourselves not to have business with lay folk beyond what is required by our priestly duties, the good of our canonry or the occasional seeking of legitimate relaxation. Other than these situations, religious should not have dealings outside unless dealing with those situations which are

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<sup>30</sup> *Vita B S. Norberti*, Migne PL 170, col. 1294; “in omni loco, in omni tempore, in omni statu”.

involved in the business of the Lord. If it was licit for an ethnic philosopher to say: "Whenever I was out with people, I returned less human."<sup>31</sup> All the more reason for many clerics to say: as often, as I am too involved with the laity, I too return less a priest and less a religious. In the "Sermon of Saint Norbert", we find a similar metaphor: "As a fish which is out of water lacks almost all natural food, and dies quickly, so the religious without the defense and custody of the cloister, alienated from good example and teaching, is placed in a bad state, in many conversations and detained by those things leading to death. Therefore flee familiarity with worldly people as a fish flees dry land."

*Custody of your room.*

True, even by staying at home, one is able to engage in dissipation, for instance by continually walking up and down the stairs and corridors, by multiplying gestures, or even which is more unfortunate, by adding a few words!

Whoever loves contemplation on the other hand will be a constant guard of his cell, in the custody of which he will find inner sweetness and great spiritual benefit. These are very well known – and how true! In the words of Thomas a Kempis: "In your cell you will find what you often miss when outside. The cell that is continually in use becomes pleasant; one that is infrequently used engenders boredom. If at the beginning of your conversion you are faithful to remain in it and use it, it will become a dear friend and will be a pleasant consolation."<sup>32</sup>

And certainly if we hardly ever go to our cell except at night to sleep there, it will be quite indifferent to us; if we only remain there when we have no pretext to stroll through the house or to go chat with another, there is no shadow of a doubt that it quickly becomes tedious for us. But if we spend our day there, it will become our workshop - work under the eyes of God and out of love for him - it will be for us another sanctuary. Such work is very definitely a genuine prayer. It is a sanctuary also because this is where we easily raise our minds to God in our work, and nothing outside distracts us; it is there that in the morning our first thoughts rise to God; it is there that in the evening we place our spirit in the hands of the Lord. Since it is a sanctuary, let it be in our hearts that always the austere life in our rooms is rightly calm outside.

*Recollection to be fostered even outside of one's room.*

There are many of the brethren, even among the conventuals, who, by reason of their office, are often outside their rooms, either in some office or working in the scriptorium. They

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<sup>31</sup> SENECA, *Epistola* VII.

<sup>32</sup> *De Imitatione Christi*, Lib. I, chap. 20, n. 5.

should not lose their sense of recollection and should observe custody of the eyes and modesty of movement. Sometimes the confreres don't like the monitum that during times of silence they should go about in the cloister with hands under the scapular and their eyes cast down. This is a question of something slight in itself and one should not be wracked by scruples if he sometimes behaves less properly. But do not think when something is of lesser value that it can be omitted.. Everyone can experience that behavior of this kind can favor interior recollection and union with God; on the other hand this is a normal sign. Besides, good behavior gives rise to edification, not only to the brethren but also to others from outside. The laity, even children and young people, are touched and their minds are raised when they see the religious acting thus in the cloister. Much less are they impressed where there is no recollection in the cloister, or they see religious walking around with their arms hanging down or moving improperly and with straying eyes. Our deportment should show a certain gravity, modesty of body, little affectation, no dissipation which destroys recollection and leads to transgressions of discipline.

All this deals with internal recollection and custody of the mind, the desire for which ought to be cultivated in us, as our Adam Scot says: "Tranquility is given, serenity of mind, purity of conscience, the clearness of the internal light is discerned and the sublimity of contemplation is understood. This is a foretaste of the joy of the Spouse."<sup>33</sup> To get this far, it is clear that the imagination has to be reined in, and at the same time, there needs to be "silence of memory"; banish the fantasies and memories that cause disorder and excite the spirit of vengeance which sometimes cause us to avoid our neighbor.

### **Keeping silence**

Among the ways that our vocation puts at our disposal to promote this precious contemplation of our soul, the place of honor should be reserved for regular silence. It is, as it were, the custodian of the other observances, so that if it were removed the entire domestic discipline would perish.

We are not dealing here with keeping silence so as not to disclose a secret, or about charity, or modesty or humility. We are speaking here only of ascetic silence, whose importance lies less in what is not said as in the fact of even refraining from talking.

### *Benefits of silence.*

Preventing noise from outside, silence makes us before anything else, more likely to hear the voice of the Lord and to receive it in the sanctuary of our soul. In this connection, our Father Saint Augustine said with great fervor: "Let us build for ourselves in our heart, and make a home

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<sup>33</sup> De tripartito Tabernaculo, Parte III, chap. 2, n. 140, Migne PL 198, col. 746.

where he can come and teach us and we can talk to each other."<sup>34</sup> Do we not read in Holy Scripture: "It is good to wait in silence to greet God"?<sup>35</sup> Philip of Harvengt elegantly expresses the same idea: "When, by the grace of religious life, men do not spend time talking to other men, but in the secret of their hearts they speak with God more familiarly".<sup>36</sup> And Adam the Premonstratensian developed the same theme: "They will keep their mouth silent so as to hear more fully the word that is said to them in secret. And even the ears of the soul will receive what is whispered as stealthily in a more perfect way, they will be shunned by their energetic resolution to refuse to spread bad news. And to the extent they do not pay attention to unnecessary images that evoke the words, they will perceive by their inner listening the voice that is heard as a breeze."<sup>37</sup>

By this divine Exchange, we are better able to communicate God to men when there is opportunity to present it. Indeed, the soul speaks of God even better when its custom will be to remain silent.

Observing silence favors hard work, for which conversation outside the hours of recreation is inimical. It also promotes peace of soul when too often violating the rule about the time reserved for reflection fills the time for work with other things, becoming the basis of other failures, injuries suffered by the role of superiors, and frequently leads to strife, unrest and complaints.

It is therefore not to be taken as unimportant, when community discipline begins to be translated into specific rules. Silence is regarded as one of the most important of these, to the point that its observance was the criterion for the fervor and the quality of the religious life of a community. Adam Scot strongly stated: "O how necessary to those who hasten to please God in religious life is the discipline of silence! Silence is the key of the religious life, its wall and its defense in every way. Without it, religious life cannot be ensured. Without it, the religious person cannot cultivate justice or keep the peace, or to be secure."<sup>38</sup> This certainty was shared by Philippe of Bonne Esperance: "It is no cloister worthy of praise, even in our time, in which silence is not kept with care."<sup>39</sup>

### **The practice of silence in our Order.**

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<sup>34</sup> *Tract. 7 in Johannem.* n. 9, Migne PL 35, col. 1442.

<sup>35</sup> *Lament.* III, 26.

<sup>36</sup> *De silentio clericorum*, chap. I, Migne PL 203, col. 945.

<sup>37</sup> *Sermo* 21, n. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 210.

<sup>38</sup> *Soliloquia de Instructione animae*, Lib. I, chap. 11, Migne PL 198, col. 818.

<sup>39</sup> *De silentio clericorum*, chap. I, Migne PL 203, col. 945.

No one should hold as unimportant or neglect the precept of silence from our Statutes which are to be observed by persons in certain places and/or times or with certain persons.<sup>40</sup> Do not betray the intent of these prescriptions. It will suffice to give some general rules.

### **Seek permissions faithfully.**

Some seem to believe that it is permissible to talk to a confrere when, in their view, there is good reason. But that is not true. Perhaps the reason will be sufficient, that permission should be asked for and obtained, but not to get involved in conversation without prior permission. Permission can certainly be sometimes presumed, but only when there is no possibility to go and find the superior. And in extraordinary circumstances, there may be a need for “epikeia”, but it will probably be quite rare. If it were otherwise, it would almost destroy the force of the law, and its purpose and effects would be nullified. Lairvelz duly warned: “Even if it is permitted to speak when the working conditions require, a convenience should not be taken for a necessity. By necessity is meant whatever cannot be realized in religious life except by obedience.”<sup>41</sup> It may seem difficult to ask permission from a superior who is far away in order to speak to a confrere who is nearby; but aren’t the requirements of religious life made of small sacrifices of this kind?

### *Noise to be avoided as well as the multiplication of signs.*

Silence is not prescribed only for helping individual recollection, but also for the sake of quiet which should exist in a monastery. And if you speak, even for a good reason, at a time or in a place where silence is necessary, it should always be in a low voice, so that the sound of the voice does not resonate in hallways or in the dormitory.

Remember that even monks or anyone who wishes to emulate their discipline, are always to have the time after Compline until the completion of the morning exercises as a time of “magnum silentium”; hence it is not allowed to seek or give permission without a very serious reason, and then especially, when one uses such permission, to avoid any noise.

One who wishes to be imbued with the spirit of silence must not only refrain from talk; he must also avoid communicating by signs, in the times and places for silence, especially if this is done with many gestures and accompanied by laughter.

### *The Practice of Silence as One grows older.*

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<sup>40</sup> Cr. Stat., Dist. III, Tit. 6, chap. 4; and *Codex Juris Can.*, can. 564, § 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Catech. Novit.*, Tom. II, Lect. 28, Reg. 19.



It often happens that after a fervent novitiate, during which the novice is monitored and punished for violations of the law of silence, this concern weakens gradually. Silence is broken without seeking permission, first for necessary things, then useful things, and then futile things such as talking about things that happened in the novitiate. The young professed may now attend university to continue his studies, or be called to military service. Returning to the Abbey, he will be much more inclined to laugh, gesticulate, and chat. The propensity to speak had once been tamed, but now it is stronger than ever. It is in vain that this young religious worked hard before and now he is again defeated by the spirit of dissipation unless he is inflamed again with the desire to interact more intimately with God, and that, aware of the impossibility to do so without practicing internal contemplation, he will return to the observation of regular silence.

## ARTICLE 3

### **Time given over to work**

Besides spirituality and other common exercises, the religious devotes some time each day to work, either in common, in his own room, or in different offices.

In his work "The Work of the Monk," Augustine strongly attacks the monks who do not want to work, but rather appeal to the evangelical precept about not worrying about the needs of the body and leaving it to the faithful to provide for their needs.

#### *Manual labor.*

In the above cited book, Augustine spoke almost exclusively of manual work, since the monks of that period were rarely suited for intellectual work. Moreover, it seems that in the early days of our Order, all the confreres seem to have been engaged in manual labor: consider the brothers of the first Church of Prémontré – surely not only lay brothers – building by the sweat of their brows. But then, Philip of Bonne Esperance warned: "The cloistered cleric must put the study of the Scriptures first, then manual labor, not delighting in it, but tolerating it, ensuring that the spiritual delight attracts him, but temporal need compels him."<sup>42</sup> The Statutes of the 13<sup>th</sup> century still have little to say about manual labor;<sup>43</sup> that chapter is still found in the Statutes of 1630. But at this time it seems that manual labor is almost abolished in practice for the canons. For the chapter begins with these words: "The prelates may exempt all or part of their religious from manual labor. If it is necessary, or a prelate orders it, then the following is to be observed."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *De scientia Clericorum*, Chap. 13, Migne PL 203, col. 706.

<sup>43</sup> Chap. 7. Editio Pl. LEFEVRE, Lovanii 1956, pp. 14-16.

<sup>44</sup> Dist. I, chap. 9, n. 1, Averbodii 1897, p. 26 f.

Thus, the custom is more and more established of giving manual work to the lay brothers, lay employees, and even in moderation to clerical novices, while intellectual work or priestly ministry is the domain of canons. This strict distribution of the various types of activity among the various classes of religious is probably due to the low esteem accorded to manual labor at the time of the Renaissance. And yet, it seems that a moderate practice of manual labor by clerical confreres and priests is not without usefulness. It allows for better recognition of the bonds between all the confreres, when their common work leads to the good of the monastery, and accents awareness of being in the state of "the poor of Christ" who must earn their livelihoods in the way that the divine Master did for thirty years, by using their physical strength.

If therefore, various circumstances, or the orders of superiors, cause our clerics or priests to engage in manual work, they should do with generosity what the superiors require of them, mindful that it is not so much the quality of the work but the intention with which it is done that gives it value in the eyes of God, and thus produces its supernatural fruits. This is even more true for the those named to such positions as: provisor, cellarer, secretary, which per se are material and secular tasks, but are very useful for the normal functioning of religious life, which by its constitutions and its activity is focused on the supernatural. And whatever one's occupation, even a secular one, each can, as St. Augustine writes: "say many prayers, many aspirations no matter how rapidly,"<sup>45</sup> to maintain the union of the soul with God.

Care must be taken that manual labor does not become an opportunity for dissipation. It should not lessen or relax the discipline of silence, unless it is to the extent of providing or receiving information about the work. The actions and behavior of each should breathe contemplation and clerical dignity.

*Skill to be applied in working.*

Whatever the nature of the work given to the religious is, it should be done well, not sparing oneself, and above all, avoiding unnecessary loss of precious time. We have discussed elsewhere the zeal to be used for apostolic work. In Book II of this work we will deal more specifically with the work of the juniors and lay brothers. Here we will propose some general principles relating to the time not devoted to community exercises, especially concerning religious living in the houses of the Order.

The legislator of the Order offers a general norm: "The rest of the time the confreres are to be in their rooms or where they have been assigned by obedience, and they shall spend the time not in frivolous reading or vain occupations, but in salutary studies and useful work."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Epist. 130, n. 20, Migne PL 33, col. 502.

<sup>46</sup> Stat. 575.

All religious should pay attention to this saying of Saint Paul: "Whoever does not want to work, let him not eat",<sup>47</sup> because the community deserves usefulness from one for whom it provides subsistence, "so that", as stated by our Father Saint Augustine, "they do not eat their bread for free, because it is now common bread";<sup>48</sup> not to mention the spiritual disadvantages that flow from idleness.<sup>49</sup> Thomas a Kempis warned us: "Do not be entirely idle, but read or write, pray or meditate or work on something useful to the community."<sup>50</sup>

It can sometimes happen that a religious lacks an assigned task for a time, leaving him with free time. But this is hardly an excuse to waste time or do useless things, since he can improve himself with correctly selected readings and study to better prepare himself for his ministry, given the opportunity.

We must carefully avoid appearing in the eyes of the world as idle or lazy. Our Father Saint Augustine gives a very timely reminder to the monks: "Show yourselves to people not as an easy prey to laziness, but as determined to seek the Kingdom of God, using the hard and narrow road of religious life in seeking the Kingdom of God."<sup>51</sup>

*Study recommended for priests.*

The advice of the Statutes taken from Canon Law is very important: "Having been ordained, the brothers are not to interrupt their studies, especially of sacred things."<sup>52</sup> New problems continuously arise due to the circumstances of human society and civil culture; one may be informed of these by reading periodicals and newly published books. Similarly, dogmatic theology is continually evolving, and it would not be appropriate for a priest to be viewed as a stranger to these sacred disciplines. Rather, happy is the one who can find the time to do this – everyone does not have such time – instead of foolishly wasting time reading frivolous or stupid material.

*Too many trips outside the room or house are to be avoided.*

Do not desire too often to want to get out of your room and much less, your house, except under obedience, the needs of the apostolate or some other useful purpose. This does not exclude moderate relaxation of the mind, visits to relatives and the like, when the superior thinks it permissible for a short visit to be out of the house. But there should not be any excess.

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<sup>47</sup> 2 Thess. 3: 10.

<sup>48</sup> *De opere monachorum*, Chap. 25, n. 33, Migne PL 40, col. 573.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Eccli, XXXIII, 29.

<sup>50</sup> *De Imitatione Christi*, Book I, chap. 19, n. 4.

<sup>51</sup> *De opere monachorum*, Chap. 29, n. 37, Migne PL 40, col. 577.

<sup>52</sup> Stat. 525; *Codex Juris Can.* can. 129.

Let us be mindful of the words of the “Sermon of Saint Norbert”, already cited: “As a fish which is out of water lacks almost all natural food and dies quickly, so the religious without the defense and custody of the cloister, alienated from good example and teaching, *is placed in a bad state*,<sup>53</sup> in many conversations and detained by those things leading to death.” And let us not be like the monks ironically described by our Father Augustine as “traversing the provinces, never sent, never fixed, never standing, and never sitting.”<sup>54</sup>

*Conclusion.*

The good use of time is an important part of discipline, not only to be organized by rules, but also imposed by the individual confreres on themselves, so that without embarrassment, each *can offer fruit to God who has chosen him*<sup>55</sup> and render an account of the time entrusted to him by God.

## ARTICLE 4

### **Reparation of faults against discipline, especially in the chapter of faults**

*The idea of a chapter of faults and its purpose.*

We have seen that faults against discipline in our Order, are not, in and of themselves, sinful, though they otherwise may include frequently theological fault. However, they should be punished by some penance, and repaired by some external satisfaction. The opportunity for this is given primarily in the chapter of faults, in which “those who are negligent in some area are to fall on their knees... humbly admit their fault and ask forgiveness, and that done, they prostrate themselves on the ground, and patiently await until the presider imposes a penance because of the fault.”<sup>56</sup> But if they have remained silent about their fault, it shall be proclaimed by the superior himself.

The purpose of this chapter is to heal the discipline broken by faults and repair the tear, to prod transgressors to amend their ways and by the humiliation and the proclamation of the penance as well as its execution, procure the deletion of the debt of reparation.

*The antiquity of this practice.*

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<sup>53</sup> I John 5: 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, chap. 28, n. 36, Migne PL 40, col. 575.

<sup>55</sup> John 15: 16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ordinarius Praem.*, n. 195.

The Chapter of Faults has been used since the beginning of our Order as was the custom in the chapters of canons, especially among the regulars. But instead of once or twice a week, as in a large number of communities, the chapter of faults was held daily in the Premonstratensian houses. The prescription remained up to and including the latest edition of the Statutes. Currently, it is up to the Circary Chapter to determine the frequency of the chapter of faults in the circary houses.<sup>57</sup> In all cases, among the three recommendations that we have left from our Father Saint Norbert, frequently recalling what is to be done every day, in the second place is the "correction of excesses and negligences in chapter."<sup>58</sup>

*Humble confession and acceptance of the penance.*

The brothers should never fail therefore to keep in mind this means since it was established to make satisfaction for faults committed by neglect of discipline.

By holding to the chapter, they should examine themselves honestly concerning their observance of the rules and, when recognizing faults since the last chapter, declare them frankly, as is required by the Statutes: "all should confess their mistakes humbly in a clear and intelligible voice", at least if they are public, since "it is not required to confess publicly a hidden fault." unless one chooses to do so.<sup>59</sup> Keep in mind that an accusation of this sort, made spontaneously, is pleasing reparation to God for the fault and the scandal, and an effective way to strengthen the common life. Without doubt, one who is not afraid to confess publicly a fault against the common good, or discipline, or disorder is to be praised and gives reparation of scandal.

Admonitions, corrections and punishments made by the presider of the chapter should be tolerated with full humility and subjection lest this practice be reduced to a mere formality and avoid being a support to the regular life and keeping it from apathy and weakness. If the penance imposed is disagreeable and thus causes some reluctance, it does not lack merit, but it may be augmented provided that this movement is repressed by considering the state of the religious who accepts the admonition freely and that tests of this kind have satisfactory as well as negative value.

*Proclamations made by superiors.*

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<sup>57</sup> Stat. 638, § 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Vita B*, in Migne PL 170, col. 1294 f.

<sup>59</sup> Stat. 636, § 1.

We have assumed until now that the guilty ones had made the confession of their transgressions. But it may happen that they are, consciously or not, overlooked, and then the fault is proclaimed by another.

In the past, these proclamations could be made by any brother, even someone who is not a superior. Made with charity and accepted with humility, they were intended to strengthen discipline and exercise virtues. But all the confreres may not have yet arrived at a very high degree of perfection, so this fraternal charity could lead to various disadvantages and exposure to various dangers.<sup>60</sup> Also, this mutual proclamation of faults fell into disuse, although it was always provided for in our statutes until their adaptation to the new Code of Canon Law. Now we read in the Statutes: "Proclamations in the chapter are to be made only by the superiors."<sup>61</sup> The circator is responsible for proclaiming faults against cloister discipline, and when he does, he is to be listened to attentively.<sup>62</sup>

*Attitude to be observed by the one named.*

The confrere thus proclaimed "should remain silent and listen patiently to what the superior wants to accuse him of,"<sup>63</sup> and never become irritated against the superior who proclaimed it or severely reprimanded him, as if he had been more severe with him than with the others, and is motivated by malice and enmity. He should not become angry by being accused by the circator, who is bound to act by his appointment and who, as Lairvelz says: "does not seek to harm but to safeguard, because while he has to be an accuser, he does not seek to degrade the guilty one, but to promote both good in general and particular, which can be pleasing to the wise man."<sup>64</sup>

The guilty one should rather consider means to correct and repair his fault, rather than searching for arguments to defend himself so that his soul is not injured when he ought to be healed. Adam the Premonstratensian notes correctly: "How unseemly and dangerous to be proud of seeking excuse for evil, of disagreeing rather than to confessing, to remain in sin instead of being absolved."<sup>65</sup>

*What if the accusation is not true?*

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<sup>60</sup> Sapida de hoc habet ADAMUS PRAEM., *Soliloquiorum de Instructione Animae*, Lib. I, chap. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 847-851.

<sup>61</sup> Stat. 637, § 1.

<sup>62</sup> Stat. 256, § 2.

<sup>63</sup> Stat. 637, § 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Catech. Novit.*, Tom. II, Lect. 7, Reg. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praemonstratensium*, Sermo 14, n. 18 Migne PL 198, col. 607; -- vel fere ad litteram idem in *Soliloquiorum de Instructione Animae* Lib. I, chap. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 849.

The Statutes tell us that no one is allowed "to excuse himself in chapter or defend himself against an erroneous charge."<sup>66</sup>

One who is erroneously accused should remember when he went unpunished for faults that were hidden, and transfer the currently undeserved punishment to that fault. In practice, "one who considers himself unjustly charged or punished, can later go to the presider of the chapter, or even resort to the prelate."<sup>67</sup> But, if he does this, "it is as if he falls through his sin but does not advance through merit; ... and while ... the innocent is not punished, he will not be crowned sublimely in heaven."<sup>68</sup> The more he is humbled, the more he will gain if he bears this in silence.

*Conclusion.*

All this material about reprimands and issuing discipline for transgressions is ruled by the following statement, that Lairvelz formulated and expressed: "let the superior always feel you are prepared to bear every correction ... with filial love toward the one who the more he corrects, the more you are inflamed with love, along with pure and sincere affections, offering him your confidence and devotion, and removing any suspicion about him."<sup>69</sup>

### CHAPTER THREE

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<sup>66</sup> Stat. 636, § 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>68</sup> ADAMUS PRAEMONSTRAT., *Solil. De Instruct. Animae*, Lib. I, chap. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 850; or *De Ordine et habitu Can. Praem.*, Sermo 14, n. 18, Migne PL 198, col. 608.

<sup>69</sup> *Catech. Novit.*, Tom II, Lect. 7, Reg. 18.

# THE SPIRIT AND PRACTICE OF PENANCE

Made children of God by Baptism, by religious profession we are made citizens of the heaven in a more yet prominent way. However to be worthy of the heavenly Jerusalem, one must be free from any moral fault, for *“nothing impure can enter there, nor any abomination or lie, but those only who are enrolled in the book of life of the Lamb”*.<sup>1</sup> Any evil that might be in the life of the soul must therefore be eliminated at the earliest possible time. Moreover, our nature, fallen and inclined to evil, must be fought against in all its evil tendencies.

Among the means to overcome or eliminate anything contrary to spiritual perfection and to fortify the holy freedom of our soul, the vows of religion and the virtues that are related to them as well as the disciplinary practices of regular life, dealt with in chapters 1 and 2, play a prominent role. However the faithful observance of the vows and discipline would not help if we did not also have a strong spirit of sorrow and the practice of penance. Because only then will we be able to wash away our stains and lessen the sources of future sins.

Therefore, this chapter will deal with penance, first of all the Sacrament of Penance by which our faults are forgiven with all their consequences, and then the practice of penance, by which opposition to sin and its consequences are more and more rooted in us.

## ARTICLE 1

### The Sacrament of Penance

*Rectifying our journey to God.*

In the New Testament, we find frequent exhortations to penance (in the original text: *μετάνοια*), i.e. to the conversion or inversion of our mind. In truth, in our members, we all sense the law of sin which continually attracts us – and often with success – to abandon the road to God. It is therefore necessary, again and again, to turn back to God, to make corrections where we have deviated, and seek again the right path to the Lord.

But it is never by our own strength, but by divine virtue, that this straightening out of our tendencies can be accomplished, this rectification of our tendency to God, our supernatural goal. This work is indeed that of Christ who alone, as the Apostle Peter said: *“took upon himself our sins in his body on the Cross so that, dead to sin, we may live according to justice, by whose*

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<sup>1</sup> Apoc. XXI, 27.



*wounds we have been healed. Because we were like wandering sheep, and now we are turned back to the pastor and the bishop of our souls."*<sup>2</sup> Whatever our remoteness from God, regardless of our deviation from the way, it can only be corrected by Christ, and that, with pure mercy. It is for this effect that he instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Restoration, by which we are not only purified of the stain of sin, but at the same time directed more fully and more perfectly to God. Thus, throughout our whole lives, whenever our path is frequently diverted, each time we will have the possibility of being accepted again, but on the condition that, with God's help, our new starting point will be higher and stronger than the previous.

The more perfect we become, the more clear our minor faults become for us and our least alienations from God become more troublesome. Hence, how acceptable to us should be the opportunity to receive sacramental absolution, be renewed and once again be "converted" to God by the right path!

#### *Healing and comfort.*

Any Christian, including religious, can acknowledge his weakness each day, through the examination of conscience, and in a number of other well determined ways. He always has imperfections and faults about which to accuse himself against some virtues, all to be admitted humbly before God and a priest. This contrite accusation with absolution becomes the sacramental pledge for pardon and moreover for the help of Christ to be accepted with strength from on high and particularly in matters about which he ought to accuse himself. Thus he is filled superabundantly by Christ; all of this God declared by the mouth of Ezechiel in the Old Testament: *You shall be cleansed of all your iniquities, ... and I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit in your midst,"*<sup>3</sup> and thus, approaching the Sacrament of Penance, the words of the Apostle are validated: *I will willingly glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may live within me.*<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Social Character of the Sacrament of Penance.*

Not only does every sin disorder the relation of people with God and soil the soul, but it also has social consequences to the extent that the faithful, united with each other in the Mystical Body of Christ, are disjoined from one another and that mystical bond by which the religious

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<sup>2</sup> I Petr. II, 24f.

<sup>3</sup> Ez. XXXVI, 25f.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. XI, 9.

family is brought together in the service of God is relaxed. People “*are separated by the wound of sin*”.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore because religious are obliged to seek more perfectly to be in mutual union in Christ, they are required to maintain and strengthen the bond of supernatural union in Christ. And if they are weakened by sin, they need to restore themselves by seeking remission. This is why sacramental purification erasing all sin is attributed to the priestly ministry. The Ministers of God receive hierarchical authority to preside over the faithful, and if dealing with religious, often from the hierarchy of the Order. Reconciliation with Christian society, or the Church, is a sign and cause of reconciliation with God. Are we not brothers in Christ, because the love of Christ unites us who were separated by sin?

#### *Frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance.*

It is clear that religious also, by virtue of their desire for a higher state of perfection in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, occupying a privileged place and more strictly joined to Christ, should make maximal use of the Sacrament of Penance, which heals the soul and reintegrates it when necessary with Christ and the society of the faithful.

Hence the Code of Canon Law prescribes that local Ordinaries take care “that clerics make use of the Sacrament of Penance *frequently* to purify their consciences”,<sup>6</sup> but without specifying a determined time. On the contrary, with regard to religious, regular superiors must take care “that all religious”, and not only the young clerics,<sup>7</sup> “frequent the Sacrament of Penance *at least once a week*”.<sup>8</sup> Our Statutes include this requirement.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore do not listen to “those who speaking falsely say that frequent confession of venial sins is unnecessary, since this is attended to daily through the general confession made by the priest who approaches the altar”.<sup>10</sup> This same confession is made also in the Divine Office at Prime, and each evening at Compline. Such comments are sometimes made by clerics and religious. Pius XII warns them: “Those who minimize or hold that frequent confession is unnecessary for young clerics are not in touch with the Spirit of Christ and contaminate the Body of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Oration of the Feast of Christ the King.

<sup>6</sup> Canon 125, 1°.

<sup>7</sup> Canon 1367, 2°.

<sup>8</sup> Canon 595, § 1, 3°.

<sup>9</sup> Statute 460.

<sup>10</sup> Encycl. Mystici Corporis, AAS XXXV (1943), p. 235.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. And the same Pontiff again stresses this similarly in the *Encyclical Mediator Dei*, AAS XXXIX (1947) p. 585, and in *Adhortatione Apostolica Menti nostrae*, AAS XXXXII (1950), p. 6.

Let us not use the Sacrament of Penance only when we fall unfortunately into mortal sin but rather remain faithful to the practice of weekly confession, and as far as possible, with a regular confessor who knows us and is able to give uniform spiritual direction. Let not the frequency of confession alone be in our heart, but also make the confessions accurately and fervently so that we may gain the fruit referred to above.

Every week, therefore, with a truly contrite heart, let us kneel before the Lord and his minister manifesting our errors since the last serious examination, so that as we have been made sons of God by baptism, we may always renew this condition, revealing past difficulties and obstacles. *Create a clean heart in me, O God.*<sup>12</sup>

## ARTICLE 2

### The Exercise of Penance

"Conversion" to God, which Christ brings about in us through the Sacrament of Penance, is not limited to the transitory acts we place. Rather the permanent condition should be avoided, namely through sorrow for past errors and proposals of good for the future with faith in divine help and urged on by the love of God and Christ.

This spirit ought to be confirmed often by repeated actions; a minimum would be by struggle and constant curbing impulses whenever, because of original sin, *we are prone to fall back into the evils of our adolescence.*<sup>13</sup> We should seize various opportunities or movements of divine grace, so that the practice of mortification will become for us purifying and salutary.

Let us now briefly speak about why we should practice mortification and how it should be done.

#### § 1. Why we should practice mortification

*Christian Denial.*

The Apostle Paul teaches that Christian baptism is at one and the same time a mystery of life and of death. A mystery of death *because our old man is crucified so that the body of sin may be destroyed and we may no longer serve sin;*<sup>14</sup> a mystery of life because the death of the

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<sup>12</sup> Psalm 50: 12.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 8: 21.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 6: 6.

old man tends in that direction, so that *dead to sin, we may live for God in Christ Jesus our Savior.*<sup>15</sup>

But, as long as we journey on this earth *we journey apart from the Lord,*<sup>16</sup> the old man is not yet perfectly dead nor is the life of Christ in us free from danger. Death and life struggle and victory depends on our freedom to go in either direction. Therefore, Jesus Christ makes mortification the mark of His disciples,<sup>17</sup> speaking very clearly: *Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a grain of wheat. If however, it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life will lose it, and whoever hates his life in this world, will save it for eternal life.*<sup>18</sup>

It is not a question of mortification and doleful practices which existed among some ethnic groups, with a merely natural purpose and with morbid excesses. Christian mortification is based on supernatural principles and supported by divine grace. Many natural propensities exist that are not compatible with supernatural tendencies, and these are to be hemmed in to leave place for the workings of grace. Moreover, our exemplar and leader, Christ the Lord, who although he never sinned nor experienced the pull of concupiscence, showed us by His life which was “totally the Cross and martyrdom”,<sup>19</sup> that the physical part of humans can be used for the glory of God and for obtaining the salvation of humans, and especially through austerities freely taken up.

In an ascetical teaching of this sort, self-denial and flight from the world are by no means sought for their own sake, as if they were destructive of nature, but rather for the sole reason and purpose that it purifies, alleviates our nature and thus is quite suitable for lifting it higher.

#### *Religious Mortification.*

From the above, it follows that penance is to be held in honor by religious, since one who, by virtue of his state openly professes Christian perfection, would be held to be alert in seeking ways to do just that. And indeed, the Constitutions of every Order and Congregation urge the members to embrace more or less demanding austerities.

In this regard, our Norbertine Order is not in the last place. St. Norbert shone by his example. He consistently was dressed in goat’s hair and wore a garment of poverty, walked about barefoot, and tamed his flesh with night vigils and hard work. Through many tiring

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<sup>15</sup> Romans 5: 11.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 6.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 16: 24.

<sup>18</sup> John 12: 24f.

<sup>19</sup> *De Imitatione Christi*, book 2, chap. 12, n. 7.

preaching journeys he never gave up the discipline of Lent, fasting until evening, abstaining not only from meat but also fish, and drinking wine only rarely.<sup>20</sup>

His first disciples, according to Philip of Harvengt, “came to the valley of Prémontré, not caring about living in the world, but rather to configure themselves to Christ crucified.”<sup>21</sup> And it should be noted that there were many strict rules at the beginning of the Order, about fasting and abstinence, silence, clothing, and their beds.<sup>22</sup> These practices, given the later accent on care of souls, were mitigated, but not annihilated. Living austere and chastising ourselves, we are more in imitation of Christ, who suffered for us and we offer expiation for wrongs done in the past and we avoid future wrongs. Furthermore we experience the joy which those who fight against the enemies of penance are accustomed to enjoy.

#### *Priestly Penance.*

But in a clerical and canonical religious community, such as ours, the exercise of mortification is a very effective help to our priestly duties, as the Abbot of Bonne-Espérance noted “the painful affliction of monks and the holy and devout devotion of clerics”<sup>23</sup> are found to be suitably connected.

Who does not understand how fitting it is that those who function as priests of Christ are not only ministers of the sacrifice with Him, but are also the secondary victim of the sacrifice: host with host? At their priestly ordination did they not hear the words of the bishop admonishing them: “Imitate what you are handling; when you celebrate the mystery of the death of the Lord, you are taking care of mortifying your own bodies from all sin and concupiscence.”<sup>24</sup> And the religious priest who must more than any others be free from all subservience to the flesh and self love, yet is existing as a part of a community of brothers. How will he keep himself unsoiled if he does not repress with courage and perseverance his flesh and keep himself away from any propensity to selfishness?

Zeal for souls also demands the exercise of mortification. It is the duty of a priest even in this time of the dominance of utilitarianism, gain and pleasure, to direct souls to follow in the footsteps of Christ. This can be verified by the statement of St. Paul: “*Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscence.*”<sup>25</sup> For this he was sent, and more than ever before the priestly ministry demands that repentance be preached not by words only but by one’s way of life.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Vita B*, chap. 4, Migne PL 170, col. 1269-1274.

<sup>21</sup> *De continentia clericorum*, chap. 126, Migne PL 203, col. 837f.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Vita A*, *Monum. Germ. Historica, Scriptores* Tom XII, p. 685.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, col. 837.

<sup>24</sup> *Pontificale Romanum*, De Ordinatione Presbyteri, 1<sup>a</sup> monition.

<sup>25</sup> Gal. 5: 24.

Moreover, the more intimately one is joined to Christ the Redeemer, that much more abundantly will he influence others in the spiritual life. Indeed, what is more like Christ – as he is Redeemer – like Christ, I say, the victim of love for humans, than to suffer as he has suffered? For that reason, more than before, *"will we complete in our flesh what is lacking in the passion of Christ for his body which is the Church"*.<sup>26</sup>

## **§ 2. How we are to engage in mortification.**

*Strict observance of the vows and discipline.*

To live in austerity and develop the spirit of penance, it goes without saying that such a person freely and joyfully takes on a variety of unpleasant things and wins victories over self-love which exist along with a faithful and constant observance of religious vows, and are connected with virtues in our Statutes. Consider, among other things, mutual charity, patience, prompt obedience, total subjection in the use of temporal things, self control in dealing with chastity and modesty, silence, the cloister, fasting and abstinence from both Church and Order law, short sleep time, imposed work, the lack of private accommodations, fatigue from our labors.

Other mortifications freely chosen, and at the same time, neglecting the restrictions on our freedom and the amusements of life which are authoritatively imposed, is evidently disorderly. What is primary is our willingness to comply with the divine will, manifested to us by orders given by legitimate superiors.

So therefore, the scope of the exercises of mortification is wide and should be held in esteem eagerly, and this is not about the practice of extra penance, but about the necessary austerity that is part of the rationale for our way of life, to which God has called us. Let us take care then, that we carry out the practices of religious penance in the spirit in which they are prescribed, not only according to the word or material tenor, but so that they truly imbue the soul with genuine mortification and in a way that the old man is chastened.

*Tolerating Adversity.*

Apart from all the inconveniences which are part of the scrupulous observance of discipline and the exact performance of unpleasant work, it happens sometimes that one is subjected to many unwanted difficulties. Some are not even imposed by positive law, but brought on by various events, nevertheless instruments of divine Providence. Such, for example, are dryness in prayer, even some internal desolation or a protracted illness preventing

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<sup>26</sup> Col. 1: 24.

a much loved task; or an order of a superior opposing something we hold dear; sterility, at least apparent, in our apostolic zeal, detractions which injure our reputation, overturning the results of our efforts in our priestly work; and so many other frustrations, which affect constantly, even religious and priestly life.

The purpose of the Most Provident God, by sending and allowing such hassles, is first to purify the intimate affections of the soul, to more completely free the heart from any attachment to creatures, and quickly bring the one following the path of perfection to direct himself to God who is to be possessed. The result is that religious must bear these crosses with love, since they correspond closely to the purpose of his vocation.

Furthermore, how much treasure is concealed in supernatural endurance of such adversity if we offer it for souls! If the priest offers to Christ the pain which weighs on him for a soul, Jesus Christ will add this pain to his own life-threatening suffering, and turn it into grace for the soul in danger, or even already beginning to succumb. If on the other hand, he murmurs and complains, he deprives the soul of a valuable assistance. He should keep in mind not to force the impetus of grace or hinder it in souls. Neither murmuring nor refusing, he should place no obstacle to the workings of grace. Every burning cry or outburst should be precluded. Every hardship and difficulty should be offered up in one's own mind and for building up the Mystical Body of Christ.

#### *Voluntary Austerities.*

A religious soul can, having done all that the Rule directs, stop there, but would be guilty of a defect of mortification. It is almost unthinkable for a fervent religious not to have the desire to add some freely chosen mortifications and crosses to those penances imposed by the rule.

It is highly recommended that he voluntarily develop the habit of denying himself; by such denial, he will more easily adjust his will when even that which could be granted without fault is withheld. Saint Augustine says it very well: "one who never refrains from things that are licit, is close to the illicit."<sup>27</sup>

Under the Old Law, to each holocaust there was added to the flesh of the victims an offering of fine flour and a libation of wine.<sup>28</sup> Is it therefore not perfectly appropriate that the priest add to the victim of the Sacrifice of the new legislation, which is Christ himself, the

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<sup>27</sup> *De utilitate jejunii*, chap. 5, n. 6, Migne PL 40, col. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Num. 15: 1-15.

penances that he imposed on himself since his last Mass? And this will be no doubt "in the odor of sweetness to the Lord."<sup>29</sup>

These privations would be more appropriate at the times and days of penance, such as Lent and the Ember Days, which would then deepen their value, and also on all Fridays, the day on which the Spouse was offered up for our sins, when it would be suitable for his followers to fast and castigate their bodies.<sup>30</sup>

Positive mortifications as e.g., afflicting the flesh with flagellation, vigils, roughness of hair cloth and other such means are not contrary to the spirit of our Order. But nevertheless they are extraordinary, and not to be used apart from obedience and in moderation. Adam the Premonstratensian rightly noted: "Do not exceed the limits appropriate to sobriety in excluding that which is necessary for your body, but rather that which is superfluous. Don't forget that your body is a beast of burden which must be given to eat, otherwise it will fail. But it is also spirit and it must be controlled lest it revolt. Thus, feed it lest it die."<sup>31</sup> This is especially true for Premonstratensians who frequently have to deal with exhausting priestly ministries, requiring strong physical health.

But a fervent soul may well impose small deprivations on the appetites of the senses and body that do not affect his health, viz. moderation in the use of things that cause pleasure such as not eating or drinking between meals, smoking, reading in a relaxed position, and so on. This in no way requires doing away absolutely with things which may contribute to the restoration of a tired body or fatigue, or useful recreation facilitating good relations among colleagues. But it is regrettable to see religious constantly searching for their material comfort, to the great scandal of the laity, while it would be easy to refrain from many of these elements of comfort, in the spirit of penance.

And where our Holy Father Augustine urges us in the Rule, to tame our flesh "as much as health permits",<sup>32</sup> we should not seek to find in this a warning of moderation: "*not more* than your health permits"; understand this to mean: "*not less* that health allows". Also, fear too much deprivation and do not look for exemptions when there would be concern a certain danger to one's health.

*Death: The crowning of a life of mortification.*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. verses 7, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Luke 5: 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Sermo* 27, n. 9, Migne PL 198, col. 256.

<sup>32</sup> Chap. 5.



After the fervent servant of Christ has led a life of genuine austerity, the hour will finally come in which his flesh of sin will not only be mortified, but now will truly die. But death should be seen as the final act of penance, by which the entire lower and rebellious part of our corruptible nature is immolated to God, until at last by the redemption of Christ Jesus, "*all that is mortal in us will be absorbed by life*".<sup>33</sup>

It happens that death for a priest is somehow a function of his priesthood, as if it were his last mass. The sacrifice of his own flesh began by a carefully kept chastity, and made fruitful by the penances he has performed with zeal. However it is in his last agony that this sacrifice is completed. It is by this sacrifice that he is able to offer himself to the glory of God, for the sanctification of souls and the exaltation of the Holy Church.

And though not all our punishments due to sin are erased before death, let us have confidence in the sacrifices and prayers of others, and especially of our colleagues; recall the words of Richard of England, a 12th century Norbertine: "we will deserve to be freed after our death by the saving host if before our death we were ourselves a host for God."<sup>34</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

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<sup>33</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 4.

<sup>34</sup> Richard the Englishman, *De Canone Mystici Libaminis*, chap. 10, Migne PL 177, col. 470, where the little work is edited as probably to be attributed to John of Cornienne; but from the *Codex Ullyssoponensis* we know that it is from Richard the Englishman.

## PRACTICING DEVOTION

The intimate union of the chosen soul with God is eminently fostered by the exercise of the Holy Liturgy, by which the Church externally represents and works out in souls *the mystery* of salvation *which was hidden for centuries and generations past; but now is made manifest to his holy ones*.<sup>1</sup> And for us in particular, who are canons regular, public worship must be the main source of our holy thoughts and pious sentiments, the real center around which revolves all of our spiritual life.

However the relationship of the soul with God is not accomplished only in the actions and prayers of the liturgy. Every soul is united to God by individual links which give a special stamp to the person's vital union with God. Often on the occasion of a liturgical function, a sermon or a reading, God speaks to our hearts with inspirations of grace and we respond with affection of the mind and through prayers; thus there occurs frequent conversation between God and the devout religious. For this holy and intimate dialogue – at least for several centuries – certain hours are assigned in the daily schedule. Spontaneously then the spirit of union with God diffuses itself during the rest of the time, so that as much as our earthly condition endures, our prayer may become enduring according to the words of our Lord Jesus: *always pray without ceasing*.<sup>2</sup>

Here we will give some brief indications about the spiritual exercises which the Statutes of our Order impose on the members, so that they are not neglected by our many external labors and that we care for building up and perfecting our priestly ministry while caring for our interior development. Then we will deal with the chief objects of devotion and cult in our Order.

### ARTICLE 1

#### INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

##### § 1. SPIRITUAL READING

***What does the phrase "Lectio divina" mean?***

Anyone who will have read through the ancient books devoted to the life of the monks will not fail to be struck by the importance of which is designated by the term "lectio divina". It

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<sup>1</sup> Col. 1 : 26.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 18: 1.

is destined for all times of the day that are not occupied with chanting the psalms or manual work, i.e. many hours daily. It is the same in our abbeys from the beginning of our existence.<sup>3</sup>

But this "lectio divina" signified a fairly complex spiritual activity, not merely constant reading, but also various forms of mental prayer. At that time there was not a clear distinction between meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, etc. The soul united to God, filled with freedom and under the influence of grace, moved from one practice to another.

We will take here the expression in its narrow sense as defined by modern terminology as "sacred reading" in its proper sense, leaving to later paragraphs other more modern exercises which formerly were included in spiritual reading or followed naturally from it.

### **The spiritual profit from spiritual reading.**

In our Statutes we read: "The confreres should have the habit of reading spiritual books, a very effective way to avoid laziness, and to acquire *knowledge that is consistent with doctrine*."<sup>4</sup> This is wholly consistent with the authentic warnings of ascetical authors that one hour of spiritual reading is a great help in building up helps to perfection, and should never be neglected by those seeking to build an interior life. This exercise not only aims to increase the awareness of spiritual knowledge, but also, and may I say especially, to remind us of the truths that we may have forgotten, or left unused, encouraging us to revitalize our faltering will, with the aid of illuminating and strengthening grace.

During our years of clerical and religious training we have been instructed in mystical and ascetical principles but unless we cultivate this knowledge and recall it to memory, we will not be able to use it in our priestly ministry, nor will we find it suitable for directing souls toward God. Our own spiritual life will suffer detriment because occasionally our judgments about things, persons, and events will fail because of our blind eyes and we need to turn to supernatural principles and their application. Without sufficient virtue we will not have the strength to form our own lives well. In fact, we will be confused in our thinking. And truly, pious thoughts that fill our minds during prayer are rarely given us by the Holy Spirit without some connection to graces already acquired. There are many opportunities for recalling ideas which we drew from spiritual reading. The importance of this practice in the traditional practice of monks, as well as that of canons regular, especially in our Order, is significant, according to the testimony of Adam Scot and Philip of Bonne Esperance.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the careful study of FR. ERIK VAN POSTEL, *de "lectio divina" among the Premonstratensians*, in *Pro Nostris*, Ephemerides Norbertinae trimesters (Brabant Circary), XXII (1956-1957) pp. 19-46.

<sup>4</sup> Statute 96.

## **The special objective of spiritual reading: Sacred Scripture.**

Holy Scripture is undoubtedly the main source for spiritual reading, which was once referred to as "*lectio divina*." Attention to the sacred books is the best way to realize "the depth of the divine plan for the salvation of humanity,"<sup>5</sup> and to drink in the authentic wisdom from the Divine Wisdom Itself who speaks there. And how fitting it is for filling hearts with that religious fragrance which fills the Scriptures! Little by little, there will flower in the soul "the knowledge of the Scriptures..., in which a cleric ought to delight by reading, meditating and devouring all of it."<sup>6</sup>

*Which books are to come before others, and what understanding is to be sought out.*

One should first acquire an accurate knowledge of the Holy Gospel and the apostolic writings, as well as the Psalms, which are used so often in the sacred liturgy, and in which, according to our Holy Father Augustine, can easily be found the love of Christ Jesus and of our holy mother the Church.

The other books of the Old Testament should also be kept available to the confreres keeping in mind that the literal sense of the sacred pages is to be dealt with in exegetical and theological studies, but the spiritual sense is sought for food and piety of the soul, and the literal sense depends on Christian tradition. Our elders assigned the literal sense as valuable for the spiritual life above all, then the moral sense, and then the typical Christological, then analogical and eschatological senses of diverse progress in the study of spirituality designated as such.<sup>7</sup>

*The Spirit of Faith to be cultivated in the reading of Sacred Scripture.*

The reading of the Sacred Scripture should be approached in the spirit of a lively faith, not only as if there would be available to us a selection of texts to be inserted into homilies or a font of stories by which we illustrate our teaching, but much more because they come to us pilgrims, longing for "letters from our homeland,"<sup>8</sup> and because they show us the progressive revelation of God to our race; God, who after *he spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, in these final days, has spoken to us in his Son*.<sup>9</sup> Reverence, penetrating attention, and prayer for divine guidance: these are needed for one who attempts to touch the mind of God himself in the reading of Sacred Scripture.

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<sup>5</sup> S. AUGUSTINUS, *Confessiones*, Lib. IX, chap. 6, n. 14, Migne PL 32, col 769.

<sup>6</sup> PHILIPPUS de HARVENGT, *De dignitate Clericorum*, chap. XX, Migne PL 203, col. 696 f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ADAMUS SCOTUS, *De tripartito Tabernaculo*, Part II, chap. 8, n. 92, Migne PL 198, col. 696 f.

<sup>8</sup> S. AUGUSTINUS, *Enarr. In Psalm. CXLIX*, n. 5, Migne PL 37, col. 1952.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews I: 1 f.

### *The Apostolic usefulness of knowing the Holy Books.*

Let us fill ourselves deeply with the teaching and spirit of the Holy Scriptures, so that the faithful may also have access to this treasure. May the words of Pope Benedict XV never be applied to us: "Alas! How many ministers of the altar, having read the Scriptures, die of hunger, and leave a large number of faithful hungry."<sup>10</sup> Let us listen rather to the exhortation of another Pontiff: "Priests who have the task of leading the faithful to eternal salvation, after having searched the sacred texts for themselves, and then worked with them in prayer and meditation, diligently preach the divine Word by means of sermons, homilies and exhortations..., so that the faithful are not only moved to conform their lives correctly, but are set on fire and develop a veneration for the Sacred Scriptures."<sup>11</sup>

### **Other spiritual works that should be read.**

Besides reading the divinely inspired books, one should also have on hand and ponder other spiritual books, which clarify the Holy Scriptures and give us norms to follow in those things which the Holy Spirit wishes to teach us through the sacred writers.

It would be very beneficial for us to constantly have recourse to the writings of the Fathers and ancient authors, also those of our Order who were very familiar with the Holy Bible so that they could hardly write a page, or even a paragraph, without a more or less explicit citation of the Holy Scriptures. Consider among others our Father Augustine, Saint Bernard, Adam Scot, Philip of Bonne Esperance.

Spiritual writers, both older and more recent, should not be neglected; they provide us with the ascetical and mystical traditions of the Church, suitable for a variety of times, and we should keep in mind such development and avoid deviations and mistakes in pursuing the practice of Christian perfection.

The stories of the mistakes and the virtues of the saints, the description of the graces granted by God to these chosen souls, the generous manner in which they responded to the call of God; all those things are most fitting, things that fill our hearts with holy desires and examples of keeping our eyes on the task of seeking God, devoted to Christ, to the Church, and even perhaps to our Order. The well-known deeds of the Saints, though not always to be imitated, urge us on more powerfully to the love of God and neighbor.

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<sup>10</sup> Litt. Encycl. *Spiritus Paraclitus*, AAS XII (1920), p. 409.

<sup>11</sup> PIUS PP. XII, Litt. Encycl. *Divino afflanate Spiritu*, AAS XXXV (1943) p. 320 f.

### **Some practical advice.**

It is therefore not surprising that all spiritual masters strongly recommend daily devotional reading, and so that the practice can become habitual they suggest a time of about half an hour.

So that one can be faithful to this, it is best to select a time to go to the reading each day, unless something unforeseen occurs. Without this precaution and because of our human inconstancy, despite one's good intentions, one could too often betray this excellent intention.

It must be admitted that religious are sometimes so busy with some issue required by obedience or some other work that it is difficult to find a half an hour each day for spiritual reading. One might seek compensation in this case, for example, by reading for a shorter period of time, or more slowly and attentively when reciting the readings of the Nocturnes in the Divine Office or the short readings of the Hours that they may draw fruit from those things drawn from the Scriptures or works about Christian asceticism. From time to time, one may supplement the lack of spiritual reading due to being absorbed by some task or when there is a little more free time, for example during the holidays, for students and teachers.

Indeed reading many things is less important than reading in depth. Do not try to read a large number of pages, but seek instead to garner something useful from what you read. If we find a passage richer or more interesting, do not hesitate to dwell there, reading it two or three times to impress its substance deeply and at the same time raising the mind to God, seeking His aid expressly or tacitly to achieve concretely the purpose suggested by reading.

It is likewise very helpful to copy in a book or sheets of paper things which particularly strike us in our readings; it will help if we read or use them again later.

### **§ 2. Mental Prayer.**

#### *The Necessity of Mental Prayer.*

It is not enough that the seed of the divine word is filed in our intellect by spiritual reading or hearing a sermon. The birds of the air or growing thorns are able to impede what has been sown.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, help the seed to germinate. How? By paying attention to how to apply the received truth to our own circumstances, and by fervent prayer to God who answers our prayers and helps our will if we ask Him, and by turning ourselves over to the contemplation of God and divine things.

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<sup>12</sup> Matt. 13: 4-9, 18-23.

*Neither Mass nor the Divine Office substitute for mental prayer.*

It is certainly true that the priest may find, in Mass celebrated with fervor and the divine office devoutly recited, a sufficient food to feed his spiritual life. This is at least in theory. The reality is quite different, especially in these times in which there are so many opportunities for distraction. Both experience and practical psychology demonstrate that a cleric, who is rarely fervent and devout in vocal prayer and liturgical functions, including Mass, is also careless and negligent about meditation. This is easy to understand. Our weak nature inclined to take it easy and attached to perceptible things often, in the recitation of vocal prayers or the celebration of the liturgical rites, is content with material recitation and liturgical gestures, and pays no attention to the rest which requires the attention and activity of the mind. "What is habitual is not exciting" the saying goes, and this is why after some time, one must make a serious effort to deal in a living way with the sublime realities contained or expressed through daily rituals or formulas constantly repeated. So we must stimulate a deep interior fervor to make any profit from the sublime things which Christ and his Church have reserved for us through liturgical functions. Mental prayer or meditation is such a stimulus by which we are disposed to carry out this cache of the supernatural in the recitation of texts or in personal gestures.

Liturgical prayer, official and public, the true "voice of the Spouse" of the Church, certainly outweighs private meditation and ought never to be subordinate to it as if it only served as matter for meditation. God forbid! On the contrary, private meditation will provide feelings and knowledge that will make us able to perform properly the functions of worship, the purpose of our canonical vocation. Our meditation should be rather the servant of our liturgical functions.

*A determined time should be set for meditation.*

There cannot obviously be strict limits for the time to this intimate relationship with God. However, to prevent invasive outside work from limiting the time spent in meditation, it seemed good to establish a daily duration for it in our Order, about half an hour in which, at least in our regular houses, the community will engage in this exercise.<sup>13</sup>

Those who would be prevented from doing their meditation at the time should spend the same amount of time in private, as indicated by their superiors, and as much as possible in the same place as the others do their mediation, e.g., the choir. Those who usually live outside the abbey, or in another House of the Order, should be willing, as required by the Statutes,<sup>14</sup> to perform faithfully this exercise. Even those who travel should never omit it completely. If it is

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<sup>13</sup> Statute 487, § 1.

<sup>14</sup> Statute 490.

not possible to spend half an hour, one should still spend some time, e.g., by extending their meditation or reflections during thanksgiving after Mass or Holy Communion.

### **Various degrees of mental prayer.<sup>15</sup>**

#### *The first level.*

The initial step of meditating consists in this, that, moderated by the virtue of prudence, one seeks, in the presence of God, how reasonably to bring spiritual principles into practice in the present state of one's soul, or in other words, how here and how one can order his life so that it is pleasing to God and continually rises toward Him.

This means first of all to be aware of our misfortune, our fragility, our littleness in relation to God, so that we are led to spare nothing to purify our mind, sharpen our interior vision, with a view of purging anything that would retard being possessed by God. Experience shows that some souls, despite their goodwill, do not advance in the spiritual life because their purification was not complete. This is indeed a work which must never be lost from view on this earth. But at the beginning of a conversion, this purification must be sought inasmuch as the foundation of our spiritual building is humility freely accepted in the sight of God. "Do you want to be great?" said Augustine, "Are you thinking of building a high building? Think first about a foundation of humility."<sup>16</sup> Thus advancing in this way the reflections of the mind move gradually towards other essentially moral virtues that are necessary to configure the soul to Christ and for us to be joined to Him.

#### *The second level.*

Little by little meditation becomes more and more an action elicited by the virtue of religion. After some time, we must press on to considering the works of grace, by which God, anticipating, helping, sharing, and wishing to sanctify us, draws us to this point. We are caught up in the deeds and sayings of Jesus during his life, his passion and triumph; we begin to scrutinize as much as we can the divine perfections.

We must be careful, however, not to rely too much on the intellectual level at the expense of actual prayer. For we need to indulge freely and for protracted periods of time in affective actions of the theological virtues of faith, hope or confidence, divine love, thanksgiving, so that from the heart, we begin a truly filial conversation with the Lord. One

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<sup>15</sup> We have been careful here to introduce certain norms independently of any particular method of meditation and of any school of spiritual theology, but relying rather on the experiences of holy souls which are common to any method or school.

<sup>16</sup> Sermon LXIX, n. 2, Migne PL 38, col. 441.



should not desire to emulate, even from afar the spontaneity with which our Father Augustine raised his mind to God in prayer in his Confessions and that which our Adam the Premonstratensian dealt with in his work entitled "Three Degrees of Contemplation."<sup>17</sup>

### *The third level.*

It is not forbidden to aspire to a higher level of prayer, where the motion of the mind and the diversity of affections gradually give way to the simple contemplation of some mystery or event of the Gospel, while the emotions become more intense and less frequent. In this way, the practice of the unitive way is greatly promoted and the soul is led to recognize God in some obscure but delightful way which expands and inflames the heart.

Adam Scot cleverly describes those who meditate this way as if "having lit a lamp of willing knowledge, they sweep out the mind's house and seek with all diligence for a long time until they find the lost drachma,<sup>18</sup> in the form of which they seek the Lord's image and grasp his likeness."<sup>19</sup> Then they will be ready to receive more perfect gifts when God wills to provide the treasures of His mystical wisdom. But above all, one must continually tend toward this so that he may attain the prayer which holy men refer to as "vital", that is to an intimate union with God.

### **Some practical advice about meditation.**

#### *1. Remote preparation for meditation.*

Those who complain that they cannot normally, despite their efforts, persist in earnest prayer for half an hour nor even a quarter of an hour, should be told that it is not sufficient simply to compose oneself for meditation at that moment when meditation begins. For in this way the soul often realizes its inability for speculating about higher things or engaging in divine colloquy. It is necessary rather that the soul strives for a habitual state of recollection, pursue freedom of heart and practice fraternal charity. There are much more serious obstacles to fervent meditation than the momentary and accidental (which are really only passing), such as dissipation of the mind, too much affection for creatures, a sense of jealousy or being picked on. These obstacles are anything that impedes access to the intimate sanctuary of the soul, where interior colloquium with the soul's Guest takes place, but from which we are often absent, or busy with other mundane things. Peace of mind and union with the Lord outside the time of meditation is needed if we fervently desire to be involved in meditation.

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<sup>17</sup> Migne PL 198, cols. 795-842.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 15: 8.

<sup>19</sup> Sermon XXI, Migne PL 198, col. 210.

## 2. *Relationship of meditation to the apostolate.*

To be more generously disposed for a fervent and beneficial meditation, it helps to consider often the insights and strengths that this exercise brings the soul who wishes to engage meaningfully in zeal for souls, and this is precisely one of the features of the canonical vocation. This is not to say that through our meditation we should have constantly in mind its usefulness for our apostolate, as if we were using the time to meditation to prepare a sermon. This is not the purpose of meditation, which has the immediate aim of bringing us knowledge and a more ardent love of God. This does not prevent us from presenting to the faithful the things that we have reflected on and this would be more fruitful than if we had thought the apostolate was its first purpose.

## 3. *On whether or not to use a special method of meditation.*

As to the method of meditating an immediate question arises. Should one focus on a concise method, determining its success with various issues like some fixed rules of each predetermined method? An answer to this question is that recommended methods can be useful for beginners. But by following a method, it is important to exclude everything that is unnecessary and which would delay the impetus of the soul toward God. Each soul has its own unique way of entering into conversation with the Lord or thinking about divine things. Indeed the Holy Spirit, in this case, is a more experienced guide than experts.

## 4. *What does our Norbertine vocation suggest in this matter?*

Our attachment to the Norbertine family makes two recommendations to us in particular in this matter.

First, there is the method of raising the heart during meditation. It is called the *method of degrees*, because it seeks for traces then images of God in creatures. Thus we climb from the imperfect to the more perfect; we listen to creatures speaking to us of their Creator. This encourages us to seek, and eventually reach God, the infinitely perfect. Then we will rest in him, maintaining with him a pleasant conversation. This method is open to many variations, but was well known to St. Augustine who described it beautifully many times.<sup>20</sup> Our own Adam Scot also very happily referred to it.<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is very acceptable to the great Augustinian family and particularly to the Premonstratensians.

Secondly, the *object of meditation* is to be considered. Engaged as we are in the recitation and singing of the Divine Office, it will be very useful to take as the subject of meditation those

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Confessions, book 10, chap. 6; Commentary on Psalm 41, nos. 6-8; Sermon 241, chap. 1 and 2; etc.

<sup>21</sup> *De triplici genere contemplationis*, Parte I, Migne PL 198, col. 795-812.

texts that frequently occur in liturgical functions or as part of the Office for the day as fitting the time or the liturgical feast. Thus we enter the mind of the Church, the master of prayer, and we come to a better understanding and a better appreciation of the formulas of the Missal and the Breviary during their recitation.

Otherwise one must be careful not to separate meditation from the other spiritual exercises; it should be inserted, not artificially, but spontaneously. Much better, moved by the impulse of divine grace, meditation leads the soul to rise to higher things and causes in it, in this daily interaction with God, a still greater generosity to discharge more perfectly the celebration of the divine praise and excite one's apostolic zeal.

### **Lifting up the mind to God outside the time of meditation.**

The pious soul who is accustomed in meditation to elicit numerous acts of faith, hope, charity, contrition, suppliant petition and other like things, and delights in them, tends to continue to rise to God, even outside the time reserved for daily meditation. This frequently occurs in secular occupations, as aspirations, and also, sometimes more extensively, at times spent in private devotion and visits to the most Blessed Sacrament. Our Holy Father Augustine alluded to and recommended such private prayers in the Rule when he writes: "That no one is to do anything in the oratory other than pray, from which it is named, and if anyone comes outside the stated hours, if it is vacant and he wants to pray, he should not be hindered by anyone else who thinks he has something else to do there."<sup>22</sup>

Such prayers should be simple, and not with too many words, which the Lord censures,<sup>23</sup> but with a sincere heart, moved by divine love, and with total confidence in God. It is in the silence of a heart that is recollected, fixed on God with fervor and sincerity that the best of prayers comes forth.

The practice of this type of mental prayer actually becomes the breath of the soul, and an almost unrestrainable need for constant growth in the spiritual life.

### **§ 3. Examination of conscience.**

Examination of conscience can be a sort of meditation in which one seeks emendation of one's life, e.g., during the annual retreat or days of recollection. It can also be a part of the preparation for the Sacrament of Penance, or it can be a way of being vigilant in strengthening one's dominance of will according to the demands of divine law and one's state in life. A third

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<sup>22</sup> The Rule, chapter 4.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 6: 7.

way to do this is by the daily examen, prescribed by the Order Statutes,<sup>24</sup> about which we will deal later.

*The Practice of examination of conscience every night.*

Examining one's conscience is usually done in 4 steps.

First, the soul, recollected in the presence of God, *gives thanks* for the benefits which it has received from God, especially that day. This is not only with the formulas that we learned, but with the whole heart, expressing gratitude for all that we have received from Him and by whose care we have been preserved from all ills, consequences of our mistakes, and from all the bad things that we merited by our being careless.

There follows a brief *invocation to the Holy Spirit*, asking Him to show us the state of our soul as it appears in the eyes of God.

One then *reviews errors and imperfections which one is aware of since the last examination of conscience*. This can be done either by reviewing the various parts of the past day, or by checking one's daily work, or by considering the commandments of God and the obligations of one's state. This can be done more or less quickly, depending on the circumstances and people involved. Thus, not only formal faults or omissions are detected, but also past sins, occasions of sin, etc. In this way formal mistakes, even omissions, are brought to light, and the hazards or opportunities of sin also appear. Thus our examination of conscience will not only be used to find past faults; it also invites us to avoid in the future everything which could compromise our walk forward on the path of perfection.

Having thus opened our conscience before God, *an act of contrition is elicited*, as perfect as possible, and we make a firm proposal to lessen our faults and do well without any intermissions. This last part, being a generous and concrete proposal, is most important, and therefore, it requires persistence. For the rest, it depends on the character of each soul and the reason for living, as to what proportion must be emphasized in each of these steps.

*Balance between anxiety and levity.*

Anxious scrupulosity should be avoided in this matter as well as thoughtless levity. Levity, because it is a matter of serious import; anxiety, lest the vexation upset the work of the soul, which is intended to seek better ways toward perfection.

*Fidelity is necessary for the examen.*

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<sup>24</sup> Statutes 488.

Keep in mind the warning of the Statutes<sup>25</sup> which prescribes fidelity to this review, even if briefly, even for those who live outside the Abbey. The examen must be performed to avoid great detriment, which may be unconscious, and could interfere with our spiritual life.

*The practice of the particular examen.*

Besides the general examen whose scope is limited to the investigation of a specific period of time, there is the so-called particular examen, highly recommended by the teaching and practice of the Saints. This focuses the attention and the will on a single point (e. g. uprooting a particular failure, or firming up a virtue), or obtaining a result more effectively than if one spread his spiritual energy among several targets.

The assessment of the progress or lack thereof helps stimulate the desire for victory in this spiritual battle against carelessness and laziness.

One must have a firm constancy of mind in order to persevere faithfully in this practice. It would be wise to be sincerely open to one's spiritual director about the effort and the result obtained. We have on this subject a good example, that of William Eiselin, a canon of the Norbertine Abbey of Rot, who was very faithful to this exercise from his youth until his death on March 28, 1588, allowing him to achieve a very high degree of Holiness.<sup>26</sup>

#### **§ 4 Days of recollection and annual retreats.**

As much as the firm intent to seek after perfection in religious life persists, so much also will the daily spiritual exercises be carried out and, thus it can sometimes happen, given human inconstancy and levity, that after some time some loss of fervor and the growth of tepidity can lessen religious fervor. When there is no passion for regularity, as the saying goes, gradually pious exercises are lost along with the craving for higher things.

It happens that our Norbertine vocation, among other things, directs us to priestly exercises even outside the monastery. It is all too easy to become soiled by the dust of the world or breathing in the corrupt atmosphere of the times in which we live. Without being aware, perhaps our sense of recollection and intimacy with God lessens, and we fall into lassitude, about which St. Augustine said to someone caught up by things outside of himself: You are "an exile of your heart".<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is too often the emptiness of our heart that attracts us to the works of the world outside and thus we live in exile outside the private area of our soul – in which the Lord has performed so many wonders – and we get involved in these works, in which the Lord has performed so many wonders, in which he is present in name,

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<sup>25</sup> Statutes 490.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Pro Nostris. Ephemerides Trimestriales Commissionis Norbertinae "Pro Hostia"*, X (1938), n. 3, p. 55f.

<sup>27</sup> Sermon 330, n. 3, Migne PL 38, col. 1457.

where he awaits with patience until we return to share his meal.<sup>28</sup> In fact we really are "exiles of our heart."

This is why days devoted to contemplation are necessary, when we return to our hearts and only be free for the business of our interior life, lamenting the mistakes made, comparing our progress and our failures in the effort to repair the losses and latch onto better things with new ardor. Also the sources of supernatural life, the priestly, religious, Norbertine spirit, have to be carefully renewed, so that if we think we hear the voice of the Lord speaking within us: "*I hold this against you that you have lost your original love*"<sup>29</sup>, we do not delay shaking off the invading languor and put on once again our first fervor, not in order to be free to be as we were formerly, but to be much better. And at the same time, we should seek ways to maintain and even strengthen this renewed disposition of our soul.

There is hardly a religious or priestly soul that would not testify to the value of days of recollection and retreat as being a source of grace and, not rarely, the start of much fervor.

It is therefore not surprising that our Statutes prescribe exercises devoted to contemplation of the soul for at least five full days annually, and a day of recollection every month, or at least three times in the year.<sup>30</sup> All members of the Order should have at heart to take part in these exercises with a real sense of devotion and generosity. For their part, the superiors should take care that none of their subjects excuses himself from these exercises.

## **ARTICLE TWO**

### **PARTICULAR OBJECTS OF DEVOTION AND CULT**

#### **§ 1. Devotion to the Humanity of Christ**

*Intimate Dealings with Jesus Christ.*

Our Order was founded during the time – the twelfth century – in which the faithful people of the Western Church began to burn with intense devotion towards the humanity of Christ, with which among others the works of Saint Bernard are imbued. The mysteries of the

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<sup>28</sup> Apoc. 3: 20.

<sup>29</sup> Apoc. 2: 4.

<sup>30</sup> Statute 492.

Nativity, the infancy, and above all the Passion of Jesus, especially attracted souls and set them on fire. The Order of Prémontré certainly did not remain far from such forms of devotion,<sup>31</sup> which were manifested in many of their writings from the very beginning, e.g., Saint Hermann Joseph and Philipp of Harvengt.<sup>32</sup>

Such a spirit still inspires our private devotion today as well as our ministry to the faithful. We have nothing more ancient than to contemplate the words and deeds of Jesus in the Gospel, to meditate on them and to begin intimacy and conversation with Christ in our interior lives, a constant intimate exchange with Christ, "a familiarity exceedingly wonderful", as the author of "The Imitation of Christ" says.<sup>33</sup>

Between the beginnings of our Order and the present time, the cult of the humanity of Christ has evolved and taken on new forms, for example in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Christ the King. We certainly remain faithful to our Norbertine tradition if we promote among ourselves and the faithful, devotion and love for Jesus Christ, studying in depth and proposing those more recent devotions strongly recommended by the Popes. In the General Chapter of 1889, our Order "solemnly and perpetually" dedicated itself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and since then has renewed this dedication in each General Chapter. We should keep this in mind, namely "this firm will and immutable proposal that we will attempt in every possible way according to our holy vocation, to promote the cult of the Most Loving Heart of Jesus in our ministry and in our own minds, and that we will offer praise, thanks and reparation to promote the cult of the very loving Heart of Jesus in ourselves and in those we serve. And we will offer most worthy thanks, praise and reparation to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus."<sup>34</sup>

*The Resurrection of Christ is to be remembered in a special way.*

From the beginning of our Order, frequent pilgrimages to the Holy Places and especially during the Crusades, drew attention to the Holy Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. This influence was felt in the liturgy - and especially in France - and among canons regular. Even today, we find multiple traces of this in the Premonstratensian Rite; consider for example the much greater place than in the Roman rite that is granted to the mystery of the Resurrection of the Lord in the Divine Office, in Mass, and processions, during the entire Easter season. The same is true of the Holy Cross from Easter time until Advent.<sup>35</sup> Frequently the writers of the Order in mentioning the whiteness of our habit like to show that it corresponds to the

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. above, p. 16 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Praecipue in suis *Commentariis in Cantica Canticorum* et in opere *Moralitates in Cantica Canticorum*, Migne PL 203, col 181-584.

<sup>33</sup> Book 2: chap. 1, n. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Actus Consecrationis totius Ordinis Praemonstratensis SS. Cordi Jesu.*

<sup>35</sup> Cf. PETIT, *La Spiritualité des Prémontrés aux XII et XIII siècles*, Paris 1947, pp. 79-90.

whiteness of the angels' garb who announced the Resurrection of the Lord; cf. Philip of Bonne Esperance, Adam Scot, and even Saint Norbert himself.

The liturgical renewal of Holy Week and the Paschal Vigil, as well as doctrinal in-depth studies of the New Testament and the writings of the Fathers, cast new light on the central place of the Resurrection in Christian doctrine and life as well as in liturgical worship. For us to comply with this recent trend it is not necessary for us to look elsewhere; we have sufficient wealth at hand in our own liturgical books and the writings of our ancient authors. And this we should diligently do.

### *Careful imitation of the examples of Christ.*

At the time of Saint Norbert, the Gregorian reform greatly favored the worship and zeal for the humanity of Christ. At this period, because the clergy were too eager for wealth, honors, dignities, and were bound and caught up in all kinds of ties with the world, the Church strongly urged her ministers of the Gospel to imitate Christ who became poor for us, humble of heart, dedicated to the Father and the salvation of souls with a total self-sacrifice: He *did not come to be served, but to serve*.<sup>36</sup>

After his conversion, our Holy Founder understood this very well. The fruitfulness of his work and the success of his preaching are due in large part to his strong imitation of the command of the humble and poor Jesus, and his efforts to imitate it. An old biography accurately explained his rationale for living: "To follow the Holy Scriptures and have Christ as your leader."<sup>37</sup> In his actions we frequently find reference to the example of Christ: itinerant preaching, seeking to help anyone in need or destitute, bringing peace and concord among men, living a poor and austere life. Our father seems to say to us, as once Saint Paul said: *Be imitators of me as I am of Christ*".<sup>38</sup>

The disciples of Saint Norbert should therefore seek to penetrate still deeper into examples from Jesus Christ and to draw their life standards from them. For this purpose they will be attentive to prayer, meditation on the Gospel, and generous in their efforts.

The Scriptures, especially the New Testament, is still the main source of ascetical practice in our Order; other spiritual works are more or less useful, according to their connection to the example and teachings of Christ. This explains the work "The Imitation of Christ", which had its origins from a group of canons regular, and which was always held in honor among us. But different eras each have their own way of accessing and imitating Christ,

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<sup>36</sup> Matt. 20: 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Vita B*, chap. 9, Migne PL 170, col. 1293.

<sup>38</sup> Phil. 3: 17.



according to a more penitential or more intellectual approach to Sacred Scripture, and considering the needs specific to the time. One should also read recent exegetical works about these topics and other works which offer a fuller understanding of Christ and deepen our access to His love.

In a word, our devotion to the humanity of Christ constitutes a loving exchange with the Lord Jesus, and nourishes the assiduous study of his person and flourishes in imitating him, to be perfected by his examples.

## **§ 2. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist.**

### *Foundations.*

Although the title given to the Order of Prémontré as a “Eucharistic Order” is relatively recent, the life of Saint Norbert and the subsequent development of the Order show that the practice of honoring the cult of the Blessed Sacrament has been followed widely, as we mentioned earlier.<sup>39</sup> Let it be dear to our hearts, as we do not wish to depart from the fervor of our forefathers.

Among the few sayings of Saint Norbert that have come down to us, one refers to the Holy Eucharist. Constantly commending to his followers “cleanliness around the altar and the divine mysteries”, he added: “for at the altar each shows his faith and his love for God.”<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the current Statutes of the Order of Prémontré, it is therefore rightly stated: “the Order cherishes the cult of the most Holy Eucharist ... recommended by the example of our Holy Founder.”<sup>41</sup> The chapter in these same Statutes “On the Most Holy Eucharist” begins, and has for centuries, with this insistent exhortation: “Let the Holy Eucharist be venerated, revered and beloved by all with full submission of the mind”.<sup>42</sup>

An old Liber Ordinarius, dating probably from the twelfth century, contains in its first chapter, entitled “On Reverence around the altar”, some things to be observed even outside the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, for the sole reason that it is on the altar that The Holy Sacrifice is offered. Here is the beginning of this text: “Holy faith holds that the presence of Christ and the holy angels are on the altar where the Body and Blood of Jesus, our God and Redeemer are confectioned. That is why, before such great Majesty, it is fitting and just to approach humbly, to assist with respect, to carry out carefully and with faith what must be done there to demonstrate the devotion of our heart by the way we show reverence with our

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. above p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Vita B*, chap. 9, Migne PL 170, col. 1294 f.

<sup>41</sup> Statute 3, § 1.

<sup>42</sup> Statute 451, § 1.

body. Whoever therefore approaches the altar to perform a function should take care lest levity or indifference be noted, but rather keep a dignified mature composure, maintaining it whether entering, standing, sitting or performing some action. And each time he passes before or by the side of the altar, he should make a profound inclination.”<sup>43</sup> This is a splendid testimony of the honor with which the early Premonstratensians carried out the Sacrifice of the Altar and all that pertains to it.

The essential reason why our Order has the obligation to more seriously take the greatest care to respect everything concerning the Blessed Sacrament is certainly to be rooted in our canonical character, which was clearly explained earlier in this work.<sup>44</sup> There we dealt with such concerns as the care to be taken in celebrating publicly and solemnly the Sacrifice of the altar, especially in our Churches. This certainly is and will remain a special manifestation of Norbertine devotion to the most Holy Eucharist.

For the present, however, in keeping with the nature of this chapter, we will examine more closely the more individual and private reasons for our behavior.

#### *The Celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass.*

First of all, our priests should be animated by such love for the venerable mystery entrusted to their power so that "according to the spirit of the Order, they might regard as the height of happiness to have each day to offer devoutly and piously the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,”<sup>45</sup> and thus draw forth from it the most abundant fruit. Saint Norbert himself maintained this practice of daily celebration, although it was not customary at the time.

*Before they celebrate*, priests should fortify themselves with a pious preparation time fitting for something of such great value, truly the most precious gift that could be given to the Church to perform on this earth. They should examine their conscience seriously, and purify it with sacramental confession if necessary; they should take care to repent also of any venial sins. They should be attentive also to exterior cleanliness, especially of the hands, and also of the altar, the corporal, altar cloth, chalice and missal.<sup>46</sup> They should be silent and recollected in order to approach the altar with due devotion.

*While sacrificing* they should direct their attention to worshipping the divine Majesty with suitable adoration, to gratefully recalling the benefits of a very loving Father, to appeasing his eternal Justice, to obtaining graces for himself and for the entire Church, and winning the favor

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<sup>43</sup> *L'Ordinaire de Prémontré, d'après de manuscrits du XII et du XIII siècles*, par F. Lefèvre, o. praem., Louvain 1941, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Sect. I, chap. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Statute 451, § 2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Statute 458.

of God for those who offered the stipend. Let them in no way be influenced by human respect, greed or the blind force of routine; and let all things unworthy of so holy a function be far from them.

While celebrating or ministering at the altar, let the members of the Order accurately observe the rites prescribed by the Book of Ceremonies or Ordinarius, with all modesty and fidelity, and without hurrying. They should read the liturgical texts carefully and give them proper consideration; it is suitable to meditate on them even outside of Mass especially during the preparation or thanksgiving. What should be avoided however is a celebration prolonged without reason, for fear that it may cause tedium among the faithful and keep them from attending Mass.

After Mass has been celebrated the brethren should always take a not too brief time for thanksgiving, both devout and quiet. Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, which is rightly considered the “Magna Charta” of the sacred liturgy, stated clearly: “The sacred work, which is regulated by special liturgical norms [i.e. the Mass itself] on its completion does not absolve from the action of thanksgiving those who have tasted the Heavenly Food.” The conversation with Christ who is still present must be continued, “not only”, -- as the Pope continues, -- “that they may hold most sweet converse with him, but also to thank him and to render him due praises, and especially to ask his aid in order to remove from the soul of each one whatever might hinder the efficacy of the Sacrament, and in order that they may do everything on their part which will favor the most intimate action of Jesus Christ.” And he added: “We exhort them to do so in a special way.” None of us should agree to those things or follow those who dissent from the Pope’s teaching. “They, therefore, wander away from the right path of truth who, clinging to the letter rather than to right judgment, assert and teach that once the Mass is finished one ought not to prolong one’s thanksgiving.” Therefore, having denied the assertions and reasoning of such people, the Pope concludes: “Wherefore... whoever would dare to criticize or disapprove of the Church because she counsels her priests and the faithful to hold a colloquy with the Divine Redeemer,... after Holy Communion..., at which moment is there greater opportunity given in which to plead for help in the name of Christ?”<sup>47</sup>

Of course, a private thanksgiving can sometimes be completely omitted, if e.g., when the priest must perform some other priestly function, e.g., hearing confessions. Sometimes it can also be shorter where his presence is required for some common exercise. But outside of similar circumstances, we must engage in thanksgiving after Mass; it is certainly very pleasing to Christ, salutary for us and inspiring to others.

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<sup>47</sup> AAS XXXIX (1947), pp. 566-568.

In a word, in all things related to the Holy Sacrifice, canons regular, and more so, the Sons of St. Norbert ought to be distinguished because of their reverence and piety, for which in this matter, we are second to none.

### *Holy Communion.*

Juniors and lay brothers are to receive Communion frequently, even daily following the decrees of the Holy See and the Code of Canon Law,<sup>48</sup> provided that they are in state of grace and have the right intention, namely that most excellent desire of participating in the Sacrifice of the Mass and uniting themselves more deeply with Jesus Christ and his Mystical Body, and augmenting and perfecting his spiritual life day by day. Let them neglect nothing that would help them be disposed to the best of things. Let them approach with a lively faith and sincere humility, and certainly with an intense love, since the Beloved requires only the return of His love.

The use of Eucharistic Bread will enhance their readiness to adhere to Christ, to adopt and keep his views and feelings; therefore, they will receive a greater purity of heart and purity of intent, with a fuller sense of self-denial and a more profound sense of recollection.

These notions are so familiar to every good religious that it is unnecessary to insist on them. "It is redundant to preach to you about this", was already said on this subject by Adam the Premonstratensian.<sup>49</sup>

### *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.*

Let the confreres freely visit Christ the Lord hidden under the Eucharistic Species. Let them approach Him in times of aridity or temptation, for he is able to recreate, refresh and strengthen them, as the same Adam has said so well: "But if *the flesh lusts against the Spirit* in me,<sup>50</sup> if the vices of the flesh tempt me, if its stimulating goads infest me: then should I not even more have recourse to my only and sure refuge, the body of my Jesus, so that my evil desires would be extinguished, temptations overcome, and stimuli dulled?"<sup>51</sup> In times of spiritual joy, let them rejoice in him who will be our eternal joy in heaven. And at whatever time, standing before him, let them adore the perfect Adorer and our most absolute exemplar of the Father; finally let them commend themselves to him, along with all the needs of the Church, of the Order, and of their canonry, the needs of their benefactors and of the souls

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<sup>48</sup> Canon 595.

<sup>49</sup> Sermon XV, n. 8. Migne PL 198, col. 115.

<sup>50</sup> Gal. 5: 17.

<sup>51</sup> Sermon XL, n. 6, Migne PL 198, col. 366 f.

entrusted to them. And in the silence of their hearts, let them hear what the Lord God has to say to them.<sup>52</sup>

Certainly the confreres living in the monastery will not be able to visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently and for long periods outside of the extended times when the Church is used for liturgical offices. Meanwhile it is sufficient that they go for short visits to Christ in the tabernacle during the free periods at least once a day. This will provide sufficient evidence of the depth and spontaneity of their fervor. On the other hand, those who live most of the time outside the Abbey will no doubt have more leisure to devote each day to such visits, in any church or chapel for some period of time. They might find it in their hearts to recite their Divine Office in private before the Blessed Sacrament whenever they are able to do so conveniently; this facilitates its pious recitation and wins for them many indulgences granted by the Holy See.

#### *Eucharistic Apostolate.*

The confreres engaged in the religious formation of the faithful should omit nothing that will instill the worship of the Eucharist in their hearts.

First of all, they should urge frequent participation at Mass, as often as possible, even outside of Sundays and Holy Days. Nor should they be content with simple attendance; they should prepare the faithful to participate actively in the Sacred Mysteries. They should actively promote the recent renewals and changes. In this way, the Mass will be the Sacrifice of the Christian community in a fuller sense, and will truly be seen as the center and apex of public and social worship.

The faithful, moreover, should be urged to be refreshed often, even daily, with the Eucharistic Bread, as the Holy See has urged, especially by Pope Pius X, who wrote: "Let those who attend Mass, be not only affected spiritually, but also sacramentally, and let them receive Communion with the right disposition."<sup>53</sup> However, the priests will not satisfy this by computing the number of those receiving Communion, but by using apt means to foster internal dispositions which will lead to an abundance of spiritual benefits. Let them take care that they acknowledge and do what is necessary to explain the relation between the Eucharist and Christian charity, so that the Sacrament is seen not only as a union with Christ, but also with one's neighbors, one that leads to peace, reconciliation and social justice.

They should promote visits to the Blessed Sacrament and various other manifestations of Eucharistic piety, such as processions, solemn adorations, Holy Hours; they should freely hold conferences about the Eucharist.

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<sup>52</sup> Psalm 84: 9.

<sup>53</sup> Canon 863.

Our Order has long since acquired the title of a Eucharistic Order and the faithful expect more from us than from other priests and religious so that we should direct and encourage them in exercising piety towards the Most Blessed Sacrament. We don't want to disappoint this expectation, but much rather confirm it. This will only be to the honor of the Norbertine family.

### **§ 3 Devotion to the Virgin Mary.**

#### **Our Order and Marian Devotion.**

##### *1. As a Canonical Order.*

Certainly we canons regular, for whom the model of the "Apostolic Life" of the primitive Jerusalem community was predetermined from the very beginning by our Holy Father Norbert, following our Holy Father Augustine, should be particularly attentive to the words of the Acts of the Apostles: "*All were persevering together in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.*"<sup>54</sup> To which our Philip charmingly observed: "No one more than the Apostles followed the same Virgin more familiarly or, through her mediation, more fully obtained knowledge of the bridegroom. Living for some length of time with her, before and after the Passion of Christ, they frequently heard from her of the mystery of the Incarnate Word."<sup>55</sup> And a little further: "Indeed by the example and merit of the Virgin who is found first to have run more perfectly, the Apostles *and their successors* believe that they have received their graces."<sup>56</sup> By successors are meant not only the bishops, but also clerics and the canons who take as a model the "*Apostolic life*" and carry it forth.<sup>57</sup>

In this union with Mary, following the example of the primitive community under the leadership of the Apostles, we find the specific elements of the Marian devotion of canons regular, and indeed such an element which makes this devotion penetrate more deeply and imbue their spiritual, priestly, and religious life.

##### *2. As the spiritual progeny of Saint Norbert.*

Our holy founder left us much testimony of his great devotion to the very glorious Mother of God. Here are some examples: He was extremely faithful to offering Mass in her honor on Saturdays; he prescribed the giving of alms on major feasts of the Virgin; he wanted to dedicate the church at Prémontré and other churches of the Order under her name; he handed over the church of St. Mary in his episcopal city to his confreres. And what great Marian devotion there was among the Saints and Blesseds of the Order!

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<sup>54</sup> Acts 1: 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Comment. In Cant.*, Lib. I, chap. 12, Migne PL 203, col. 213 f.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 13, PL 203, col. 215.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. PETIT, op. cit. p. 163, note 1.

The Premonstratensian show themselves really worthy sons of such forebears since they observe such filial devotion and intense respect toward the Holy Virgin, the principle patroness of the Norbertine family, named so beautifully in the first Missal of the Order as: "Virgo Conservatrix of the Order of Prémontré!"<sup>58</sup>

### 3. *As a particularly Marian Order.*

Marian devotion is certainly familiar to all Christians: "No one can call himself Christian if he is not devoted to Mary", said Abbot Wichmans of Tongerlo.<sup>59</sup> It is a known fact that for centuries in our Order there have been many forms of Marian devotion (e.g. the Little Office, Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, her patronage, particularly recognized, etc.) These forms, truth be told, are not exclusive to our Order: Cluny, Cîteaux, and other Orders also have similar practices.

However, the consistency with which the Premonstratensian Order retained various practices such as the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, after it had been deleted almost everywhere should be noted. The obligation of the Little Office was removed by the General Chapter of 1953, but only after more recent forms of devotions among the faithful were approved by the Church, such as the Rosary, and were virtually adopted by the Order. Indeed, the multitude of external exercises of devotion would eventually have impacted the demands of studies and the apostolate.

And, although we do not claim that in our Order, the Marian character is its specific quality, it is fair to note that the Premonstratensians have a unwavering devotion to the Mother of God, marked with a special character.

## **Practical Implementation.**

### 1. *Cult of the privileges of Mary.*

We honor the chief privileges and cult of the Virgin Mary, as does the universal Church of Christ, but we place more focus, as Premonstratensians, on some of them.

First of all her ASSUMPTION. It is, in effect, under this title that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been chosen as our primary patroness. It has been recognized since the first century of our Order and this was expounded with great clarity by Philip of Harvengt,<sup>60</sup> and then especially by

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<sup>58</sup> *Missale Plagense*, probably printed around 1480.

<sup>59</sup> *Brabantia Mariana tripartita*.

<sup>60</sup> *Comment. In Cant.* Book Vi, chap. 50, Migne PL 203, col 488.

Adam Scot,<sup>61</sup> in whose sermons there are indeed remarks on the Assumption of our Lady, thoughts expressed in excellent words. We are happy to cite just this passage: "Now therefore, our most benign advocate, what shall we say about this incomparable hospice of both God and man, your most holy body? That this body has not been reduced to dust as is usual for humans, why do we hesitate to affirm what is certain?... But where is it now? What shall we say in wondering, since we do not know it to be anywhere on earth? Surely it is in heaven; heaven is indeed more worthy to retain such a precious treasure than the earth."<sup>62</sup>

We also celebrate with a great devotion the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is now established that this privilege was not recognized by our Fathers at the very beginning of the Order,<sup>63</sup> but the first reference known to us is by a Premonstratensian from around the year 1269.<sup>64</sup> But thereafter it has been very much affirmed and vindicated in our Order, especially in the Spanish Circary.

We must also make a reference to giving thanks concerning which there is a feast in our liturgical calendar to celebrate Mary as the UNIVERSAL MEDIATRIX. Note that, as early as the XIII<sup>e</sup> century, some members of the Norbertine family did not hesitate to honor the Mother of God under that title. These panegyrists of Mary are the same two authors already cited regarding the Assumption. Abbot Philippe wrote: "Mary herself commended us by her intervention with the Bridegroom and the Son [...] a powerful and efficient mediator [...] a good neck (between the body and the head), a salutary intervention, and finally a good mediator who brings together what was disunited by Eve, the ill-fated cause of division."<sup>65</sup> And our Adam wrote: "*Our Lady and our Advocate, our sweetness and our life, our hope and our mediatrix;*"<sup>66</sup> and in another place: "*By his taking on flesh the Word of God went from the bosom of the Father to the Virgin Mary, and by her mediation, by faith, came to the Church.*"<sup>67</sup> And again: "*For she is the mother of Christ, and whatever prayer you transmit through her, God hears.*"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Passim. – Cf. omnino quae de Assumptione Deiparae apud duos illos auctores proponit J.-B. VALVEKENS in Anal. Praem. XXIX (1953), pp. 288-296.

<sup>62</sup> Sermo 13 inter ea quae inveniuntur in *Codice man. 1003 Bibliothecae Mazarinae*, Parisiis, fol. 119 f.

<sup>63</sup> J.-B. VALVEKENS, in *Virgo Immaculata (Acta Congressus Marialis Romae habiti an 1954, Vol. VIII, fasc. 3)*, ostendit nec Philippum de Harvengt nec Adamum Scotum docuisse Immaculatam Conceptionem, licet quaedam asserant, quae sunt ad eam veritatem praeludia favorabilia.

<sup>64</sup> In sermone scilicet ROBERTI DE WIMY, asservato in Bibliotheca Laudunensi, asseritur de B.M.V.: "Caruit enim culpa et originali et actuali".

<sup>65</sup> *Comment. In Cant.*, Lib. II, chap. 7, Migne PL 203, col. 260. – De Marialogia in genere in *Comment. In Cant.* Philippi de Harvengt, cf. egregium studium J.-B. VALVEKENS in Anal. Praem. XXXII (1956) pp. 147-154.

<sup>66</sup> *Sermo* 40, n. 7, Migne PL 198, col. 367.

<sup>67</sup> *Sermo* 16, n. 4, Migne PL 198, col. 188.

<sup>68</sup> *Sermo* 40, n. 7, Migne PL 198, col. 368.



## *2. Theological and spiritual teaching to be written about Her.*

Presently, when there flourishes so much Marian theology and Mariology, it seems proper that also in our Order Marian doctrine should be seriously cultivated. Even after having completed theological studies, everyone should continue to peruse more recent writings, both ascetical and speculative, about Mary, of which much is available, but at the same time not neglecting the works of the Fathers or the ancient writers of our Order.

Indeed, it is well known that a number of Premonstratensians wrote excellently about the Mother of Jesus. In addition to Philip of Bonne-Espérance and Adam the Premonstratensian, who wrote abundantly and skillfully, there were Wichmans, Lienhardt, and many others. Much is to be found in their works with which we might nourish a proper affection toward our heavenly Mother, material that is solid and useful to furnish us with what we need to give to the faithful in our sermons on the Blessed Virgin.

## *3. Devotional practices to use.*

The sons of Saint Norbert should freely and from the heart, not by coercion, make use of the practices of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which are prescribed in our Order or have grown due to use.

First of all, it is with great fervor and filial trust, full of supernatural joy, that they should celebrate the feasts of our Lady, whenever any one of them occurs.

Their Marian devotion should be evident daily when the Divine Office leads us to sing petitions and praises to her, as at the end of Chapter and Compline.

All the confreres should keep in their hearts the injunction of our Statutes: “Let them recite the rosary willingly,”<sup>69</sup> and to do it all the more faithfully because now the obligation of reciting the Little Office of the Virgin has been suppressed. They should daily therefore recite at least a third part of the rosary which is called the “Marian Crown”, by meditating on its mysteries. This way of praying increases our devotion; it is often recommended by the Church as very effective. They should also pray the Litany of Loretto with its antiphons, verses and responses on a daily basis, and not neglect to pray for a happy death.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, during our entire life, we should show ourselves as devoted subjects, but much more as genuine children of the Blessed Virgin, going to her with our various difficulties and needs for our own spiritual life and ministry.

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<sup>69</sup> Statute 489, § 1.

<sup>70</sup> According to the norm of Statute 489, § 2.

#### 4. *Promoting the cult of the Blessed Virgin.*

In his Ministry among the people or souls seeking after perfection, the Premonstratensian Canon should always be sure to say a word about our loving Mother in his sermons and instructions and, in dealing with other matters, to mention her in passing at other opportunities, so that the words of Saint Bernard can be used about him: "*Indeed, nothing pleases me more..., than to preach about the glory of Mary.*"<sup>71</sup>

Let him be solicitous in stirring up a popular, even a vivid, devotion toward the Mother of God. He should purify their devotion from any superstition, solidify it with firm doctrine, and finally to use it as a means to preserve the Christian life of the faithful as active and fervent.

There are certainly many communities of the Order to which we could apply the words of Philip of Harvengt to his confreres of Bonne-Espérance: "Your community, Brothers, is gathered in honor of the Virgin, and this place and this church is dedicated in her name; you enjoy her protection and special patronage, while embracing her as guardian with a certain affection and spiritual tenderness."<sup>72</sup> Each of our homes ought in its turn, by its piety and its work, to seek to shine like the bright Crown of glory with which God has girded the very pure brow of his mother, in the spirit of all the confreres and of all those to whom their spiritual influence extends.

#### **§ 4. Devotion to our Fathers Saint Augustine and Saint Norbert and the other Saints of our Order.**

Our Holy Fathers, Augustine and Norbert, never thought they were establishing a new way of life; they sought only to recall their disciples back to the example of the Apostles and the primitive Jerusalem community in order to live the life which was called "Apostolic". They considered themselves reformers or renewers of this perfect life. Subsequently, the canons regular, and among these the Premonstratensians, have always considered their religious orders different from the monks, as it were an "Apostolic Institution", so that during the Middle Ages the founder issue remained in the background.

Norbert gave us Saint Augustine as our spiritual father in as much as he was considered the first, in the opinion of that time, to have organized the clerical life according to the spirit and practice of the Apostles. St. Norbert humbly placed himself under the paternity and leadership of Augustine because it viewed the apostolic and canonical life.

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<sup>71</sup> Sermon 4, on the Feast of the Assumption B.V.M., n. 5, Migne PL 183, col. 427.

<sup>72</sup> *Comment. in Cant.* Lib. I, chap. 22, Migne PL 203, col. 235.

We will briefly review the attitude that we should have toward both of our Fathers, and also toward their spiritual sons who, in our order, shone in holiness by following their example.

### **Our Holy Father Augustine.**

First of all we should honor and venerate Our Holy Father Augustine by allowing ourselves to be deeply imbued with his spirit and by courageously imitating his example. We must apply to ourselves the words of Pope Pius XII: "First of all let Saint Augustine offer you an invitation and example of holiness that you may follow and imitate; you, we say, who have embraced that form of evangelical and common life,... which he proposed to the clergy of his diocese with such abundant fruits and wise imposed norms".<sup>73</sup>

The first example that Augustine gives us is that of a great love of religious life. From his conversion until the end of his life, although he was an outstanding teacher and most vigilant bishop, nevertheless he constantly adhered with heart and soul to common life in the monastery. In history and cult his doctrinal and pastoral view clearly holds the primacy; but if he had not been forced to assume the priestly and episcopal office and exercise his teaching office, he would have been known in history, if not exclusively, as a distinguished founder of the monastic institution. He never said farewell to this kind of life, notwithstanding the opposition, at first almost insurmountable, between monastic life and the care of souls. This happy reconciliation of the two ways of life, which he devised and implemented in his bishopric of Hippo, is the main reason which leads us to recognize him as the father, lawgiver, patron and leader of canons regular.

And further we learn from him to give first place to contemplation; this by no means harms our priestly activity with souls, but rather facilitates and makes it more fruitful. Even more his example should teach us that charity – which so greatly burned in him – is the hinge of our entire spiritual life. Common life is a powerful help to achieve this ideal: "*one mind and one heart*" in God.<sup>74</sup> Let him teach the superiors to act in a fatherly way and exercise truly human discretion as he did. Let him teach the subjects to empathize with their superiors' difficulties and alleviate them as much as possible. Finally let him teach everyone self-denial by which their priestly duties should be carried out.

Be pleased to recognize that such a great man has been given to us as a father in whom "are united along with admirable natural gifts a harmonious set of virtues, as if God had wanted to show in a single man, an exemplary bishop, a good pastor and a prominent doctor."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Epistola Apostolica, XVI volvente saeculo ab ortu S. Augustini*, AAS XXXVI (1954), 517.

<sup>74</sup> Acts 4: 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Breviarium Praemonstr.*, 7a die infra Oct. S. Augustini, Lect. 2.

Whenever the liturgy recalls his memory for us, namely on his feasts, or on the Wednesday suffrage, we commend to him our spiritual life. Nor should we allow the cult of our Father Norbert, which rightly became prevalent in our Order after his canonization, to obscure the veneration and devotion which flourished toward our Father Augustine in the first centuries of its existence.

Let the affection that we bear toward him also encourage us to read his works which are so suited to nourishing, elevating and enflaming our souls. Let us feed our theological doctrine on his writings but clearly not to the excess of the Premonstratensians of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, who were led to defending the Jansenist errors by choosing St. Augustine's teachings over other intellects in the wrong order. But let us cling to the footsteps of St. Augustine by uniting, in our studies and teaching, wisdom with charity and goodness in order to arrive at true wisdom which he so persistently extolled.

### **Our Holy Father Norbert.**

Certainly no one is a Premonstratensian Canon who is not moved by a special devotion toward the holy founder of the religious family of which he enjoys being a member. And this is all the more true because our Order has a founder so filled with gifts by nature and grace that no one, even a non-Catholic, is able to learn about the life and deeds of Norbert without being moved by admiration and love.

We have already mentioned in the introduction to this book the preponderant role of Saint Norbert in the foundation of the order, and impregnating it with the apostolic spirit. We will discuss later, in the course of this book, the examples of this father of ours that we should carefully imitate. For the present, however, we will only consider general points showing how to follow Saint Norbert in his generosity and self-sacrifice in giving of himself, completely abandoning earthly goods. This is reflected in the depth of his faith: "In Norbert, it is faith that dominates", said his contemporaries.<sup>76</sup> This fundamental disposition is in our vocation. Therefore, it is very profitable for us to be able, in imitation of St. Norbert, to pursue this on a day to day basis.

We should read all that is published in books or periodicals about St. Norbert not only to maintain, but also to increase day by day, our sense of admiration and filial affection toward our Holy Father. In our sermons to the people or clergy we should give examples from his life. And we ourselves should frequently have recourse to him so that he may give us the spirit that he wanted to instill in his foundation and with which he himself glowed, "that spirit by which

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Vita B*, Migne PL 170, col 1269.

Saint Norbert lived".<sup>77</sup> For who will obtain from God one more suitable than he, whom we call "Patriarch Norbert", for us his spiritual offspring, "that we may walk worthily in the vocation to which we are called and to feed the Christian people always by word and example"?<sup>78</sup>

### **The other Saints and Blesseds of the Order.**

But in addition to our Holy Founder we have an innumerable series of men and women, who have attained heroic virtue by the same way that we are going and have come to heavenly glory. They are in fact examples that we should keep before our eyes and imitate. *"We are the sons of the saints."*<sup>79</sup>

The most well-known of these belong to the early days of the order when Norbert's eloquent words and deeds were heard or at least still remembered; those words and deeds with which he recruited choice young men. In addition, Blessed Hugh impressed upon them the rationale for a life of austerity and self-denial, which was suitable for the proper character of the nascent order.

After the lives of these leaders had ended, their spirit still clearly flourished, but gradually some of the initial fervor lessened and little by little the primitive "dynamism" is more rigidly fixed in the various regulations and practices. These certainly guard the spirit, but slowly they temper it by being accustomed to it. For this reason the pristine ardor had to be rekindled by considering the examples of those who at the beginning of the Order were still imbued with the spirit although these men were not directly drawing from the source.

Let us not pass up the opportunity to better recognize these men. Material published according to critical historical norms is scarce in their regard. Certainly the devotion of the Premonstratensians towards them should encourage many young confreres to study their lives and to make known the results of their research. Certainly they would more clearly inform us of many very useful things beneficial for inquiring into the spirit of the Order and better following it.

Together with these men we should also honor those in whom the true spirit of St. Norbert has more recently shone forth, that spirit that is to be lived out in canonical life. These are men such as Jacob Kern, our confrere of Geras or those who have shed their blood for their faith in Christ, such as Peter Ochin of Vicogne, whether they are granted the honors of the altar or not. Nor should we fail to commend ourselves to their intercession in our difficult circumstances, periods of aridity or interior battle; furthermore let us place under their care our

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<sup>77</sup> *Missale et Breviar. Praemon.*, Oratio in Oct. Solemnitatis S. P. Norberti.

<sup>78</sup> *Missale Praemon.*, Postcommunio Solemnitatis S. P. Norberti.

<sup>79</sup> Tob. 2: 18.

desires for greater perfection and the future vitality of the Premonstratensian Order in the Church of Christ. How charmingly these are expressed by the following words of this liturgical hymn.

O fathers duly honored by us,  
Make sure that nothing happens to your sons;  
May your glory blossom  
And flourish in future generations.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Hymnus Festi Omnium Sanctorum Ordinis Praemonstratensis, ad Vesperas.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DUTIES TO THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST**

We have seen in the previous chapter how we should relate toward God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints to which our Order is particularly drawn.

But that immense Mystical Body, of which Christ is the head, still lives on this earth. Many of its members, ourselves included, continue to have relationships with one another. This chapter will allow us to examine the requirements of our Norbertine vocation in this regard, firstly with regard to the Holy Church and its hierarchy, and then our order and its members, and finally with everyone with whom we are in solidarity.

#### **ARTICLE 1**

##### **The Love of the Holy Church**

**and**

##### **Respect for the Hierarchy**

The mystery of Christ and our sanctification in Him continues through the centuries, penetrates the generations of people and deifies them through the Holy Church, which everyone who loves Christ and hopes for the salvation of souls ought to pursue with the intimate affection of his heart. The servants of Christ – such are certainly the religious – should therefore be animated by love and devotion toward the Holy Church of Christ.

*The Mind of Saints Augustine and Norbert toward the Holy Church.*

The Premonstratensians can rejoice in this because both fathers whom they acknowledge were exceptional lovers and defenders of the Holy Church! For indeed our holy fathers Augustine and Norbert stood out in this regard.

Both the personal mind and spirit of Saint Augustine, which he instilled into his monasteries, were deeply imbued with the love of the Church. Possidius testifies to this: "He was a remarkable man... always attentive to the needs of the universal Church and vigilant... always rejoicing in the successes of the Lord and mourning his losses."<sup>1</sup> And it is well known

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<sup>1</sup> *Vita S. Augustini*, chap. 18, Migne PL 32, col. 49.

that he always had the greatest respect for the decrees and instructions of the Roman Pontiff whom he called "*the father of the Christian people*".<sup>2</sup>

As far as Saint Norbert is concerned, was it not recorded that he was particularly careful never to perform the duty of itinerant preacher without the support of a papal document? Did he not first choose a fixed site in the diocese of Laon at the suggestion of Pope Callistus? Did he not want to obtain confirmation of his Order without delay, first from the legates of the Holy See and shortly thereafter from the Pope himself? And did he not use his final energy, already weakened, in helping Pope Innocent II in restraining the schism of Peter de Leone?

*What is expected of us.*

Faithfully following these examples, let us strive, as much as possible, that a vibrant love of the Church and an intense zeal toward the Apostolic See be attributed to our Order. Let us frequently recall the saying of Pope Pius XII: "Love of the Church and fidelity to the Pope are a vital element of the love of Christ and, if they are authentic, are inseparable from him."<sup>3</sup>

It will be a joy for us if by our prayers and good works, our studies and apostolic labor, we can make even a small contribution to the considerable efforts of the Church, Bride of Christ, to maintain and advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ here on earth. Let us gird ourselves for this in the years of formation and let this stimulus to our work remain with us to the end.

The canonical institute, in the spirit of Saint Augustine, does not propose a specialized objective, but it exists for the good of the Church and souls in general; it is prepared for every good work, provided that it is beneficial for a sublime intention. Let our direction therefore be aimed toward perfection, to the good of the whole Church under the leadership of obedience. Sometimes it will be more fitting to reject our own desires for intimate contemplation or the hidden life if we want to engage in works needful to the Church, as Saint Augustine so aptly wrote to some religious: "We urge you in the Lord, brothers, not to get carried away by too great an ardor, or by nonchalance, when our Mother the Church has need of you.... Do not let your idleness get in the way of the needs of the Church".<sup>4</sup>

*Subjection to the Church, whatever the cost.*

In practice we should be drawn to submit ourselves as loyal sons to the Church in doctrinal matters, not only by adhering firmly in our faith to the dogmas that it presents, but

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<sup>2</sup> *Epist.* 45, chap. 5, n. 16, Migne PL 33, col. 167.

<sup>3</sup> "Liebe zur Kirche und Treue zum Papst ist ein Herzstück der Liebe zu Christus und, wenn echt, von dieser nicht zu trennen". (*Allocutio de die 9 Oct. 1952*, AAS XLIV (1952), p. 829).

<sup>4</sup> *Epist* 48, ad Eudoxium Abbatem, n. 2, Migne PL 33, col. 188.



also by willingly submitting our judgment to accept the doctrines it commends and the rejection of ideas which are denounced as dangerous. In our work we should be particularly attentive to all lessons and warnings given by the Holy See. We believe that this attitude will attract God's grace in abundance and produce the best results for the faithful. Thus we will show ourselves as protectors of the Church, so well expressed in this ancient sequence sung since the 13th century in the churches of France:

This is the boat that transports us to our security,  
It is the sheepfold which offers us protection,  
This is the column of truth by which we are firmly  
supported.

If our obedience sometimes imposes more personal sacrifices for the sake of Mother Church, let us offer them willingly, believing that the Church never joins us to Christ better than when it gives us the chance to conform ourselves better to the sufferings of the Savior, and thus, able to penetrate more deeply into "the mystery of the Church".

*Obedience to the Supreme Pontiff and the local Ordinary.*

Let us demonstrate a very great respect for the Roman Pontiff, viewing him not merely as a man but as the Vicar of Christ, to whom we submit ourselves by our vow of obedience.<sup>5</sup> Not only should we pray for him assiduously, but we should have a great affection, reverence and submission to him. "Then, let it be that the admonitions of the Roman Pontiffs are willingly heard and resonate with us and willingly followed."<sup>6</sup>

The bishops, successors of the Apostles,<sup>7</sup> are under the authority of the Pope, as heads of particular churches. Clerics, and especially priests, assist in various ways in the fulfillment of the holy liturgy and the care of souls. What is true for the secular clergy is not less for the regular clergy who also "must exercise their ministry as a collaborator with the bishop and under his direction .... The exemption of religious orders does not nullify the general law that a priest should be obedient to the bishop. Indeed, according to Canon Law, exempt religious are under the authority of the local bishop insofar as their performance of the episcopal office, and the proper care of souls."<sup>8</sup> If these provisions are valid for the regular clergy in general, they apply more to the canons regular, established to solemnly celebrate liturgical worship in the dioceses and engage in pastoral ministry.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Codex Juris Can.*, Can. 499, § 1.

<sup>6</sup> PIUS PP. XII, Encycl. *Fidei donum*, AAS XLIX (1957), p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Codex Juris Can.*, Can. 329, § 1.

<sup>8</sup> PIUS PP. XII, *Allocutio diei 8 Decembris 1950 ad Delegatos ex variis statibus perfectionis*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 28.

Let us therefore be constantly solicitous in our concern to exercise, as much as we can, a salutary influence over the faithful, which will provide effective help for the local ordinary and his vicars in the proper administration of the flock. Certainly we should be careful to protect and keep safe our privileges – included among which are exemption – and the Constitutions of the Order. But in external ministry, we should observe carefully the laws given by bishops concerning ecclesiastical disciplines dealing with any topic under his jurisdiction. We will thus be able to contribute something, so that in peoples' eyes the Mystical Body of Christ may appear *"joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love."*<sup>9</sup>

How are we better able to show ourselves true sons of the Church, in the spirit of our canonical vocation?

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **Duties to our Order and its members**

#### **§ 1. Toward the entire Order.**

From the cradle we have been incorporated into Christ's mystical body by Holy Baptism. Then, through a particular divine call, we entered a specific body, a tributary of the mainstream of spiritual life, and hence we have spread life giving rays to the other members of this body. The Order of Prémontré is this organization, and it allows us access to a flight toward God, by the abundant graces that the Order has, and so, we increase the number of souls cherished by God.

*Reasons for holding the Order in special affection and esteem.*

The Norbertine Order should be very dear to us, not in words alone but also in our heart and work. We should be happy, therefore, to see progress and an abundant harvest, but sad because of setbacks and poor results in work.

We should regard the Order with a filial love; many things commend the Order to us, namely:

The person of Saint Norbert, our founder, so well-endowed with gifts of grace and nature that people were spontaneously attracted to such a man with an affection of admiration and duty;

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<sup>9</sup> Eph. 4: 16.

The preeminence of our lawgiver, St. Augustine, whose praises are sung emphatically from his own century because of the genius of his talent;

The many examples of true holiness which are present to us in the lives of our saints and blessed; these stimulate and call us to seek perfection;

The fidelity of our Order to the sacred canons and ecclesiastical traditions from the life of clerics and cenobites by the strength of which our houses live; they breathe a venerable antiquity in their way of life, but they are always adapted to the necessities and vicissitudes of different times; above all else they overcame the dangers of laxity which threatened or had already invaded them; consider for example the situations of the commendatory abbots and the interventions of princes;

Finally, our apostolic work: ours is there, always applied, without vainglory or ostentation, mainly in the countryside so often looked down upon and neglected.

*Practical demonstration of such affection.*

We should show appreciation and brotherly affection toward our Order by the way we speak about it, about its observances, about common life, and about our superiors and confreres; also in our daily prayers for success and development. There are other means: being aware of the history of our predecessors, what they accomplished for the Order in sacred doctrine, literature, art and priestly ministry. We do this by seeking postulants and forming them, or to put it simply, but most importantly, to build up the Norbertine spirit so that in fact "we should love what our Holy Father Norbert loved, and put into practice what he taught."<sup>10</sup>

*Nevertheless without detriment to the charity due to other clergy and religious.*

However, we must avoid with care that the esteem and affection that we hold for our own Order not be too exclusive and not generate any contempt for other religious families. In his eighth letter, our Philip of Bonne-Espérance tries hard to inculcate extended love and, even more so, complete fairness to all those who "having renounced the world with the highest intent, enrolled and took the habit in a clerical or monastic congregation". Here is the reason he gives: "Although they live far from each other or the diversity of their clothing and occupations is different externally, the same spirit, the same charity must set ablaze that which is a spiritual union of hearts." And further, the good abbot laments that "those who are living in different Orders, breaking the bond of peace, oppose each other and when they ought to support each

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<sup>10</sup> Oratio in die Octava Solemnitatis S. Patris Norberti.

other with a holy kiss and mutual embrace, rather bite and consume one another,<sup>11</sup> can hardly be supported by one another".<sup>12</sup> Fighting this quarrelsome spirit, the same abbot urges us to love with "an open heart and contented condition, not only the members of our Order which we have deliberately joined, but also all those whom we see as religious or who bear that title".<sup>13</sup>

No doubt this is the spirit of Christ. Those who do not possess it and who publicly profess Christian perfection destroy their own spiritual life and are more apt to scandalize those who view their lives. Rightly our Statutes warn that "we should do or say nothing that could harm, in any way, the harmony and peace between secular clerics or members of other religious orders and the members of our Order".<sup>14</sup>

## **§ 2. Toward one's own canonry.**

*The place due to our abbey in our affection.*

Thus far our words have pertained to love toward our whole Order. But what has been said above (Section I, chapter 2, article 1, § 2) applies to our abbey, to which we have given ourselves by our profession, and to which we remain incorporated forever. So it is really we, not only the buildings, but especially the living stones that are each of its members, their works also and in particular their spirit. It must occupy first place in our concerns and in some way dominate our whole life. Our well understood divine vocation has providentially placed us in this particular house. Our life has received its direction and its occupation from among the benefits of God which the abbey provides for us.

It should always remain for us a very dear "*Alma Mater*" to whom we owe so much and to whom we will remain attached until death according to Canon Law but no less according to the affection of our hearts. We should almost be nourished by its spirit; we should have at heart to do everything that we can to contribute to its prosperity and its good reputation; we should feel regret for the troubles and misfortunes that may overwhelm it, even if they do not touch us personally. And if, for the good of our beloved abbey, we are asked to make some hard sacrifice, it should not have to be imposed under obedience; we should not hesitate to do so.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gal. 5: 15.

<sup>12</sup> Migne PL 203, col. 66 f.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., col. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Statute 531, § 3.

How many of our memories are about this moral person, moreover about places and buildings which, I might say, are attached to us as a body, and specifically that church where so often *"we have received the mercy of God in the midst of his temple"*.<sup>15</sup>

The beginnings of our religious life, the abundant graces received from our prayers and instructions that we're heard; our professions and perhaps ordinations; our solemn first Masses; trials and crosses, which were themselves divine blessings and aids to unite us more closely to Christ; all these events of our religious life happened in that blessed "house of our poverty" which we had chosen and about which we could always say, as the Jews said of their Holy City of Jerusalem: "if ever I forget you, let my right hand wither. May my tongue cleave to my palate if I forget you, if I do not count you as the source of my joy."<sup>16</sup> We speak these words of ours not with our lips, but from the bottom of our hearts and our work. Thus we remain faithful to our solemn profession: "Offering, I give myself to the Church of...."

We should not become angry, as a few religious do, about minor annoyances which they happened to encounter in the community and which they were not able to overlook, nor able to tolerate by a supernatural spirit. Some are always ready to look at the shortcomings of their house and talk about them; they automatically prefer other canonries and their members to their own community. All their praise is for others, but nothing but criticism and blame for their own abbey. This deplorable mood often comes from low self esteem; they believe they have been offended by confreres of their own house. One who discovers in himself the first symptoms of such unfortunate feelings should strive without delay to put such thinking aside, and especially to seek help from God in order to rid himself of these temptations which are harmful to his vocation.

*Avoid any exclusivity harmful to other abbeys.*

However, one should be careful that the esteem for one's own abbey and the tendency to put it first, does not also undermine the fraternal spirit that should animate us regarding other canonries of the Order, leading one to talk about others in scathing terms, contrary to the expressed warning of the Statutes: "That the brothers approve and commend with sincerity, and to the extent of their means, the good works in other houses".<sup>17</sup> This also applies to the superiors and confreres from these houses, worthy as they are of praise and esteem.

Not that all emulation between different abbeys is reprehensible, but it should always be a "holy" emulation, free from any trace of jealousy. Each confrere should consider his house

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 47: 10.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 136: 5f.

<sup>17</sup> Statute 530, § 2.

as one that no other surpasses in searching for perfection, cultivation of discipline, and apostolic zeal. But on the other hand he should also consider that the superiority of each of the canonries of the Order redounds to all the others, one's own included, for the good reason that our Premonstratensian Order is one family, one moral person. Among the various abbeys, there should be the same brotherhood as between members of the same house. The union should never be undermined by our fault and there should be goodwill between the abbeys; carefully avoid anything that can injure charity or promote a constricted spirit and withdrawal within itself.

### **§ 3. Toward the confreres themselves.**

*Mutual charity to be followed particularly by religious.*

The proper criterion for distinguishing Christians from non-believers was given by Christ himself who said: "*In this will all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"<sup>18</sup> Those who vow perfection in the Christian life are more than all others held to this mutual love. This charity is so important that the first place is reserved for it in our religious communities.

*Fraternal charity, the hinge of our Augustinian Rule.*

Never before St. Augustine, and rarely after him, has charity been formally identified as the fundamental norm of religious life. Here is found the proper spirit which Augustine wanted to impress on his Institute by his Rule for those who, under his leadership, intended to serve God.

According to the mind and practice of this Father of ours, it is not, as in various other religious communities, the love of solitude, the austerity of discipline, the severity of poverty, or the perfection of obedience, which constitute the soul of religious life, but rather *charity*, which has to imbue and inform the entirety of religious life. In the first monasteries that he visited, namely in Italy, he admired above all the spirit of charity that governed common life.<sup>19</sup> And he later held that charity also be the central hinge of the communities he founded. He considered life together in the spirit of charity to be not only a support toward the goal, but as an end in itself, even though it appears to be a means. His monasteries were not simply crowds of people, but family gatherings: "The first purpose for which you have come together is to live in unity in the house and to be of one mind and one heart on the way to God."<sup>20</sup> These words by which the primitive Christian community is described in Scripture<sup>21</sup> he spontaneously quotes

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<sup>18</sup> John 13: 35.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae*, Lib. I, chap. 33, n. 73, Migne PL 32, col. 1341.

<sup>20</sup> *Regula*, chap. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 4: 32.

and comments on as often as he is dealing with monastic life which somewhere he describes as: "many bodies but not many souls; many bodies but not many hearts".<sup>22</sup>

It is not surprising to see that for Augustine the criterion of the individual progress of a monk is measured by his care for the common good: "The more you care for the interests of the community before your own interests, the more you may know that you have made progress."<sup>23</sup> The whole rule is dominated by concern for evangelical charity; for this reason we see moderation in the imposition of discipline and exceptions granted to the infirm or to those who have come from more delicate backgrounds;<sup>24</sup> poverty and the perfect community of property are at the service of charity.<sup>25</sup> Obedience to superiors and, especially the care that they have to take for those who are under their care, are governed by charity, in a familial spirit, and not by strict customs of Eastern convents.<sup>26</sup> Fraternal charity encourages rapid forgiveness of insults.<sup>27</sup> Lairuelz is correct in affirming that Augustine built his Rule on the precept of charity "as on a firm foundation".<sup>28</sup>

Our former Statutes began thus: "Since, according to the precept of the rule, we are required to have one heart and one mind in God..."; hence it followed that obedience to the Rule should be followed equally by all, "inasmuch as unity, which is to be kept internally in our hearts, is favored by consistency in our way of life".<sup>29</sup> Adam the Premonstratensian was therefore correct to say: "Our Order directs its full intention to living by love."<sup>30</sup>

### *The exercise of charity.*

Therefore, in the spirit of our Rule and the Statutes of the Order, we should put into practice very carefully and observe the example which is advised: "All should live together in perfect harmony and honor God in each other, whose temples you have become."<sup>31</sup> We will be better informed by these words that Augustine wrote to a monk: "Thus your soul is not your own but that of all the brothers and all their souls are yours or to put it better, their souls with yours are not souls but a single soul, the one soul of Christ".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Enar. in Psalm.* 132, n. 6, Migne PL 37, col. 1733.

<sup>23</sup> *Regula*, chap. 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Regula*, chap. 2 and 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Optica Regularium*, Coloniae 1614, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> Editio R. Van Waefelghem, *Les premiers Statuts de l'Ordre de Prémontré*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> *De Tripartito Tabernaculo*, Prooem. 2, Migne PL 198, col. 615.

<sup>31</sup> *Regula*, chap. 3; cf. Statute 530, § 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Epist.* 243, n. 4, Migne PL 33, col. 1056.

We are not dealing here with various forms that the exercise of fraternal charity can take and all that is good and the joy of a united community, the mutual aid that is to be given to ensure joy in the divine service. Who can say to what degree the helpfulness of the confreres, their goodwill, their understanding, their thoughtful kindness, their attempts to warn, exhort, and comfort, their good mood, their cheerfulness will often be a powerful aid for such religious or to maintain the right balance and peace of mind? That is how all the believers must cultivate this delicacy of mind which also allows salutary influence on the members of the Body of Christ living near us, following the same divine call and filled with the gifts of God.

Who is not able to see that nowhere better can the words of the Psalmist be fulfilled than in cloisters: *"How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live as one."*<sup>33</sup>

*A few inconveniences should be born willingly out of union with the brothers.*

It is not uncommon that someone applies this verse during the Divine Office with some bitterness in his heart, considering the reasons he has to complain about his brothers, impersonating somewhat the religious to whom Augustine makes these comments: "Who is pursuing me? I thought there was only the love of God here."<sup>34</sup>

When you see these reactions where there are only small problems that crop up in life in common with brothers that animates the same love of Christ, it brings the same prosecution for the same purpose, it would do well to say that this is really nothing other than what we constantly feel living in this time, when people have opposing views on the essential principles of life and seek only their own interest, as we find in Plato: "Man is a wolf to other men."<sup>35</sup> But if, in the house of the Lord, we cannot support these tiny wounds that our colleagues inflict on us knowingly or unknowingly, how can we enjoy fraternal conversations spiced with salt? "What can he endure," says our Father Augustine, "who does not endure his brother?"<sup>36</sup>

*Carefully avoiding even the smallest faults against charity.*

Moreover, such a one should ask whether perhaps he is at least a partial cause of some defect in complete charity with his brothers. More or less consciously, some are more likely to note the defects, deficiencies and errors of their confreres and talk about what can be done to help them in their needs, work and success. The "true and sincere brotherhood" they offered and received on the day of their solemn profession is fairly distorted by unwelcome and

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<sup>33</sup> Psalm 132: 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Enar. in Psalm.* 99, n. 12, Migne PL 37, col. 1279. The complete number should be read.

<sup>35</sup> PLAUTUS, *Asinaria*, II, 4, 88.

<sup>36</sup> *Epist.* 48, n. 3, Migne PL 33, col. 188.



intrusive conduct. If, at recreation, time is spent disapproving of confreres or making fun of them, the result, not only for those in question and who may be absent, but also for all those who are there, will be a state of mind that is rather restrictive than helpful and which would ruin the peace and quiet instead of bringing it about. It is a true joy to make an effort to judge the work of one's colleagues in a benevolent and fraternal spirit and highlight their success, even if they have any hint of having less success than they hoped for. A few words from the heart or animated by internal benevolence has a much more beneficial effect on the minds of the confreres.

### *Charity in conversations.*

In general conversations, on a given occasion, we can still express our censure against something in passing, even against a confrere, when the issue is in fact reprehensible; but we should always remember that we are rarely able to penetrate the intentions of the heart or judge the actions of our brothers.

Nor should we ever appear, even from a distance, to take joy in the poor outcome of the work of one of our brothers or delight in reviewing the things that he did which were less praiseworthy. Let us rather try to see how good these things are and recognize and praise them as works of our colleagues which were generous and beneficial for the good of souls. This is perhaps done only rarely.

Even more, when we are outside of the community and are in a conversation with strangers, keep in your heart the esteem of our superiors and our confreres and do not degrade them among others; avoid what is less in their praise and speak out what tends toward sympathy and good reputation. It is not enough to avoid what would be malicious, but we must monitor all of our words and not say things without thinking that would not edify and would cause defamation of our confreres.

### *Avoiding or resolving all disputes immediately.*

The importance of this exhortation of the Rule escapes no one. Every Friday in Chapter we hear it read or we read it ourselves, namely: "You should either have no quarrels, or you should end them quickly, lest your anger grow into hatred and make a beam out of a splinter." For thus you read: "*He who hates his brother is a murderer.*"<sup>37</sup> It is read under the title "*On*

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<sup>37</sup> I John 3: 15.

*avoiding conflict.*"<sup>38</sup> In particular it shows the heart of our Father the lawgiver who had extensive knowledge of the human soul.

It seems that there is no need to develop this any further since it is well known and admitted by everyone. Suffice it to cite the text of Adam the Premonstratensian who comments on this same passage of the Rule: "It sometimes happens that one of you – it is even difficult to avoid it – has unfairly upset a colleague in such a way that there is no peace for a time. Take a moment from this grumbling and fully make peace with him. Do so by all means of charity and then the previous serenity can be found."<sup>39</sup>

*Nor is politeness to be neglected.*

All this material on fraternal charity is suitably complemented by the following warning of the Statutes: "In dealing with each other with honor, the brothers should faithfully maintain between themselves the rules of religious politeness and refrain generally from any words or acts that are contrary to mutual respect."<sup>40</sup>

It is certain that the laws of politeness, including those which may seem somewhat arbitrary, suggest and develop our own dignity and that of others. No one therefore should ever flaunt their contempt or any affected rustic behavior; much rather they should have gentleness of words and elegance of external actions as the flower and delicate fruit of their fraternal charity.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, it is not appropriate to neglect one's bodily maintenance and cleanliness of clothing; when this is observed in regard to the confreres as well as toward outsiders, it could draw contempt on our community and on our entire order.

## ARTICLE 3

### Charity towards outsiders

It is not enough that our charity is restricted to these beloved of God, who like ourselves, share our sublime vocation and have been given to us as companions of life in the Order of Prémontré or in our canonry. Our charity must extend to all those who benefit from God's grace<sup>42</sup> and are capable of attaining heavenly bliss; this is not only to be done affectively

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<sup>38</sup> *Regula*, chap. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praem.*, Sermo II, n. 5, Migne PL 198, col. 551.

<sup>40</sup> Statute 543, § 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Decretum S. C. de Rel. *Sacrosancta Dei Ecclesia*, AAS III (1911), p. 31; vel *Enchir. de Statibus perf.*, n. 272, p. 313.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. S. AUGUSTINUS, Sermo 69, n. 1, Migne PL 38, col. 440f.

but, according to circumstances, effectively as well. Saint Paul tells us: "*While there is time, do good to all, but especially to the members of the household of the faith*".<sup>43</sup>

This having been said, we have nothing more to offer here except certain examples of charity toward strangers, examples that are particularly representative of our Norbertine vocation.

*1. Prayer for those who are in trouble.*

At all times the eternal salvation of countless souls is in danger. But now more than ever all kinds of trouble await them, often troubles both material and spiritual, and some especially very harmful to spiritual life, leading to one's losing the way, if not left in despair.

We who pray so much, both by our duty and publicly, for all the members of Christ, should frequently direct the intention of our prayer for those who are tempted and troubled so that we can bring some relief to their torment or, even better, strength to bear patiently the woes permitted by God.

Thus, from time immemorial, there was inserted into the Office of our Order an oration for the troubled: "Almighty and everlasting God, consolation of the afflicted, strength for those laboring ... etc." Until recently it was preserved in the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, but that is now suppressed. We ought to use this formula or others to give our prayer a corresponding dimension to the love of Christ which knows no limit.

*2. Care of souls entrusted to us.*

Those to whom the care of souls is entrusted and who have the duty of feeding the flock should take particular care for their spiritual advancement and especially the eternal salvation of the souls. They will be accountable to the Divine Judge. And the same can be said for those who choose a specific priest in order to be led in the secure ways of the Lord.

It is good to show particular kindness to those souls to bring them close to the Lord; it is a joy to share with them the treasures of grace. The love that a priest has for the salvation of souls is filled with joy and it becomes a reality for them.

Nevertheless it is necessary that the affection remain supernatural and personally denied. The work, difficult perhaps, and taken on to promote the spiritual good of the flock of Christ, bears with it an internal joy because of the wonderful working of the divine grace and the great joy in that the poor servant of Christ was able to be an instrument of God in the

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<sup>43</sup> Gal. 6: 10.

sanctification of souls. The sacred minister should never lose this satisfaction, even as spiritual, and should carefully ensure that his heart is not seduced gradually by sensual attractions and is thus divided between Christ the Lord and the creature.

### *3. Assistance offered to the needy.*

People overwhelmed by material or moral concerns come to religious or priests to seek advice, consolation, or even some kind of material assistance. The priest must always be a benevolent listener to their complaints and hear the narrative of their troubles and the dangers they face. They should share the misfortune of those who suffer from poverty; give gladly to them any assistance permitted by the rules of prudence.

The revenues of the community will determine the extent of distributions, as provided for in the Statutes: "Alms will be distributed to the poor within the limits permitted by the income of the community".<sup>44</sup> We need to tread carefully to detect fraud and be able to recognize dishonest people; however, it is better to show largesse to a trickster than to fail to do good to the poor of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, no Norbertine can forget that our Father Norbert excelled in the art of reconciling enemies and restoring peace to deep-rooted hatreds. His sons in this area should seek to emulate their Father and take every opportunity to act as "Angels of peace."

### *4. Practice of hospitality.*

"In all the churches of our Order, proportionately to the resources of each, there should be a serious pursuit of hospitality which is recommended frequently, especially in the Holy Scriptures and is something that our Lord will consider on the last day, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked;" thus we read in our former Statutes.<sup>46</sup> In addition, don't all our old documents recommend hospitality as one of the three things advocated often by our father Norbert?<sup>47</sup>

In past centuries, hospitality was extolled as one of the most important duties of fraternal charity; journeys were rough and places to spend the night in an inn were few and far between. Thus abbeys offered frequent hospitality to pilgrims and received them with food and shelter. Today there is found almost everywhere rapid means of transport and suitable hotels

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<sup>44</sup> Statute 536, § 1.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 10: 42.

<sup>46</sup> *Statuta 1630*, Dist. II, chap. 21, n. 1. – Consonant, licet temperantius, *Statuta hodierna*: Statute 536, § 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Vita B.*, chap. 9, Migne PL 170, col. 1295.

rarely are lacking, so that the hospitality of the monasteries is less necessary than formerly for the needs of travelers.

However it is still appropriate to reserve a good welcome in our homes for priests and religious. As the members of the Order pass through, they should be received as brothers; and close relatives of the confreres are always to be treated decently.<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes, not infrequently, those who were received in a monastery received a caring hospitality along with a great many spiritual gifts, and the movement of grace becomes more sensitive in the soul. It is therefore up to the superiors and the guest master to make decisions in this regard, and how evangelical charity is to be reconciled with prudent caution.

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<sup>48</sup> Statute 536, § 2, 3 and 4.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DIFFERENT FORMS OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

We have examined in the first section the ministry of souls among the main functions that make up the social end of our Order. We must now deal in this second section with the means available to the Premonstratensian Order to perform this function, namely the different forms of ministry that we have to practice to sanctify the faithful.

We shall reflect briefly for we have already spoken above about the ardent zeal needed to inflame those who provide their ministry for the care of souls.<sup>1</sup> In this second part of the Directory<sup>2</sup> we need to consider what will be the relationship among themselves and with their abbey for those who usually live outside. Then we will develop a few considerations on apostolic work, specifically in view of Pastoral Theology.

### ARTICLE 1

#### Pastoral ministry

*Legitimacy of the pastoral office in our Order.*

Who can presume to doubt that it is legitimate for canons of our Order to accept pastoral assignments when the practice of several centuries justifies this? The early Statutes hardly mention this activity but this can be explained by the fact that these Statutes were more oriented to the internal activities of the monastery by which the confreres were prepared for apostolic work by a genuine religious and Norbertine spirit.

Anselm of Havelberg dispels all doubts on this subject. He wrote apparently before 1138 – i.e. shortly after the death of Saint Norbert – defending the Order of Prémontré, to a certain abbot of a monastic Order: "We have learned that you have not been timid about arguing and sometimes speaking about canons regular, that they should neither be in parishes, nor take care of souls among the people. If this is true, I am extremely surprised at this manifestation of your prudence,... it is obvious that anyone who holds such an opinion is inspired by jealousy of

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<sup>1</sup> Sect. 1, Chap. 2, art. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Second part, chap. 2, art. 2.

the canonical Order and not by a concern for truth."<sup>3</sup> In the following century, the 13th, Menko, the Abbot of Floridus Hortus, wrote in his Chronicle: "It must be noted that the professed of the order of Prémontré can lawfully own churches and accept the care of souls."<sup>4</sup> More recently, the Bull "*Oneroso*" of Pope Benedict XIV grants to members of our Order the privilege to obtain and retain, licitly and validly, parish churches, both secular as well as regular, without an Apostolic dispensation.<sup>5</sup>

*The practice and its fruit.*

There is no doubt that the exercise of the care of souls was for centuries the major part of our pastoral apostolate. Who can say how much salutary influence that our monasteries had on the Christian faithful by supplying them with priests as pastors of exemplary life and true doctrine, accustomed to the austerity of the monastery, and this at a time before there were seminaries and in which ignorance and low moral standards affected even the clergy.

And later also by giving themselves to pastoral care, our confreres have performed – and still perform – a very important service by helping the diocesan bishops to feed the flock of Christ, especially where there is a shortage of secular clergy. This is a distinctive mark of our Order and it is rightly expressed in our liturgy where, in Vespers of All Saints of our Order it is expressed thus:

"And the sacred order of pastors of the people  
Goes forth in Ministry...."<sup>6</sup>

*The special suitability of Premonstratensians for these ministries.*

One might ask if the sons of Saint Norbert, not only as fervent religious and priests, but primarily as Premonstratensians, have some special quality which makes them suited for running parishes. The answer to this question is affirmative. Yes, the priests of our monasteries are particularly suited to the function of pastoral ministry, especially for promoting divine worship and the Interior life, collaborating with the flock entrusted to them.

A Premonstratensian priest is perfectly prepared to direct the worship of a parish community. Indeed, from the novitiate he took an active part in the liturgy which occupies an important place in the life of the abbey, and which is performed with due splendor and attentive care. Even before the liturgical renewal so successfully begun by Saint Pius X, the primacy of the liturgy was always observed faithfully in our canonries. From here the future

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<sup>3</sup> Migne PL 188, col. 1128.

<sup>4</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Scriptorum Tom. 23, p. 527.

<sup>5</sup> Bulla diei 1 Septembris anni 1750.

<sup>6</sup> *Breviar. Praemonstr.* Hymnus ad Vesp., in festo SS. Omnium Ordinis nostri.

pastors drew their great liturgical sense, their zeal for divine worship and developed a very high regard for the proper administration of the sacraments. Having thus constantly lived the liturgy during their years in the abbey, it will be easier and very natural for them to teach the parishioners to take an active part in parish worship. They will offer themselves as proponents of the restoration of a genuinely liturgical spirit among the people, to help them acquire in this activity the salutary fruits Holy Mother the Church wishes them to harvest.

*Things to be especially attended to in parish ministry.*

In all the churches entrusted to the canons of our Order, there ought to be cleanliness of the altars and vestments, decorum in sacred ceremonies and strict observance of the rubrics and other prescriptions of the Church. These are an aid that assists the people in discovering the transcendence of God and developing devotion in others. Negligence and lack of consideration on these points would be absolutely contrary to the Norbertine spirit.

Our pastors and vicars ought to address the various social issues of our time and strive to be always faithful Norbertines, missing no opportunity to stress the excellence of worship which honors God and emphasizes the place and the power of the Holy Eucharist in Christian life.

It is hardly necessary to note here what was said in the first section about zeal for souls. The men who are made pastors must pay close attention to everything relating to the spiritual guidance of the Christian people.

And since in the performance of their pastoral duties they are subject to the Ordinaries of the place, they should take care to follow their provisions with sincere observance and prompt obedience. This is a necessary condition for fruitful apostolic labor in the Church of Christ. There is nothing that leads more effectively to the esteem and good will of the leaders of the Church in regard to our Order.

*Thus may the esteem of the faithful be increased regarding our religious and Norbertine life.*

The good example and the ardent zeal of the sons of our Premonstratensian Order who were sent to the harvest of souls also contribute to making religious life, and in this case, Norbertine life, more appealing and in greater esteem to the Christian people.

This was beautifully said by our Father Saint Augustine in a text that one would think was written with our Order in mind. The pastors who would take this text to heart should include the usefulness of their active apostolate and enhance the esteem of the public for their religious vocation. The Holy Doctor notes first that in the Church "there are men who come



from the works of the world and who enter into the peace of the knowledge and the contemplation of truth;" this is the religious vocation. "And then they are unexpectedly drawn to the needs of the Church and set to work;" understand here apostolic work. This is a mixture of the works of the apostolate of the contemplative life. And then he continues: "For those chastely dispensing the mystery of God, so that they may give birth to children of faith in the night of this age," – as happens in pastoral care – "that life is praised by the people, converted by their love, they have left the hope of the world and have been received from that profession to the mercies of ruling the people. This they do in all their labors, in order that this profession, by which they are changed, since he gave such rulers to the people who will be glorified more widely and more clearly."<sup>7</sup>

What can delight Premonstratensian pastors and vicars, who are engaged in the ministry outside of their monastery, more than the thought of the esteem they gain for their Order and their canonry in ministering to their flock with wisdom and selflessness? So that others may do nothing detrimental to this esteem, let them avoid everything which would cause defamation to them and their House of profession; rather let them be "*examples to the flock*,"<sup>8</sup> that people may seek them out. This will be an honor for the religious family "*which gives such pastors to the people*".<sup>9</sup>

## ARTICLE 2

### Preaching the Word of God

*The example of our Holy Father Norbert.*

To one who reads the life of St. Norbert, even casually, it is immediately obvious that from the time that he was ordained to the priesthood he gave himself totally to the preaching of the word of God. After forty days, the new priest returned to the church at Xanten. When it was his turn to celebrate the holy mysteries, he spontaneously delivered a word of exhortation to the faithful who were present. The next day, in chapter, he gave to his canonical colleagues a salutary warning, speaking with freedom of spirit, arguing and begging. Nevertheless this was without great result, as we shall see.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after this he goes forth to preach to the faithful proclaiming the word of God with more success. He becomes an itinerant preacher visiting castles, villages and towns, preaching and reconciling those in discord with one another. And so that no one could impede

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<sup>7</sup> *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, Lib. XXII, chap. 58, Migne PL 42, col. 437.

<sup>8</sup> I Petr. 5: 3.

<sup>9</sup> S. Augustine, cf. above.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Breviar. Praemonstr.*, Lect. 2 ad Matut., die 2a infra Oct. Solemn. S. Norberti.

him from preaching, he received letters of permission from successive Popes, Gelasius and Callistus, allowing him to preach everywhere. As the fire of the Holy Spirit inflamed his heart he zealously continued; crowds flocked to him, repenting at his voice and returning to a better life.

After founding his Order, he did not remain in the solitude of Prémontré but continued to go about the various regions, evangelizing the people and recruiting young men to become members of his canonical foundation.

He intended his new brothers to live a contemplative life devoted to prayer but, when the needs of the faithful demanded, he did not hesitate to send the most experienced of them out to spread the word of God where it could thrive best, and give appropriate care to wounded souls. This is what led to the foundation at Antwerp and the triumph the Premonstratensians won over the heresy of Tanchelm.

#### *Further Practices in the Order.*

The outstanding example of their Holy Father no doubt prompted the Norbertine family to unite proclamation of the word and the practice of contemplation, without detriment to the canonical character of the Order. From the beginning of the Order the documents of the foundation of various abbeys frequently and explicitly granted the canons the faculty to preach. Such was the case for Ilbenstadt (while still under the administration of our Father Norbert; later in 1139 "the privilege to preach was extended by Innocent II to the whole province"), Varlar, Ursberg and other places.<sup>11</sup> The abbots of the time did not hesitate to be preachers themselves. Thus Gilbert, Abbot of Ninove, in 1150 is said to have been "so given over to these divine works that he applied himself both on Sundays and feast days going around to the surrounding parishes to sow the seed of the word of God. Thus his name spread like the odor of sweet smelling oil far and wide among the people and the princes of the earth."<sup>12</sup> Also Walter, the abbot of Saint Martin of Laon, of whom it was said that "he entered Douai in 1168, addressed the people, spoke about God with confidence and so effectively that many of the clergy and people dedicated themselves to God in this place."<sup>13</sup>

The completion of this fruitful work was never interrupted, although at certain times, almost all our religious were in charge of parishes entrusted to the Order, so that they could no longer go about as itinerant preachers, at least in the smaller abbeys.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. HUGO, *S. Ord. Praem. Annales*, Nanceii 1734-1736, passim.

<sup>12</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptorum Tom. 25, p. 554.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Tom 24, p. 287.

*How things are today.*

There are currently in various circaries some large canonries where many confreres can provide all kinds of sermons such as missions within the area, three day retreats, spiritual exercises, etc., and thus can "bring back with joy a harvest of what was sown for Christ to their house of poverty".<sup>14</sup> In addition, the convenience of transportation and the multiplicity of roads allow our religious easily to return to the abbey to immerse themselves and follow spiritual exercises with instructions and sermons.

Thus the abbeys and other houses of the Order have become centers from which the message of salvation is made available for those who wish to revive their spiritual lives or advance in holiness; they will receive words of encouragement as well as knowledge.

*Ministry of the Word is genuinely Norbertine.*

The sons of Saint Norbert who are called to this type of priestly work know that this work is fully consistent with the spirit of the Order of Prémontré in which our Holy Founder Norbert excelled. Unfortunately he has not left us his writings. But our Rule giver, Saint Augustine, has provided posterity with abundant material which describes a sure method,<sup>15</sup> and has left us many examples of his sermons.<sup>16</sup> Our colleagues from the beginning have used these sources that allow us to suggest a certain favor with us.

*Sources of sacred eloquence.*

To one who asks what to teach the faithful, you might answer with the Bishop of Hippo: "I feed others with that with which I am fed."

However, apart from the doctrinal treasure which theological and ascetical tractates have extensively provided during his years of training, every Premonstratensian has another rich source from which he draws daily an abundant spiritual food, and that is the Divine Office, with its selected passages from the Holy Scriptures, writings of the fathers, all of which are tailored to the liturgical periods of the yearly cycle. Hence the canon regular is imbued with the liturgical and ecclesiastical sense that he needs to bring to the exercise of the sacred functions and especially in his own spiritual life. Why not nourishment to the flock from that with which he is nourished?

The faithful of our time are more concerned than they were in earlier times to hear the essentials of the divine life, which they bear in their soul, the principles to be applied in dealing

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<sup>14</sup> *Breviar. Praemonstr.*, Resp. 5, ad Matut. Festi S. P. Norberti.

<sup>15</sup> *De catechizandis rudibus, De doctrina christiana*, lib. IV.

<sup>16</sup> *Tractatus, Enarrationes, Sermones* plurimi.

with complicated current living conditions. The Church presents us with these principles in an admirable manner in the liturgical books that must be completed by the reading of holy books and the writings of the Fathers. The preacher has to learn them and read books and the latest periodicals to help him and provide important assistance.

*What is to be proposed to the people?*

What use will the preacher make of these sources? All heralds of the word of God should set forth and explain to the people, when given the opportunity, the full deposit of revelation and the current problems that torment souls and need a solution.

But each messenger of the truth introduces something particular to his teaching, something that corresponds to the specific elements of his own mission. Do canons regular, as such, have something special to share with the faithful or perhaps some special aspect of the mystical Body of Christ to explain? Certainly! Because they form a community especially engaged in divine worship in which the Mass and the Divine Office have a place of honor. Is it not their task therefore, more than for any other preachers, to teach the people that their Christian life tends to glorify God by offering the Eucharistic sacrifice? Their divine praise and worship must include compliance with the moral obligations of living in a state of communion with God, to draw the supernatural forces and the graces required for the performance of such a sublime task.

We will certainly be faithful to our Norbertine calling if we explain to the Christian people this aspect of the divine economy. However, let us not forget to speak, in light of the liturgical and cultural aspect of the glorification of God, about the formation of the Mystical Body which is a special portion committed to canons regular and about the various aspects of Christ on Earth.

In this way the preaching of the followers of Saint Norbert will help create and develop the song of praise that the faithful people offer to God, following Christ, their Lord.

## **ARTICLE 3**

### **The Education of Youth**

*Some of our Order in the work of education.*

No one can deny the great importance of the formation of youth so that they may develop a human and especially a Christian culture and ensure good spiritual health. It is an

excellent form of the apostolate in keeping with the ordinary concerns the Order of Prémontré, commonly expressed as "prepared for every good work."<sup>17</sup>

The pastoral duties mentioned in article 1 include especially teaching catechism to children and adolescents; likewise the preaching of the word of God in article 2 often is designed to prepare boys and girls to receive the body of Christ for the first time and to profess their faith at the threshold of adolescence, and to choose a state of life or to prepare these young people to use their spiritual and bodily gifts in Catholic Action.

But there are also in the Church of Christ institutes specially designed to give a Christian education: universities, colleges and schools of all kinds, elementary, middle or upper, classic or technical, where the education of children and young people is provided by priests chosen for their zeal and the firmness of their doctrine, or at least under their direction and control.

In the early days of our Order, these institutes were quite numerous, at least in some circaries like Friesland. Not only were schools set up in the abbeys, but on the farms dependent on these abbeys. These schools were not reserved solely for the education of future members of the Order; they were open to all children.

Later, a spirit developed here and there in the Order, especially in France, which was fairly hostile to schools that were not elementary. It seems that this was inherited from the Cluniacs. When this happened the activity of the Premonstratensians in this area was lessened.

But, more recently, the circumstances have led our Order to embrace the service of the education of youth in various countries. Large schools were established in Hungary, North and South America, in Belgium, etc. This corresponds perfectly to the character and spirit of the Norbertine Order, since this is a matter of training worshippers of God and forming young souls in Christian life. This is also a form of genuine apostolate, often superior to others, due to the influence it has on lives during their years of training. Pius XII wrote: "Youth must be regarded as fragile shrubs which need not only the light of the sun, rain and the dew of heaven, as well as the help and attention of a trainer. Their character and their spirit must be penetrated with insight so that they can move forward in the disciplines taught them and follow their hearts to accept Christian principles, which is essential, under the conduct of a wise master".<sup>18</sup>

For the present, it will suffice to give a few principles for the practice, in a Norbertine spirit, of this service of a Christian educator.

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<sup>17</sup> 2 Tim. 2: 21.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of May 15, 1950, AAS, XLIII (1951), p. 87.

*Example of life and gentleness of conversation, the first means of education.*

The confreres engaged in education should remember that their example is much more persuasive than their words or warnings, hence the importance for these religious to make serious efforts to seek perfection. It is important that teenagers see in their teachers fervent priests, detached clerics, genuine sons of Saint Norbert. Christian youth usually have a high ideal of priestly and religious perfection. Be careful that you do not shock them. The pursuit of Christian perfection is necessary for a priest-educator if he wishes good results in his ministry.

For if the threefold fight of concupiscence is indispensable for all Christian life, religious who live in the spirit of the three vows can slowly teach their students to follow Christ by giving good example by a nearly complete victory over the spirit of the world. This is a genuine apostolate! To make it more effective, confreres should strive to keep a calm mind, a passionate soul for good, a pleasant character without ever harming religious seriousness and the dignity of the priesthood; this attracts respect and trust. They should therefore always be honest and respectful towards the students entrusted to them, excluding any misplaced familiarity.

*Students should be taught to pray.*

With regard to the positive element of Christian education, those who train young people must be convinced that the practice of prayer has a great place in Christian education. Therefore, use all possible means for teaching children and adolescents to pray by means of your own personal piety, according to their age and living conditions.

Communal exercises of piety, neither excessive nor prolonged, should be organized and prepared with great care. They need to be varied and explained for fear that a harmful routine develops.

For such to result in the ability to pray and meditate, let the Bible be read and other spiritual works and let them practice examination of conscience.

*Liturgical piety should be inculcated.*

Since we are Premonstratensians, we should be careful that our students develop an interest in the specific character of our spirituality.

Hence our Statutes auspiciously warn: "The confreres should know that in the education of youth they are the propagators of liturgical worship."<sup>19</sup> We who are so abundantly nourished by our sacred functions and prayer should seek the best ways to lead young people

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<sup>19</sup> Stat. 374, § 1.

to the source of all fervent Christian life which is active participation in the sacred Mysteries and the public prayer of the Church.

To fill their still flexible souls with a true liturgical spirit is to instill in them a reverence for God; to lay the foundations of fervent worship and take care that a select part of the family of Christ "instructed in the sacred actions becomes all the more pleasing to the divine majesty the more it is enlarged by these powerful gifts."<sup>20</sup>

First of all, students should learn how they can and ought to actively participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass and the importance of Holy Communion as a completion of this participation - not something just common but a duly prepared and respectfully received communion. What could be considered a more effective means of Christian education than to inculcate the social nature of worship and Christian life in general?

*The objects of cult particularly honored in the Order should especially be recommended.*

Priests of the Order should seek to instill in their students those devotions that they found profitable as Premonstratensians and which were discussed earlier in the fourth chapter of this section of the book.

The first spiritual doctrine to be passed on should be "*Christocentric*", i.e. constantly related to the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, our Redeemer and Master, as to the single source of all sanctification and any spiritual momentum. Following the example of the precursor, St. John, our task of preaching is to manifest the Christ;<sup>21</sup> it is from Him that young souls will draw the graces of healing, purification and instruction. Having recourse to Him they will be protected from imminent dangers. He will strengthen their love and inflame it. By showing this example to young people and trusting in their generosity of spirit, teachers will not hesitate to propose, in its entirety, the requirements of a Christian life, and even make willing young people more perfect and attentive to God's call, and even if by chance open they be called to the priestly or religious life. So, as recommended by Pius XII, "very carefully educate children so that the ardor of Christ and the love of souls might ignite a desire for the priesthood".<sup>22</sup> Neglect nothing that could help discover a sprouting priestly or religious vocation. Let us emphasize these ideas and let them grow in the chosen souls. The call of God should never be declined as a result of negligence on our part.

Also let us place the youth entrusted to us under the particular protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the patroness of our Order. Let us take care that the hearts of young people

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<sup>20</sup> Oration of Saturday within Passion Week.

<sup>21</sup> Hymn of the Feast of St. John the Baptist, at Matins.

<sup>22</sup> Apostolic Constitution *Ex quo die*, of April 5, 1955, AAS XLVII (1955), p. 581.

develop a reverence and filial love towards the Mother of God, our Co-redemptrix and our Mother, a clear example of purity, "*the honor of our people.*"<sup>23</sup> The image of the Immaculate Virgin should dominate the work of Christian education. In her presence, we find a great educating force, the prelude of grace, the source of spiritual renovation. The image of the Immaculate Virgin shows young people what it's like to enjoy good "health of the mind and body".<sup>24</sup>

*Students should also be taught other virtues, even the less active.*

Take care also that the Catholic youth entrusted to us do not reject the so-called "passive" virtues which are also significant in Christian education: humility, obedience, penance. The youth of our time period have to be armed for a continual struggle if they want to preserve their chastity. Do not neglect this aspect of Christian education which is always necessary, but be cautious and refer to valid psychological experience. We need to get young people to develop a love of purity, a love which will sustain a good moral life without timid anxiety but with good will and spontaneity.

*Do not neglect instruction in the profane sciences.*

In this present article we are focusing especially on religious education to be given to young people in the spirit of our Order. It is obvious that we must also ensure that the confreres responsible for their education are prepared for their task with regard to the quality of the secular instruction they are to provide to their students. When the students are ready to leave instruction, they must be able to raise a family and to serve the Church and State. Assuring a good education for such people will be an honor for our Order.

## **ARTICLE 4**

### **Missions abroad**

*Missionary activity since the beginning of the Order.*

Such activity can at first view seem scarcely compatible with the nature of the Premonstratensian Order, in churches to which the religious bind themselves, even to the point of solemnly making a vow of stability in that place. On the other hand, at the time when the Order was founded, all the nations of Europe, separated as they were, were united only in the unity of the Church. It was not easy to get to distant shores.

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<sup>23</sup> Judith 15: 10.

<sup>24</sup> Oration of the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturdays throughout the year.



Yet, from the beginning of the Order, attempts to propagate the faith permits one to think that the Premonstratensians were already willing to respond to invitations from the Holy See to sow the word of God even in remote regions.

As archbishop of Magdeburg, St. Norbert was inflamed with zeal to subject the Wends, the inhabitants of northern Germany, to the sweet yoke of Christ. With the assistance of Emperor Lothair, by the destruction of the idols of the great temple, Norbert was able to bring those provinces into the apostolic territory. And what he did not accomplish was later completed by his followers, particularly through the efforts of the Bishops of Ratzeburg, Saints Evermode and Isfrid. The Wends, extremely uncivilized pagans, were baptized more from fear of their leaders, than out of love for Christ. Gradually through the gentle preaching of Saint Isfrid and his companions, they came to profess the Christian faith, so that an historian of the last century could argue that one cannot find in the history of the Middle Ages another religious family that could claim the honor of having converted an entire people; he refers to the Premonstratensians and the Wends.<sup>25</sup>

*Missionary activity of the Order in more recent times.*

The Norbertine Order later expanded in an admirable manner into various Christian countries where it was able to exercise the ministry of the Word and win souls. It must be recognized that in the following centuries the expansion of the Order consisted more in erecting new abbeys in the various countries where the Order had already settled and also in consolidating and extending the influence of these abbeys.

However in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the sovereign Pontiffs often asked the bishops and major superiors of Europe to send priests and lay brothers to far off regions which still awaited messengers of salvation or labored under the lack of priests. Recent pontiffs have issued several encyclicals in which they insist at length, pleading about the necessity for the clergy and the faithful to send heralds of salvation to bring spiritual aid, for many countries, to souls sincerely awaiting, perhaps subconsciously, the Good News.<sup>26</sup>

Our Order responded actively to these invitations by sending its sons in large numbers to these lands awaiting harvesters for God. We read the exhortation of the Supreme Pontiff to all Catholics in the Encyclical *Fidei donum*: "That they should move their effort to the regions of Europe which have been deprived of their Christian religion and the vast areas of South America which we know to be oppressed with great difficulties. This fervor should also be put

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<sup>25</sup> Winther, in opere de influxu Praemonstratensium in Germania septentrionali, saec. XII; edit. an. 1865.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict PP, XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud*, AAS XI (1919) p. 440 f.; Pius PP XI, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Ecclesiae*, AAS XVIII (1926), p. 65 f.; Pius PP. XII *Evangelii Praecones*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 497 f.; and *Fidei donum*, AAS XLIX (1957), p. 225 f,

at the service of the Catholic missions in Oceania; their work is essential, so that this fervor is fraternally supporting thousands of Christians who *suffer persecution for justice*.<sup>27</sup> Finally, it seems appropriate these days to look at Africa as it opens itself to the life of the modern world and passes through perhaps the worst years in its history."<sup>28</sup> Is it not encouraging to note that there is no part of the Church which the pope particularly recommends for apostolic zeal that is not an area where the Premonstratensian Order has not sent workers to reap a rich harvest?

Indeed, the legislation of the Order, recently updated, now lists missionary activity among the various forms of the apostolate which it envisages. We read in our Statutes: "According to the wishes of the Sovereign Pontiffs and the spirit of the Order, religious, who are suitable physically and mentally, are sent to missions abroad."<sup>29</sup> "According to the spirit of the Order": This is clearly expressed above<sup>30</sup> concerning the ministry of souls and the social task of the Order.

*How prelates can help the missions.*

Prelates should be happy to comply, if their religious personnel is sufficient to send some out as missionaries. "Missionaries" is not to be taken in the strict canonical sense of the term, those going to some areas under the direction of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, but in a more general sense that refers to all those who go to distant lands to spread the faith or develop it.

Nevertheless it is not necessary for prelates to comply with the statutes unless they can send only religious with the physical and spiritual qualities needed. In addition, they should select those whose firmness of faith and strength of soul fear nothing and can face the dangers threatening the faith and morals, which are often more formidable in the country of mission than at home.

The question may also be asked whether it is suitable for our canonries to take on missionary work that is not compatible to the mixed life which we have professed. So, for example, activities that would impede the public recitation of the Divine Office and most likely would always impede it. If this problem occurs early on because of the small number of confreres, then strive to remedy this as soon as possible as numbers permit.

Abbots should accurately arrange the duration of the stay of the religious in the missions and the frequency of their return to their homeland. This is not only to enable them to

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 5: 10.

<sup>28</sup> Loc. cit. p. 226.

<sup>29</sup> Stat. 375, § 1.

<sup>30</sup> Sectio prior, chap. 2, art. 3.

rebuild their health, or to take a vacation with their families, and to renew friendships, but much more to move to the monastery for a period of time long enough to re-immense themselves in the spirit of their Norbertine vocation, and renew their fervor that could fade somewhat in the demands of their heavily active ministry. It should be nice to spend some time in the abbey and live the conventual life that, too often, they could not do in the mission.

*Duties of missionaries themselves.*

The priests or lay brothers sent to a mission should by no means seek to avoid this obedience; they should feel happy to be judged capable of spending time in a ministry so needed and successful. They should not hesitate to respond generously: "*Here I am, send me.*"<sup>31</sup> Once designated, they should begin to study missiology, a special discipline useful to all those who must go to mission country.

It is not possible to give specific advice here because the circumstances differ significantly according to the churches where the Gospel workers are sent. It is up to the ordinaries of the place and to the superiors of the missions not only to designate to each confrere his task, but also to teach his subjects the methods adapted to the nature of indigenous and local traditions. They should also advise them how to keep intact their spiritual life, their religious fervor and priestly integrity. They should also instruct them how to behave so as to avoid scandalizing the natives. The instructions of the Holy See concerning the missions and its exhortations to the missionaries should be welcomed with respect and submission and faithfully implemented.

The confreres sent out for missionary work should never forget that they are Premonstratensian. Therefore they should apply in the various areas of their pastoral ministry, their preaching and the education of youth, the spirit recommended in the first three articles of this chapter. The sons of Saint Norbert ought to offer and foster their liturgical and Eucharistic spirituality everywhere.

*Cooperation of all the confreres in missionary activity.*

It is not only those appointed by superiors for mission work that should develop the missionary spirit in themselves. All should have at heart the will to give something of themselves to do good and to develop the earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ which suffers from a lack of sacred ministers. All should pray frequently for the missions; their prayers should extend to each of the missions of the Order or of their own canonry.

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<sup>31</sup> Isaiah 6: 8.

For centuries, we have recited in our Order several times a day (except on solemn feasts and during octaves) *Psalm 66: "Deus misereatur nostri"*, imploring repeatedly from God that "all the people may praise him, that his salvation may be known among all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may revere him."<sup>32</sup> This Psalm deserves to be called *the Psalm of the Missions*. The public recitation of it was suppressed by the General Chapter of 1953.<sup>33</sup> But there is nothing to prevent a fervent private prayer according to this excellent formula that God deign to grant to apostolic workers, our confreres, and others who now sow in tears, one day to return joyfully carrying their sheaves.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Psalm 66: 3, 4, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Sessio 5a.

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 125: 5 f.

## **SECOND PART**

### **CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE ORDER**

#### **IN PARTICULAR**

*In this second part, material which is taken literally or almost literally from the Statutes of 1630 (Distinctions I and II) are in italics. There are many beautiful texts that were not inserted into the new statutes modeled on the provisions of the Code of Canon Law but which should be preserved.*

# CHAPTER 1

## SUPERIORS AND OFFICIALS

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### ARTICLE 1

#### The Abbot

*Those who accept the function of abbot should strive to recognize what its duties are. They should understand that they are called not to their own conveniences, to wealth and luxury, but rather they are bound to attend to themselves and the flock committed to them and henceforth obligated, according to the Apostle, to be vigilant, to labor in all things and to fulfill their ministry.*<sup>1</sup> Philip of Harvengt has written well: "It is a great honor but a great concern is joined to this honor and its luster will bring no little harm to the one bearing it if he whom divine providence wishes to preside over others in an honorable position does not wish to serve them with the greatest effort."<sup>2</sup>

#### § 1. The Government of the Abbot in general.

*The discretion necessary for the abbot in governing.*

The Abbot should acquire an accurate knowledge of the domestic affairs of his house; when this is done he may be able to wisely take care of the administration. *Moreover with the virtue of discretion which is known as the mother of all virtues and certainly necessary for a good and peaceful government, the prelate will be adorned as with a special jewel and with it he will break the impetus of passion and will be in control of himself in all things so that he may do nothing precipitously and impose nothing beyond what his subjects are capable of doing.*

Therefore he should make no decision without consultation and previous deliberation. In carrying something out, however, he should avoid on the one hand apathy through which by being always hesitant and worried he would lose the joyful opportunity of the event, and on the other hand, he should avoid being precipitous like those who, weary of all delay, ignore reflection and seem to act before thinking. He should also avoid instability by which he would both approve what was previously condemned and then condemn what was previously approved so that his subjects are always uncertain about the advice of the superior. Nor should he restrict

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Tim. 4: 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistola* 13, Migne PL 203, col. 105.

obstinacy by which he would maintain an opinion once expressed, as if it were a matter of life and death. Continuously changing is the sign of an unsettled mind but refusal to change in spite of a better opinion that is contrary to one's own is a mark of stubbornness. The middle way is the golden rule; don't change a carefully thought-out opinion unless a safer or wiser one is found.

*Fitting use of counsellors and assistants.*

*The Abbot should furnish for himself a safe way, even when it is not strictly required, seeking the advice of his council, and making frequent inquiries of the prior and other superiors regarding the conduct of his religious, their progress and their mistakes.* This is what our father Saint Norbert is said to have done. We read: "He had the custom, in any case to review, modify or confirm, according to the opinion of his entourage and he never made a decision without having previously sought the will of God through prayer and what was best for the circumstances."<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XII strongly recommends this course of action when he says: "Clearly, whoever is a prudent superior should willingly seek and listen to much advice; he should reflect on and ponder the thinking of the wise and learned; he should never put trust in himself as it the danger of making mistakes here on earth does not threaten everyone. Afterwards, however, as much as possible after having consulted those whom the rule requires him to consult, pouring out his prayers to the Holy Spirit, he may embrace a certain and definite decision."<sup>4</sup>

So that his advisers are in fact helpful to him, he should take great care to choose suitable ones and not appoint various officials who are not fitted for the task according to their abilities. Once someone is designated, he will hold office without assuming everything to himself, thus being prevented from working usefully, or seeking any opportunity to do so by deceit, outside the limits of obedience.

He should have confidence in these subjects whose ability in fact deserves trust. They have proven their prudence through their actions and their piety through their example. It is important that certain cases be explained to some lower officials so that, if the prelate were to die suddenly, his successor could be informed of the state of affairs. However, he should not assign to a single religious so many functions that others have the impression of being neglected. Nor should the confreres be given the opportunity to think that someone has all the power in this hands or that someone has power that doesn't correspond with this ability.

For which reason it is fitting that the abbot require an accurate account of everything. Nor should the officials gather to themselves important material without his knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> *Vita B*, chap. 16, n. 100, Migne PL 170, col. 1329.

<sup>4</sup> Allocution, February 11, 1958, to the general superiors of orders and sodalities, AAS L (1958), p. 155.

*Caution concerning informers and flatterers.*

The prelate should be careful not to listen too easily to accusers and detractors lest he interpret their words and deeds in a more negative way or indulge in bare suspicion. When he hears a denouncement he should be restrained, should think about it for a while and weigh the case carefully.

Everyone should also know that their prelate shrinks from all flattery and hence in no way whatever should he be asked anything if they jump to flattery and agreement.

## **§ 2. Vigilance of the prelate concerning discipline.**

*Discipline to be stressed in general.*

*Never forgetting that he will be accountable on the last day for the flock entrusted to him, the Abbot should remain careful to observe accurately the Statutes of the Order and other decrees especially with regard to assistance at the choral office, silence, fasting, the chapter of faults and other spiritual exercises which are the foundation of all discipline. He should restore and reform whatever might be neglected or distorted, knowing well that he cannot save his soul unless he fulfills this duty by all means within his power.*

*Laxity must be firmly opposed.*

The prelate should carefully curb any relaxations that are slipping in, restrain abusive practices, cut off any mild interpretations, and vigilantly resist the spirit of independence in order to tackle any attempt at overly broad interpretations of the rule – and even worse -- the spirit of independence by refusing to multiply undue favors, either by weakness or, a fortiori, to gain the sympathy of the confreres. Although he may naturally tend to neglect small details, he should still strive to give his full attention.

He should not yield to various opinions, the requests of others, the presumption of his subjects as much as these are presented as moderate, prudent or charitable. He should be guided only by the Lord and the dictates of his own conscience.

On the other hand, he should not try to lead all his subjects indiscriminately by the same pathway, or force them to bear the same burden without admitting any excuses. Rather he should seriously examine the strength of each and, before harshly criticizing someone, he should hear him out.

*Permissions and dispensations to be granted or denied.*



In what concerns permissions and exemptions, the abbot should maintain a balance between an implacable severity and easy indulgence. Excessive gentleness may enervate discipline while too much severity aggravates and produces hatred of discipline.

If it seems that a permission or dispensation should be granted, it shouldn't be offered reluctantly by first explaining reasons against the permission with sharp words so that these reasons may be removed later. Quite often the petitioner may be more grateful if the superior refused rather than grant the permission with such a tone. The applicant would often prefer that permission be denied rather than granted in such a way. The superior should rather put forward the reasons he has for granting this favor and thus soften the point of the rule for a subject who is otherwise a faithful observer.

If, on the other hand, it seems that permission or exemption should be refused, the prelate should ease this disappointment with gentleness by indicating his decision gently. He can often (but not always) indicate the reasons for the refusal before stating it. Thus he may prepare the mind of the one requesting permission so that he may even approve the decision. A benevolent refusal is sometimes more desirable than a permission by reluctance.

#### *Curbing of transgressions.*

Also in the repression of transgressions it is fitting that the prelate in no way appears to act for the sake of taking vengeance or humbling an inferior but for the sake of protecting the Order and restoring the integrity of the transgressor. This pertains more to the desire for mercy and love than to the goal of punishment.

The prelate should never immediately act in anger but sometimes allow the transgression to pass as if unnoticed or show his displeasure with merely a serious look on his face. For if the subjects are to love their father, it will often be sufficient for them to understand that the violation of even moderate rules is displeasing to him. Sometimes the superior should be content with merely the embarrassment and admission of the offense while excessive frequent blame may provoke irritation.

He should not be too indulgent, however, so that he paves the way for laxity and seems to refrain from admonition and punishment out of innate weakness of character and fear of trouble and eagerness not to displease anyone. Let him fear fulfilling in himself what Panhausen, an abbot of Steinfeld in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, commented on: "There are certain provosts and prelates who considering their own peace and tranquility, neglect to correct their subjects. This is because they would either incur the wrath and indignation of their subjects or perhaps because they are stuck in the same mud as their subjects or even seized by inordinate human fear."<sup>5</sup> Pius

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<sup>5</sup> From a manuscript kept in the archives of Averbode, fol. 143, recto.

XII gravely warns about this same thing: "Superiors should not dismiss their responsibilities regarding a wrongful subject by saying 'he is of age, he should see to it'. The Lord will not judge the matter thus when he demands an account of the souls entrusted to him (Ezechiel 34: 10); from him, who allows the sheep to wander astray while becoming drowsy and does not keep them from wandering off the path, he will demand their blood."<sup>6</sup>

The Abbot should gently correct errors of negligence but severely correct those which were inspired by pride or contempt. But the abbot should also not habitually fail to correct transgressions of the Statutes which do not oblige under sin, and all the more venial sins; for teachers of morality occasionally consider that this would be a grave sin in a superior. For example De Lugo mentions the breaking of silence, entering the cells of others, etc.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is that, if defects such as these are tolerated, regular observance cannot help but disintegrate. Indeed, by virtue of his office the abbot is the defender of discipline

The prelate should punish serious faults with suitable penalties according to the norm of Canon Law and the Statutes of the Order, nevertheless mingling mildness with rigor lest he turn the spirit of the matter into despair. He should take care to settle the matter so that the severity of the punishment not harden the situation and exasperate things rather than improve it. The offender should be brought to recognize the severity of his error and undergo the sanction willingly. Thus the superior, by punishing, at the same time wins him over.

He should always strive to restrain his angry impulses since these are completely contrary to mature advice, leading the superior to do things which take away from his dignity, or which when hastily done are only later revoked with difficulty. If therefore when he discovers a transgression, he senses movement of anger surfacing in himself, he should delay imposing a punishment and, only when he has become calm, consider whether or how punishment should be inflicted.

### **§ 3. Contact of the abbot with his subjects.**

*The abbot as father and pastor.*

The prelate should put on the role of father, which is signified by the name "abbot", if he really wants his subjects to be his sons; clearly the role of a mild or strict father according to the condition and merits of his subjects, but nevertheless the role of a *father*, by no means that of a lord or master; for it is burdensome in a religious order to be experienced as a lord to whom one has dedicated himself as to a father. Didn't our Father Augustine command: "Your superior should be obeyed as a father"?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Allocution of February 11, 1958, cf. above, AAS L (1958), p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> *De Jure et Justitia*, Dist. IX, Sect. III, n. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Regula*, chap. 11.

*The Abbot should frequently visit his sons or should call them to him. He should advise them as a true father in a spirit of gentleness, warn them, console them and, when necessary, correct, rebuke and punish them. Above all, however, he should work so that, both toward himself, Christ the Shepherd, and toward his sheep who have been entrusted to him by Christ, he may be supported by a very ardent charity; from this, if he accomplishes all his tasks and conceives the sweet and soothing affection of a mother, he may finish everything with great success and will be concerned about the salvation of his men and be unwearied toward all his work.*

*He should especially make frequent visits to the sick, and insofar as it seems necessary for their health he should admonish, encourage and advise them.*

*“Let him desire more to be loved than to be feared.”*

It is only after he observes this, and then only, that the abbot will fulfill St. Augustine’s admonition: “And although both are necessary, nevertheless he should desire more to be loved by you than feared.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps what Adam the Premonstratensian noted is more valid today than in his own time: “In such weakness of this time period, love more than fear finds greater love and more abundant fruit in the subjects of our own time.”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, it should be noted that fear should not be completely excluded, although love is more desired. Doesn’t Augustine say: “Both are necessary”? There are those who never make strong decisions based on the authority which they have and thus they are not feared. However, this lack of reverence toward the superior does not benefit at all. It would be better that the prelate conform to the advice of the Apostle: “*Rebuke with all authority; let no one despise you.*”<sup>11</sup>

*Let the abbot defend his authority.*

*The abbot should moderate his clemency – all shallowness apart – with religious gravity of manner, lest he show any regalness and lose any authority. Therefore in the sight of his subjects he should avoid any improper expression of joy, and in the common recreation where he is present let him be an observer and listener rather than a participant, not coming easily into debate with his men, but rather conversing with a few rather than many.*

*Let him also be very careful, both inside and outside, lest anyone in his presence, provided that he can impede this, either speak loosely or less honestly and religiously, and not*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praemonstr.*, Sermo 12, n. 14, Migne PL 198, col. 576.

<sup>11</sup> Tit. 2: 15.

*scandalize others or in some way violate the respect due to him; if someone fails in this way, he should at least be admonished, or even corrected, at an opportune time. Therefore the confreres, who are in the companionship of the prelate, even if they are superiors or officials, should not presume boldness or liberty, but rather bear themselves with the modesty and reverence and honor due to the abbot and defer to him humbly.*

*Communication of the abbot with individual confreres.*

Subjects should have easy access to the prelate so that they may dare to speak to him with confidence about their cares and concerns. He should listen to them patiently, knowing that he must be attentive to their requests and give them total confidence. He should encourage them, provide them with advice, and solve their problems as much as he is able to do. He should express his interest in their joys and sorrows and be ready to help them in their difficulties if he can. By so doing he will be a portrait of the ideal superior as depicted by our father Saint Augustine: "Even those who give orders are to be the servants of those to whom they give orders. If they give orders, it is not because of a domineering passion, it is out of the duty they have to ensure the interests of others; this is not from a principle of pride but from far-sighted charity".<sup>12</sup>

He should however not stifle in his subjects any sense of "responsibility"; an overly protective attitude of the superior and interference in detail is not suitable. Especially in our time, this adversely affects the personal activity of each. This activity must be directed and regulated by the authority of the superior, but it cannot deprive all the religious of their "initiative" which helps them to be all the better. It would be better to listen, and indeed with wise advice and paternal solicitude to repeat orders and prohibitions more frequently.

*Prayer for his subjects.*

*Finally, the prelate should remember that it is a duty incumbent on him to pray with fervor each day for the salvation of his subjects. He should pray ardently and offer for them the most sacred sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb or be mindful of them frequently at the altar of God.*

#### **§ 4. The prelate's custody of his private life.**

*The prelate should excel by his example.*

*Because this pastoral burden, feared even by angelic shoulders, cannot be sustained without singular purity of life and the assistance of the most eminent virtues (the integrity of the*

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<sup>12</sup> *De civitate Dei*, lib. XIX, cap. 14, Migne PL 41, col.643.

*prelate is the salvation of the subjects), this is why the prelate should be extremely careful not to be the object of scandal and to do nothing that is inconsistent with his dignity. He should nurture the virtues to carry its load courageously and steadfastly, with all that this entails; thus will he ensure the salvation of many. Thus anyone who wants to scrutinize his personal life will have before him an example of all virtues. As Saint Augustine said: "Before everyone let him be an example of good works" <sup>13</sup>*

*Therefore, he should present to his subjects both in word and deed, (for if works are absent, words mean little), true teaching and norms of perfect life as St. Gregory the Great said so well: "He should speak more by his actions than by his words."<sup>14</sup> For if he is a leader by admonition alone, not by deeds, he is exhorting to higher things in vain; on the contrary "when the merit of added holiness does not commend the prelate, the excellence of his dignity is held in contempt."<sup>15</sup>*

Therefore let the superior offer himself as an example in all things, and not require from his men what he has not modeled beforehand. He should not spare himself, but be first in difficult things and last in things that are easy. "He should not first correct those who are not acting properly and then offer himself as a model of the good; he should first show by example in his works and then by correction in his words."<sup>16</sup>

*He should not abuse his condition in order to live more freely.*

The Abbot must never give the impression that he uses his dignity to live more elegantly or more freely; this is especially true with regards to his residence, banquets, poverty, and attendance in choir.

*To be sure, he should reside nearby according as he is obligated by law, to graze the flock that will be accountable to the Supreme pastor. He should be absent rarely and only for reasons motivated by the duties of his Office; in this case, it will be necessary to make sure that his subjects lack nothing during his absence. He should not remain too long outside the monastery, so as not to neglect the affairs of the monastery; nor should he remain too long inside lest the benefits of his being outside perish. It is his duty to keep and conciliate the friends of the Abbey.*

*Mindful of his profession and following in the footsteps of the Holy Fathers, the Abbot should always make use of modest furniture and table and frugal dining. He should rarely give banquets. If he does so, they should be religious and modest, avoiding all excess and levity.*

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<sup>13</sup> *Regula*, chap. 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Regula pastoralis*, Pars II, cap. 40, Migne PL 77, col. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Philip of Harvenot, *Epistola* 13, Migne PL 203, col. 108.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Scot, *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praem.*, Sermo 12, n. 13, Migne PL 198, col. 575.

*Hence in order to present himself to the community as a model of regular observance and know that he is satisfying the needs of the confreres he should regularly eat with the community.*

*In the remaining aspects of his life in his entire residence let there be nothing that shall seem foreign to the virtue of poverty; let there be nothing that should manifest disdain or a lack of simplicity on his part.*

He should not absent himself from community exercises, especially from the canonical hours and the Missa Summa, except for reasons of health or urgent and important useful occupations.

*Let him practice humility and not seek honors.*

*The prelate should carefully strive to be meek and humble of heart.<sup>17</sup> These are particular marks of superiors by which they reject their own personal preferences and personal feelings and subject themselves to the commands and wishes of the major superiors, thus rendering their governing, the austerity of which makes it harsh and unbearable, more pleasant. This completely corresponds to the advice of Wisdom: "Have they made you a superior?" "Don't be exalted: Be among them as if you are one of them."<sup>18</sup> Because nothing does more than arrogance and pride to excite minds against superiors and obscure their respect. Always be mindful of the golden words of Saint Augustine in his *Rule*: "Let your superior not deem himself happy in using his authority, but in serving you with love. In honor before you let him take the first place, but in fear before God, let him prefer the last place."<sup>19</sup> This same Holy Father of ours elsewhere develops the same idea: "That superiors are not personally useful in what they do but in those they lead. A superior, because he is a superior should seek his honor and see its conveniences in that he is grazing himself and not the sheep".<sup>20</sup> Completely in accord with the spirit of our law-giving Father, our own Adam declares those superiors holy "who in accepting the governance rejoice more in being useful than in being in charge. Whatever they are externally in a lofty way before men, interiorly within they place themselves in fear before God, prostrate at the feet of their subjects, before whom they have the honor of being their prelates."<sup>21</sup>*

*Let him edify those outside, and be careful of his reputation.*

*Since he lives among outsiders, the abbot should never be forgetful of himself, but bear himself in such a way toward all so that the good may be edified and the evil may fear to admit anything indecorous in his presence. Let him be solicitous of his reputation even carefully avoiding anything that appears wrong; and this not so much because of himself but because of*

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<sup>17</sup> Matt. 11: 29.

<sup>18</sup> Eccli. 32: 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Regula*, cap. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Sermo* 46, n.2, Migne PL 38, col. 271.

<sup>21</sup> *De Ordine et habitu Canonicorum Praem.*, *Sermo* 12, n. 12, Migne PL 198, col. 574.

those who are subject to him, whom he is bound to edify, and because of his canonry and the Order, which it would be seriously wrong to dishonor. Our Father Augustine excellently addressed his flock: "For ourselves, our conscience is sufficient; on account of you I do not tarnish my reputation, but it should shine in your estimation.... Whoever trusts his conscience and neglects his reputation is cruel especially when placed in that position about which the Apostle says when writing to his disciple: *In all things present yourself as a model of good works.*"<sup>22</sup>

Above all, the superior should avoid being seen by outsiders as extravagant, envious of other people, eager for the amenities of life, lacking prudence or gravity. Of course, in spite of all his vigilance the abbot must expect a lot of criticism due to his lofty position and the fact that he is seen by many people. Moreover, to avoid all slander is not possible in this world. Patience makes lighter that which is impossible to avoid.

*Let him be patient and strong in adversity.*

By no means should the abbot expect that everything is going to be favorable and pleasant in the exercise of his regime. *Therefore he should prepare for himself an invincible patience by which he may constantly bear up under the infirmities and imperfections of his flock. He must also seek to acquire an extraordinary greatness of spirit in order to control the rebellious, forcefully shatter occurring difficulties, and other things which are constantly impeding the fulfillment of his office.*

*Let him diligently foster his own spiritual life.*

Burdened as he is, by the weight of his governing, and daily distracted by his many occupations, the Abbot must find in a fervent and intense spiritual life the force and light he needs to accomplish his task firmly and untiringly.

*Therefore by intimate contemplation of heavenly things let him restore within himself grace, charity and devotion, and shake off the dullness of mind which usually creeps in because of various cares. Let him withdraw from the excessive preoccupation of temporal things; let him take time for reading and study, in order to obtain that which, according to teaching, is the true doctrine,<sup>23</sup> so that by so doing he may save himself and those who give themselves over to his direction.*

## ARTICLE 2

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<sup>22</sup> *Sermo* 355, n. 1, Migne PL 39, col. 1569; Tit. 2: 7.

<sup>23</sup> Titus 1: 9.

## Other Superiors

In the preceding section many things which have to do with all superiors were fully covered when speaking about the abbot. In our Order it is in his hands that all authority resides. This is effective both in the right governing of the canonries as well as rightly and fruitfully organizing the lives of the individual brothers. Everything that has been said can be applied, "*mutatis mutandis*", to the other superiors, in that they have, as the Abbot General, leading the entire order and under the abbots themselves, or they have to participate in an abbey, and under the orders of the Abbot, at the direction of their colleagues in their specific duties.

For this reason in the present section only those things will be spoken of which need to be made clear about subordinate superiors of the canonries which may change the normal rules in a particular way corresponding to the duties of the individuals. A section will therefore be devoted to the prior, the subprior, the circator and the superior of the dependent houses.

### § 1. The Prior.

*General overview of the qualities of the prior.*

If the prior wants to know what the Order and the prelate who appointed him expect of him, he will have to refer to the serious warnings given to the Abbots by the Statutes of 1630 on the choice of a prior: "*Considering only God and their own salvation and progress, they should choose as prior one whom, among all others, they consider to be the best and the most capable who will know how to bear the care of the souls which are committed to him, one who is prudent and discreet in his administration, kind in his words, modest and serious in its morals. He should be one to whom the prelate, in his absence, can be entrusted with the community.*"<sup>24</sup>

The prior must be deeply convinced of the importance of the load which is entrusted to him. It is on him that depends in large part the progress of the community as well as the suitable and fruitful activity of the confreres.

*Constant presence in the community.*

It is the duty of the prior to take careful and attentive care of the community and to be present almost continually. The domestic care of the monastery is entrusted to his vigilance. He should always be available to the confreres who have some matter to deal with him. He ought to decline opportunities to absent himself rather than seek them. By so doing he is forced to do so

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<sup>24</sup> *Statuta* 1630, Dist. II, cap. 10, n. 3.



rarely but for the good of the House. Then lest he be absent too frequently for the necessities of the confreres, he will shun less useful trips.

*Discernment in the distribution of tasks.*

The prior should study the abilities of the priests of the community, their talents, their physical force, to assign to each, as far as possible, work to which he would be best suited. It will be to replace the absent, the infirm and the ill. In the absence of the Abbot, he has the upper hand on all the "officers" of the Abbey and will ensure that everything goes in order.

*Care of discipline and the individual confreres.*

It is undoubtedly for the prior to ensure compliance with regular discipline, identify faults and breaches of the confreres in this observance and in the exercise of their functions. He warns and corrects in chapter or any other time those who are guilty of any breach.

On the other hand, he is requested to "*grant to the brothers, with kindness and ease, everything that is necessary for them.*"<sup>25</sup> Otherwise he would provide the opportunity to avoid superiors or violate poverty by obtaining elsewhere whatever they need or find useful.

Finally, in his personal dealings with the confreres, the prior can and should observe what was stated in the previous article about the Abbot.

*He should be an example for the community.*

*For everything regarding the order and discipline, the prior must be a shining example for his brothers; he should also put all his care into observing exactly the Rule and Statutes.*

*He should never absent himself without good reason from the church, the refectory or other community exercises. In all things let him portray himself as first. Let him be careful not to infringe or change even the least of regular observances because all discipline is lost if it is violated by its custodian.*

*He should be assistance and a support for the prelate.*

The extent of this means that the prior will provide assistance to the prelate by easing his burden and bearing with him.

*Whether the Abbot is present or absent, inside and outside, the prior will function according to the wishes of the abbot and not transgress these wishes in any way. Therefore he*

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<sup>25</sup> Stat. 245.

should carefully find out what is expected of him and do his best to carry this out without departing from the views of his superior.

He should also have frequent discussions with the abbot regarding everything he is to do or correct and report to him whatever he tried to solve but was unsuccessful. He should respectfully let the abbot know about decisions the abbot had made but, which due to forgetfulness, negligence or being too busy, were not yet implemented.

If ever in the absence of the Abbot he had to resolve any extraordinary situation he should report this to him upon his return.

The prior should work to enforce in the community the abbot's orders and requirements. He should ensure that no one speaks about him irreverently or disrespectfully. Whenever necessary or just he should take to heart his defense in the presence of others. "The Prior should seek to defend the honor of the Abbot in the community that has been entrusted to him and be careful not to do anything against him."<sup>26</sup>

If the prior notes that the abbot, unconsciously perhaps, takes too many liberties, or is out too often without good reason or gives an opportunity to some colleagues to criticize him, he should not hesitate to make note of this to the prelate. He should do this respectfully, convinced that he cannot perform a more useful service: those who enjoy authority rarely have the privilege to hear opinions that can make them more dedicated and prudent!

The abbot and the prior should carefully avoid any rivalry and any dissension between them, for their good as well as for the community. The abbot must not be envious of the prior nor should the prior be arrogant towards the abbot. Adam the Premonstratensian gives an exaggerated but very good description of this.<sup>27</sup>

This same author describes very well the mutual collaboration between the prelate and the prior when he writes: "They depend on one another. The abbot has all the power, the prior shares it with him. As a result there is no considerable confusion in the business if they refer to one another and assist one another. In a community, the action of the prior will be futile if the authority of the abbot does not support him; so also will the case of the abbot be if the faithful support of the prior is missing. They must respect and help each other mutually, with humility and effectively."<sup>28</sup>

*He is a mediator between the abbot and the community.*

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<sup>26</sup> Adam Scot, *De Ordine et habitu Can. Praem.*, Sermo 12, n. 5, Migne PL 198, col. 568.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. nn. 3-5, Migne PL 198, col. 567-569.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. n. 3, Migne PL 198, col. 566.

It is the duty of the prior to work for peace between the abbot and the community. For since he is situated under the abbot and above the rest, when the occasion arises, he can easily function as a mediator between them and with his skill arrange for quarrels to be quickly dissipated by bringing out the truth.

But whatever seems to him as useful or opportune for the community – whether in the material or spiritual area – and whatever is realized as ongoing he should make known to the prelate.

*What is the role of the prior when the abbatial seat is vacant?*

If the abbatial seat becomes vacant the prior, according to the norm of the Statutes, becomes the administrator of the abbey. As such, he is responsible for keeping the community in good condition. He should change little and make no significant decisions, unless necessity or a pressing need or obvious usefulness demands it. In this case, he should generally seek the counsel of the Abbot General or his vicar of the circary.

## **§ 2. The Subprior.**

The holder of this office must carry out his task showing, as demanded by the former Statutes, *"modest, religious and strict morals, loving discipline and observing it with rigor, giving good example to his confreres; he should hold and foster unity and concord."*<sup>29</sup>

Enjoying precedence and being a member of the Abbot's council, he is entitled to respect from the confreres, to which he should respond with great kindness and his edifying example.

His office is primarily one of substitute, inasmuch as it will be to fill the offices of the prior and the circator who are absent or prevented from being present.<sup>30</sup> He should perform these duties not reluctantly but with zeal and willingly.

He should carefully carry out whatever the Statutes require of him, *namely that the confreres, wherever they are, behave with order and discipline.*<sup>31</sup> He should do this less by imposition and scolding and punishing those who break the rules -- which, moreover, often exceed the framework of his powers -- than in exciting their generosity and drawing attention to their deficiencies.

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<sup>29</sup> *Statuta* 1630, Dist. II, cap. 11, n. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Stat. 250, 259, § 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Stat. 252, § 1.

He should strive “to correct and amend, when necessary, those things which pertain to the cantor and the sacristan”;<sup>32</sup> he will be to happy and honored if by his attention he may have to help to ensure the good observation of the liturgical requirements.

### **§ 3. The Circator.**

The Circator, as a vigilant guardian of regular discipline, should first of all take care *"to be himself a strict observer and a worthy example of life style, standing in perfect unity of views with the other superiors, which testifies to indispensable respect"*.

The functions incumbent<sup>33</sup> on him are to go about all places of work and search for all those who are absent without delay thinking to bring these things into good maintenance and for the good of the community.

If he notes serious or frequent transgressions he should not hesitate to refer them to the abbot or prior since these things pertain to the common good. Since no one has accused himself of this fault, it is under his charge to fulfill this thankless role. If he notices minor breaches of the rule, and if the matter is worth the effort, he should proclaim it in chapter.

But his zeal should not be precipitous. But unless he weighs the matter, he may cause harm where he intended to benefit. In the chapter, *"he should be careful not to accuse someone maliciously or from personal dislike, or on the other hand conceal someone's negligences out of friendship"*. It should be clear to everyone that he is not acting out of personal favor toward anyone.

Outside of the chapter, he may admonish the offenders by a sign rather than vocally, especially in places and at times where silence must prevail. On the other hand nothing should impede him from admonishing confreres by fraternal correction concerning their deficiencies. This warning will be more readily accepted if it is inspired by affection; at the same time he will be happy because of the quality of the superior more urgent in advising with particular efficiency.

The Circator may be of assistance to other superiors of the house. On the other hand, his goodwill towards the confreres could offset the severity that is burdensome at times.

### **§ 4. The Superiors of dependent houses.**

It is easy to apply to the superiors of the dependent houses what has been said about the abbot and prior, with the adjustments necessitated by the circumstances.

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<sup>32</sup> Stat. 252, § 2.

<sup>33</sup> Stat. 256, § 1.

As a general rule, the superior behaves as the prior of the abbey when the prelate is absent. But, since in a dependent house, the abbot is rarely present and is often not easily or quickly reached the superior of the house frequently has to make decisions on his own. However his initiatives cannot exceed the limits granted by the prelate and he shall remain in contact, *"remaining fully submitted to him"*<sup>34</sup> and as far as possible, he must seek his instructions for any matters of importance.

He will carefully nurture among his subjects the love of their Abbey, reacting strongly to indications of any indifference as well as against any attempt of complaint or blame against his superiors. He will strongly insist on turning his sons' duty to the honor of the mother abbey and stay in close union with her, as remote as it is.

The superior will also ensure that everything that concerns the life and activities of the house be communicated regularly to the confreres of the abbey either by private letters, or through a periodic newsletter, as is sometimes exchanged regularly between the monastery and the dependent houses.

## ARTICLE 3

### Officials

Confreres who, having accepted a particular area of obedience in the monastery itself or in a dependent house, and are called to exercise it for the good of their abbey, are called officials.

The statutes specify that "they are acting according to the will of the prelate."<sup>35</sup> It is true that the exercise of these charges is a continual exercise of obedience, not passive obedience, by which he submits to the prescribed disciplines, but active obedience, by which he works with all his strength and creativity to carry out the intentions of the superior who committed this task to him. Officials must not be sparing in their work and should be an example to the rest of the confreres. If they perform in this way then the other confreres will be willing to comply with instructions that they would have to be given within their jurisdiction.

What must be especially avoided is to be negligent about things that are specific to the exercise of their office, if confusion or temporal or spiritual loss to the confreres might be the consequence. Never in the exercise of their duty should they seek to live more freely or free themselves from the burden of discipline; they should not try to turn their office into a benefice.

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<sup>34</sup> Stat. 261.

<sup>35</sup> Stat. 270, § 2.

In this article, we will recall some principles relating to the main officials. Whatever concerns the responsibilities and duties of the masters of novices, the professed juniors and the lay brothers, will be dealt with separately.

### **§ 1. The Cantor, Succentor and Organist.**

Since it is in the hands of the cantor, succentor and organist that the proper execution of the choral office rests and on which the devotion of the confreres relies in the recitation and singing of this office, these officials should gird themselves for its excellent performance.

It is the duty of the cantor especially to apply every skill so that the sacred psalmody is performed accurately as is fitting the divine praise. Nevertheless this should be done so that excessive urgency not produce a lack of joy and make the work burdensome especially where the confreres ought to be spiritually refreshed.

The presence of the cantor and the succentor in the choir, and their zeal to improve singing and chanting to help souls in their ascent to God, will be for all an example and incentive to their fervor. As often as they have to correct some error or defect during the office or must admonish someone who, unknowingly perhaps, is disturbing the choir they should do this with such dignity and modesty so that what needs to be corrected is done without offense in the mind of the one erring.

They should not presume to introduce new norms at will but only strive to find and work for the best methods to apply them according to the spirit which pontifical decrees, our Statutes and the *Liber Ordinarius* will prescribe concerning liturgical chant and recitation. The succentor should conform exactly to the methods of the cantor, so that the direction of the choir may be harmonious and all be perfectly united.

Similarly, the organist, according to the *Statutes*, "in accompanying the singing should faithfully comply with the indications of the cantor"<sup>36</sup> and moreover "his role should be to adapt to the tenets of the liturgy with accuracy to ensure great luster to the sacred ceremonies".<sup>37</sup> When he plays the organ at the times when there is no singing, it should modulate the accompaniment designed to promote and excite in souls the fervor of the prayer, in a way that corresponds to the character of the feast of the day or the current liturgical function.

These three officials should never fail to obtain for themselves new theoretical knowledge and especially practical knowledge regarding sacred music and Gregorian chant so

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<sup>36</sup> Stat. 278, § 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. § 1.

that they may apply themselves with greater skill to adapting the performance of divine praise and to furthering its perfection from day to day in the church of their profession.

## **§ 2. The Sacristan and Master of Ceremonies.**

In its time and place there is always something to be done to ensure the proper implementation of liturgical functions and the conduct of worship with order and devotion. The same can be said of the solemn ceremonies of the principal offices. It is the role of the Sacristan and the Master of Ceremonies, assisted as needed by some confreres, to ensure the splendor of the liturgical celebrations.

The Sacristan will scrupulously ensure the perfect execution of everything which is prescribed by the statutes. "The church and the altars shall be sparkling clean, also the vases and sacred utensils; sacred linens and the vestments of the ministers should be clean, and never torn or worn."<sup>38</sup> Anything with a view to the Holy Eucharist for the consecration, preservation and ministering, should always be perfectly clean, to inspire the greatest reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, hidden under the consecrated species. Finally, the Sacristan should deal precisely with everything which is prescribed by the Holy Canons and the Instructions of the Holy See concerning custody and the cult of the Blessed Sacrament and of everything sacred.

All the above applies also to the Master of Ceremonies to whom is committed the development of the sacred rites and especially in pontifical ceremonies. He should spare no effort to achieve this perfection which is rightly expected from men addicted to the solemnities of divine worship. Never should he tolerate that brothers come without being prepared for the various ministries. Let him educate them carefully beforehand as to what is expected of them and during the sacred function he should keep an eye on them so that he can, if necessary, direct them or correct them with signs. His mind and his action should be inspired by the words of the psalmist: "*Dilexi decorem domus tuae*".<sup>39</sup>

## **§ 3. The Librarian and Archivist.**

It is to the librarian and archivist that have been entrusted the orderly and methodical custody of books which are intended to enrich the spiritual and intellectual life of the confreres as well as the codices and documents that describe the life and changes in the abbey through the ages, and which can be drawn on as needed.

Our Statutes<sup>40</sup> give enough specific instructions so that these officers can properly fulfill their support for the common good.

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<sup>38</sup> Statutes 458.

<sup>39</sup> Psalm 25, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Statutes 296-302.

Our Holy Father Augustine said in his Rule: "Books should be requested at a fixed hour each day. Outside of that hour no request should be honored."<sup>41</sup> This rule, which was perfect at the time when it was enacted, given the scarcity and size of the books, should now not be taken according to the letter. However, the principle and its intention remain valid. Consultation or borrowing books should not be at the whim of each but according to specific rules, so that the confreres use them with discretion and avoid any loss or damage to the books. These norms as set up by the librarian under the supervision of the abbot are to be carefully observed.

The librarian should be useful to the confreres in a timely manner by making available new literature and periodicals. He will facilitate their use of the library by the establishment of a catalogue. Thus, he will have participated in the intellectual activity of the confreres. He should not spare himself so that his care and labor in this matter be more effective.

The archivist should keep the documents entrusted to him with greater care as is clearly required by the Statutes. Hence he should understand how much vigilance is required of his office. The vigilance should correspond to its importance.

#### **§ 4. The Provisor, Cellarer and Vestiarius.**

*Qualities and care concerning spiritual aspects.*

Lest he be distracted from the care of souls and spiritual exercises by external occupations the abbot is forced to select a few confreres to whom he can entrust to a great extent the care of temporalities. These will have to be men of proven virtue, skillful, faithful and careful, in particular, men found to be suitable for dealing with temporalities.

These men should not cease to expand in themselves the above mentioned qualities and allow these skills to grow from day to day. Nevertheless they should be careful not to expend themselves totally in temporalities. And therefore they should meet regularly with the prelate and be concerned about their duties. But they should frequently turn inward and not be fully absorbed with temporal things. Agree therefore with the prelate who fixed the offices to which they must attend (and that they do not expect major exemptions from presence in the choir that their office does not expressly require), and they should often return in closing to conform to what is prescribed for meditation and examination of conscience, that in no case they neglect them entirely.

*Dependence on the abbot must always be maintained.*

The provisor of external matters (to whom frequently, even partially, is committed financial management of the goods of the canonry) should sincerely consider what the abbot

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<sup>41</sup> Rule, chap. 9.



intended to entrust to him and not presume further freedom to himself. It is altogether worth noting that the former Statutes, by fully describing the various duties of the provisor,<sup>42</sup> insisted each time on the fact that he had to act only with the knowledge and instruction of the abbot or according to his ordinance. And rightly, for only in this way is unity considered in the governing of the house.

Therefore the provisor and the other officials who take care of the materialities should carefully observe that they should pay out the money entrusted to them to no one for a use which is not of their responsibility, following exactly in this the regulations and will of their prelate. This is effective all the more concerning the administration of goods which pertain to the foundation of the canonry if the abbot has entrusted it in part to the provisor. Great prudence is necessary for him so that the house may not be brought to material detriment because of his ignorance or carelessness. For this reason he should give an accurate report of his stewardship to the prelate who will inform the house council according to the norms of Canon Law and the Statutes.

*What is necessary for the confreres should be met without delay.*

The aforementioned officials should take care that the confreres, certainly with the exception of all luxury and excess, should have what is necessary in food, clothing and equipment. Let there be too much rather than there be something lacking. Therefore don't be inordinately extravagant or stingily sparing. Thus every occasion of detraction will be lacking and everyone will find themselves more ready and more eager to promote a happy home. Indeed strength and health of body are necessary for performance in choir or in the works of the apostolate. And although a confrere who lacks something may seek nothing, an official who notices this should carefully provide for him as much as his humility and moderation makes him worthy of this kindness.

Whatever is ministered to the confreres, even moderately, are offered kindly with a smiling and joyful expression; those who are receiving will consider less the thing itself than the spirit in which the necessary things are given for health and labor.

## **§ 5. The Guest Master.**

One who is responsible to care for the guests should draw on the principles listed above about hospitality<sup>43</sup> and put it into practice in accordance with the directions of the Statutes.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Statutes of 1630, Dist. II, chap. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Part I, Section II, chap. 5, art. 3, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Statutes 536-539, 314-315.

He should be a good religious, cautious in his words, serious in his approach and actions; should observe modesty of eyesight, should be careful and solicitous in service of the guests, and an example of moderation and discipline in all things.

In the reception of any guest received, he should always present a pleasant face without ostentation but with religious moderation. He will meet their needs adequately but without excess.

The guest master should see to it that no one is admitted who would cause any inconvenience to the prelate or the community or damage to the monastery, or anyone, who driven by a blatant curiosity might browse through offices, kitchens or other places.

He should not hesitate to admonish a confrere whom he notices dealing improperly with guests. If necessary he should notify the superiors. As to his own conduct, he should always remember that people of the world will judge a religious house as good or bad based on how they have been received in the house and by the example given by the confreres whom they will have the opportunity to meet.

## **§ 6. The Infirmarian.**

The priest, to whom the care for the sick is entrusted, should know exactly their condition in order to provide what is necessary and provide for the observation of religious discipline in the infirmary. He should ensure that the patients are never neglected.

The infirmarian should not be morose or gruff but always prompt and available, so that the patients already suffering in their body may not be exposed to spiritual pain in addition. Therefore let him be warm and smiling. Let him know how to empathize with their pain and their grief and thus bring them the consolation of a pious and pleasant conversation.

He should receive the complaints of the patients not disdainfully but patiently, even willingly, and extend to them a willing ear. He should mitigate the difficulty of their state with loving words for the depressed in spirit and show the gift of his heart entrusted to him for their care. With such skills may he lighten the burden of the one who is infirm.

Let the infirmarian be prudent and discrete in preparing, distributing and administering the necessary medicines and be careful to administer these medicines to the sick on time and at the stated times according to the direction of the doctor. But while giving the sick what he believes useful to improve their state, the infirmarian should follow the golden norms formulated in our Rule given to us by Saint Augustine: "If the sick man wishes something that is perhaps not appropriate for him, his wish should not be fulfilled. For sometimes even if it may harm, it is

believed to benefit because it tastes good. Finally, if the pain is hidden in the body, if the servant of God says what it is that hurts, he should be believed without hesitation. But nevertheless, the doctor should be consulted if the medicine given to ease the pain is not definitely the right one to ease the pain.”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile something should be given to the patient – even if a good reason is lacking – if the cause or occasion of the complaint is removed. If, on the other hand, because of spiritual fervor and spirit of penance, someone is not willing to use drugs or sedatives, or in order not to frequent the exercises of the community, in this case “let it be, without complaint, according to the decision of the doctor, so that even if he is unwilling, at the command of the provost, he should do what must be done for the sake of his health.”<sup>46</sup>

The infirmarian also manages the confreres of advanced age, since old age has to be considered as a kind of infirmity. He should handle them gently and carefully, and whatever is considered useful for their physical condition should not be sparingly granted; for after the constant labors of life, it would be inappropriate not to take care to comfort them in their old age.

Everything that is said in this paragraph applies, all things equal, for the service of the lay brother skilled in the care of the infirm “inclined, faithful and dutiful toward wretchedness”<sup>47</sup>, who assists the priest infirmarian in helping the sick. His integrity should not be taken at the slightest suspicion; it should be modest and discreet but should fear any hasty timidity when he will have to give patients the care that his office will impose and the charity. In other words, he should not forget the duty of charity.

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<sup>45</sup> Rule, chap. 9

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Stat. 316, § 2.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**THE CONFRERES**  
**RESIDING OUTSIDE HOUSES OF THE ORDER**

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**ARTICLE 1**

**Choice of confreres for external ministries**

For the benefit of souls our Order frequently sends its religious out from the monasteries and other houses for pastoral care to be exercised even in secular churches,<sup>1</sup> as well as for various priestly works such as teaching Christian doctrine, spiritual direction for nuns and similar things. Since this is the case prelates should be careful to be sure that in the flock entrusted to them they have confreres trained in discipline of life and morals whom they are able to send out to tend to the vineyard of the Lord and bear fruit without loss both of others' souls and their own.

Since the direction of souls is an art of arts and a science among sciences, therefore prelates in the appointment of their men to pastoral care or other priestly ministry should put aside all personal affection. They should carefully consider the qualities of each individual and assign them on the basis of their sense of duty, sufficient education, and on the consistency of their ability, so that they may respond on the last day knowing that if they advanced unworthy men knowingly, whatever these men did wrong and whatever damage they caused will fall on them.

However, since according to the Apostle, *"no one should take on an honor for himself except he who is sent like Aaron,"*<sup>2</sup> prelates should hold back and repress and not assign those who strive to involve themselves unsuitably but not called by God.<sup>3</sup> Nor should they assign them any tasks outside a house of the Order.

However, when someone of firm manner must be sent out for a ministry that is very important but likewise somewhat dangerous, prelates should keep in mind the example of Christ who spent the night in prayer to God when he was about to choose his Apostles;<sup>4</sup> they

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<sup>1</sup> Bulla "Onerosa", Benedicti PP XIV, de die 1 kSeptembris 1750.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hebr. V, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jer. XXIII, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Luke VI, 12.

should ask the grace of the Holy Spirit, then ask the advice of the prior and a few others to advise them on the qualifications of the one to be appointed to avoid any error. Moreover they should judge their hearers, keeping in mind only God and the benefit of the Church. They should take care to appoint him, whom according to their conscience, all things considered and weighed, they consider most apt for taking on such a task. Nor should they be concerned in this matter either about their age or about the time of their profession, but rather about their suitability and ability.

## ARTICLE 2

### **Virtues to be striven for by confreres living outside**

#### *Care of interior life and piety.*

As is clear from many things explained in the first part of this Directory, the Order of Prémontré, as early as its origins, expressed its contemplative nature. It would not be right to call this characteristic into question because of the many outside works of ministry undertaken by many confreres. Thus in all the apostolic labors which are common to us with the secular clergy, there is always recognized a genuine spirit of prayer and union with God in the activity of the sons of St. Norbert which deeply permeates their apostolate.

It would clearly be desirable that confreres appointed outside for the ministry of souls would be living together, two or three as much as possible and at least recite some of the canonical office in common. No doubt every effort to do this should be praised to the highest degree. It must be admitted that sometimes this is impossible due to the necessities of parochial care or other functions, especially in our day. But at least confreres who live alone or with one or two others should have it in their hearts to arrange their life so that prayer and recollection have a place in it. If it is neglected, however, it is not certain that the Norbertine spirit would be preserved and certainly our apostolate would be deprived of our particular spirit.

Pope Pius XII, addressing clerics, expressly stated that diligent concern for the intense inner life was perfectly compatible with sustained apostolic zeal: *"They can combine, he said, the greatest zeal for the riches of the inner life and their work.... Joyful work and attention to the inner life, not only require a mutual union, but even as one and the other progress they proceed with equal step and advancement."*<sup>5</sup> In our Norbertine life, even conducted outside the

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<sup>5</sup> Allocutio diei 8 Decembris 1950, Delegatis conventui generali ex universis Religiosis Ordinibus, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 32.

community, the contemplative elements bear similar roles to those of contemplative orders in the life of the Mystical Body of Christ, which -- the same pontiff asserts -- are "necessary to the Church, *providing a perpetual honor and a source of heavenly graces*".<sup>6</sup>

The liturgical life, which we live in our monastery – during the years of formation and afterwards – with constant and active participation in the daily Missa Summa and choral recitation, often solemn, of the divine office, makes us privileged, even if later we are forced to lack it altogether. For the memory of it and the profound traces of it, which have impressed our souls, continue to help us to find in our Mass and breviary the source of our solid devotion and fruitful apostolate. And indeed if God has called and directed us to the Order in which the Eucharistic sacrifice and "Opus Dei" consume such a great place, it is certainly fitting for us – more than for others – that wherever we have been the Mass and Office remain the prime and necessary means of sanctity and apostolate.

Nor must the spirit of recollection be neglected which all the confreres – although in diverse degree – had acquired at the time of their religious and clerical education. And although the extraconventual confreres in practice are deprived of the exercise of regular silence, nevertheless they should impose on themselves some exterior arrangement of life which avoids excessive effusiveness toward the outside and which nourishes – even in the midst of priestly activity – an intimate union with the Lord from which they might draw supernatural strength and efficiency for their apostolic life.

#### *The Spirit and practice of poverty and penance.*

All the confreres outside of the monastery, who obtain some gift, should be mindful that they are solemnly professed religious. Certainly they don't have to nor are they able to go to the superior provided that it is of less ordinary value; but they should do this precisely. They should exercise dependency in this matter by rendering annually – and this is to be taken seriously – to his prelate in writing a list or inventory of all mobile things which they have, or at least which they have received in the past year for their use and stewardship along with a full and honest description and inventory in which all debts and credits are expressed.<sup>7</sup> Nor should they forget that they are bound to faithfully render to their canonry any excessive money according to the norm of the Statutes.<sup>8</sup> They should take special care not to give notable gifts either to their parents or anyone else without the consent of their prelates.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Stat. 481, § 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ibidem, § 2, et integer Stat. 485.

If they are pastors, however, lest they be spread around too much, they should not mingle in the secular government of their villages, unless requested by their subjects or obvious need requires it, and of course they have sought and received the consent of the prelate. Without the written permission of their prelates, pastors should not accept the administration of any goods, either of the church or the poor or of anyone else; otherwise neither monasteries nor pastoral revenue may be considered as obligatory debts contracted by reason of their administration. However, those who have obtained permission for such administration are bound to refer to this in their annual “computus”.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to food and equipment, they should live like religious, frugally and modestly; if many live together, they should live the common life strictly according to the norm of the Statutes.<sup>10</sup> It should appear that they are bound to Evangelical poverty and therefore wish to live simply, apart from all luxury. In their garb and living everything should be clean, but no one should deservedly say that their lives are lived more elegantly than many secular priests.

They should also be careful not to leave their residence without some manifest need or usefulness for themselves or their parish and they should avoid all unnecessary going about; if this is necessary they should refer to their prelate for the required permission.

Those who live outside the community enjoy greater liberty than those confreres in the monastery with respect to external austerity and the use of things that are enjoyable. Yet if they were allowed everything within their reach, it would not fit with the spirit of their vocation. Should we not then suggest that those in the monastery endure restrictions and deprivation because of the Rule and the superiors and not in a spirit of penance? Let them generously develop the practice of mortification which was given above.<sup>11</sup>

### *Zeal for Souls.*

It would be redundant to urge the confreres living outside toward zeal for souls with full self-sacrifice; for everything which has been said about exercising the apostolate in general,<sup>12</sup> as well as about the various forms of the apostolate specifically,<sup>13</sup> is valid for the confreres who usually live outside the monastery. Let them instruct themselves from what has been said and let them dedicate themselves tirelessly to the apostolic labor and build it by their example.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Stat. 367.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Stat. 368, §§ 1 and 2.

<sup>11</sup> Pars I, Sect. II, Chap. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Pars I, Sect. II, Chap. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Pars I, Sect. I, Chap. 2, Art. 3.

Considering the burden imposed on themselves, let them try to carve onto their hearts the words of the Apostle and then exhibit them by their works, by which words he advises Timothy saying: “Be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity; ... take care about what you do and what you teach; always do this, and in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.”<sup>14</sup>

### **ARTICLE 3**

#### **Relation of confreres living outside toward the Order and the canonry**

From the psychological point of view, it cannot be denied that the members of our Order, who normally live outside a house of the Order and only spend a few days each year in their monastery, are exposed to the danger of losing the religious and Norbertine spirit and assume for themselves a great independence. Bonds with their abbey are easily lost and at first glance it sometimes seems that they – except for the religious habit, which perhaps they have also put aside for whatever reasons – can scarcely be distinguished from secular priests.

This will sometimes happen and should one or another of them depart from his canonry and Order, it will be a surprise to no one; but what are these among so many? Indeed history bears witness that Premonstratensians held benefices during the course of the centuries before the Council of Trent, when there were still no seminaries or an orderly formation of secular clergy, but even afterwards and up until now. Would anyone dare to say that such elaborate effort does not agree with the genuine spirit of the Order? So do not look down on our confreres who are working on the outside. On the contrary consider them great since in these less favorable circumstances they remained faithful to their Norbertine vocation; by their activity were useful to the faithful people. They increased the merits of our Order in the Church of Christ.

Whoever is conscious that he is scarcely able to retain and cultivate the spirit of his vocation, as he ought, outside of conventual life and claustral discipline, may rightly request from his prelate that he be permitted to remain in the monastery or dependent house, still subjecting himself, nevertheless, to the superior’s decision. However, whoever is sent outside by the abbot, besides the common means of fostering spiritual fervor that are recommended to all priests, he should know that he is bound to his canonry and constant dealing with it is an innate support for him and for his maintaining a specific spirit of the Norbertine vocation and for keeping this support in good repair.

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<sup>14</sup> I Tim. IV, 12, 16.



Devotion towards the Order and one's canonry, about which it was discussed above,<sup>15</sup> and which must be found alive in every Premonstratensian, must be fostered with special care by confreres living outside. It is necessary that thoughts and affections about their home supply in them the daily presence and affective force exercised by way of the senses. How pleasant for a Premonstratensian Canon who is living outside of his home to reflect in his mind on all the benefits and the divine graces which have accumulated from that very dear home. No human power can destroy them and the memory of them feeds the interior fervor. Moreover the celebration of Mass and the recitation of the Hours unite him to the community Mass and public chanting which are celebrated in the abbey as well as to the memory of the years that he lived in the monastery taking part in the liturgical actions there.

They should keep up with what is going on in the monastery and dependent houses so that they may be able to "rejoice" with their confreres and be happy or grieve about the favorable or unfavorable things of the mother abbey. Where there exists a periodical which is sent to all the confreres of the canonry, let it be a joy for the confreres outside to read it and unite themselves more closely to the little changes in conventual life.

Nevertheless, let this devotion reveal itself more externally by going to the abbey as often as circumstances permit, for instance, not only for the annual spiritual exercises or the trimester days of recollection but also for the celebration of domestic feasts, e.g. Sts. Augustine and Norbert or the local abbot and for the jubilees of confreres. Let them be present for funerals and first Masses of confreres newly ordained, as long as they are available; as otherwise the Statutes recommend in these words: "for this witness of fraternal love, even those who are occupied outside the abbey should not easily excuse themselves."<sup>16</sup>

Another sign of devotion to the Order is the accurate and ready observation, with a willing spirit, of the following Statute: "All confreres, even those habitually living outside the house, are strictly held to wear the proper habit of the Order both inside and outside of the house, unless because of reasons deemed serious in the judgement of the superior, by the prelate or urgent necessity by the superior of the house."<sup>17</sup> Certainly peculiar circumstances of persons, places, weather or transport can present an excusing cause so that a dispensation may be sought. However, a fervent Premonstratensian doesn't seek, much less multiply these occasions; in this also he will submit to the advice given by the authorities of the Order and repeated regarding this.

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<sup>15</sup> Pars I, Sect. II, Chap 5, Art. 2, § 2.

<sup>16</sup> Stat. 503, § 2.

<sup>17</sup> Stat, 514, § 1.

## CHAPTER 3

# NOVICES AND PROFESSED JUNIORS

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### ARTICLE 1

#### Candidates to be admitted to the Order

##### **General Norm.**

Since the sublimity of the religious vows and that perfection toward which the Norbertine life strives is so great and far exceeds human strength, therefore when candidates seek to be admitted to our Order, the superiors should be vigilant in regard to each one so that considering those to be admitted or not admitted, all friendship or consanguinity or any other reason should be excluded; only God and the common good of the confreres and the Church should be considered. Superiors especially should take care that no one be received for vestition who has not given truly approved signs of his vocation as a religious candidate. Keep in mind the warning of Pope St. Pius X: "Everyone should know that nothing can relax religious discipline more than laxity in receiving members. For this reason they should be careful that no one is admitted into the Order who does not seem to be able or wish to serve its usefulness or honor."<sup>1</sup>

##### **How candidates should be examined and what should be required of them.**

Why there should be a careful examination of candidates:

1. *On the purity and sincerity of intention*, if it is spontaneous – not forced or persuaded by parents or someone else -- that they aspire to God and religious life;
2. *What moved them* to the religious state rather than secular clergy, and why they desired to enter this Order rather than another order, and by what ways did God lead them by the help of his grace to choose the difficult and penitential canonical life;
3. *How long have they felt this propensity to religious life*: Did their vocation come all of a sudden or on the contrary from infancy or adolescence and evolve gradually?

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<sup>1</sup> Epist. *Inter plura*, diei 31 Maii 1905, n. 1, *Enchiridion de Statibus perf.*, n. 248, p. 261

4. If they do not suffer from any of the impediments which, according to the norm of the Code of Canon Law or the Statutes of the Order,<sup>2</sup> would make their admission to the novitiate invalid or illicit.

Before they are admitted, a double medical record should also be required of them, one from their own doctor, a second from a doctor of the canonry in which suitable information is reported for entry into our life. Often an examination of the candidate by a skilled and Catholic psychiatrist is found to be useful. At the same time the prelates should discretely inquire “into the morals of their families to see if the parents are free from those defects which can easily be passed on to their children.”<sup>3</sup>

From the studies already performed it will be clear if they will be fit for successfully studying philosophy and theology.<sup>4</sup>

It may also be inquired about the reputation which they enjoyed in their parishes or colleges and whether in some Section of Catholic Action or in another parochial or religious association they exhibited themselves zealously and generously.

It is often advantageous not only in writing but also in conversation between the superiors of the candidates and those who knew them and their families better.

### **Entry into the canonry and subsequent probation.**

Thus, after being examined and tested, if they are thought to be suitable to the ends of the Order, they may be permitted by the abbot to enter the canonry, since everything required by law had been observed.

They can be permitted to bring with them certain useful objects or apparel, or some spiritual or classic books. But preferably there should be placed serious restrictions to this matter as far as quantity and quality of the things which are brought even if a certain detriment is the result. For it is appropriate that from the beginning they understand that the Lord is to be followed in leaving everything – “*relictis omnibus*”.<sup>5</sup> They are not asked to hand over their possessions, but themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Can 542; Stat. 319

<sup>3</sup> Instructio S.C. de Rel. *Quantum Religiones*, diei 1 Dec. 1931, n. 6, AAS XXIV (1932), p. 76; *Enchiridion*, n. 363, p. 473 sq. – Cfr. Stat. 321, § 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stat. 321, § 2.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 5, 11.

During the weeks in which they are preparing themselves for vestition<sup>6</sup> under the leadership of the master of novices – still in civil attire – they are further examined and instructed.

The importance of the choral office in our canonical religious community should be strongly impressed on them. Let be pointed out to them the strictness of the Order, in food certainly and attire, but especially in discipline and in obedience, which ought to be very perfect. Thus in some form of preparation it should be investigated whether they have the strength corresponding to such a burden and perfection.

Meanwhile let your inspection be careful and intent on their conversation and something may even be discovered with discretion so that it may appear what they are really like. Also let their customs be noticed, their propensities, the capabilities of their nature (especially by noticing their sound judgement and acuteness about things, facts, persons and about those things which it is expedient to be said or on the contrary better not to be said) serenity of appearance and moderation of passions so that it may be known whether they are suited for a peaceful life. And if they are found to be stiff-necked or persistent, obstinent, complainers, not suited for discipline, burdensome and troublesome to the confreres, disturbing or about to disturb the common peace and quiet, the abbot should be notified of this in time by the master of novices so that, without any dissimulation, such should be dismissed before they are vested.

If on the contrary they should appear to suitably deny their own will and judgement and offer hope of obedience, humility, a mortified and religious life and other virtues, the same master should recommend them to the abbot, the prior and the rest of the council of the house who after deliberating, can admit them for vestition according to the norms of the law.

Once admitted, before they are vested and begin the novitiate, they are bound to make a retreat of at least eight full days, and according to the prudent judgement of a confessor make a general sacramental confession of their past life,<sup>7</sup> so that they may be disposed to begin the course of their spiritual service and receive and pursue it with such a greater increment of grace the more they are better disposed to it.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Stat. 324, § 1.

<sup>7</sup> Can. 541; Stat. 324, § 2.

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **The Proper Education of novices**

#### **§ 1. The Master of Novices**

##### **Prudence in selecting the Master.**

Because the religious discipline of novices and their ongoing security depends on their proper instruction, therefore in selecting a master to be in charge of them great care should be taken by the prelate in order to choose one who, besides the qualifications required by law,<sup>8</sup> should be one who excels in piety and in knowledge. And he should be very competent to discretely govern youth, to teach mortification, instill piety solicitously, and to form them in all the rules of the life of perfection. For since unpolished youth are accustomed to imbibe and express gradually the customs of their instructors, therefore the superiors must be very careful lest they place anyone unformed, unmortified and not compliant over their novices lest they fall into ruin if they are subjected to someone unmortified and less approved in prudence and doctrine.

##### **Qualifications that the Master should strive to acquire.**

One who has been appointed to the office of master of novices should often reflect on how important a duty has been entrusted to him, and what great damage he could inflict on religious life, what great disaster to discipline, and what manifest destruction to the monastery. If by his inexperience, his lack of mortification or idleness he has not instructed those committed to him precisely according to the plan of his vocation and has not formed them toward all the holiness to which the grace of God can call them, he has not lived up to his duties.

For this reason he should primarily take care, supported by divine help, more and more each day to put on Christ and procure for himself an intense supernatural life so that the novices entrusted to him might find in him a model to imitate and a leader to whom they may come and be imbued with the genuine spirit of Christ according to the mind of St. Norbert. Let him not seek himself and his own ministry; let him hold rather the example of Christ the Lord as his ministry and not neglect to entreat his light and strength with fervent prayer along with the rest of the qualities by which he may become suitable to nourish the novices as new plantings

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<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Can. 559, § 1; Stat. 263, § 1.

with spiritual doctrine. Let him remember: “Not words but examples confer more on the minds of the young to be informed.”<sup>9</sup>

The master should not think he can use his innate judgement and some newly acquired experience in order to train the novices prudently and properly, so that they may suitably come to know their vocation. Rather he should not allow any assistance to escape him in order to be effective in fulfilling his office.

Above all he should know ascetical doctrine well, especially that which looks to the rules of discernment of spirits and various means by which souls can advance in the way of perfection. Thus, and thus only may danger be avoided lest the master himself be deceived regarding the dispositions of his disciples, or be unequal to the uncovering of their illusions and correcting their steps which are perhaps off the track. For this reason he should read through the works of the old writers of the Order in order to imbibe from them the spirit of our Holy Founder, which spirit from those early times is still no doubt spotless and vibrant; let him provide for himself some knowledge about the history of our Order and the virtues of the blessed men who served in it. Thus he will be able to imbue his men with a genuine Norbertine spirit.

He should not fail to make himself aware of the recent research of the psychological practice and characterological items by dealing with works which “ex professo” treat of such. For since grace does not destroy but perfects nature and uses it as a foundation on which to build up a construction of supernatural life as much as possible we must work to build the building in question.

The master of novices should observe carefully what the concerns and wishes of current youth happen to be and moreover the various events of the current time which could contaminate them. He should clearly neglect nothing of those things which should be firmly inculcated to teach abnegation and nevertheless use those means which especially fit the composition of their minds. On the contrary he should avoid those things without any spiritual profit, which could naturally offend natural legitimate feelings, especially if these feelings are those of all young people of their age.

Toward his novices the master should not be harsh, loud and insulting but, putting on the heart of a mother, he should be pleasant and amiable; they may rest safely in his bosom whatever is in their hearts and may find in him solace, counsel and help.

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<sup>9</sup> Instructio S. C. de Rel. diei 1 Dec. 1931, n. 11, AAS XXIV (1932), p. 78; *Enchiridion*, n. 363, p. 476.

### **Relation of the Master to the Prelate.**

Every three months the master of novices should inform the abbot in writing about how the novices are doing, if they are in a common novitiate outside of their own canonry; otherwise as frequently as the abbot wishes. This should be in regard to their adjustment to regular discipline; if they are seriously breaking their own will, if they are humble, mild, obedient, docile and modest and about what hope he can expect from his novices. He will also indicate what imperfections he sees in them and especially if they are hard and rough, morose and irritable, obstinate in their thinking, calm of character or feeble, peaceful or argumentative and discordant. He should make known to his prelate, as far as possible, the entire interior and exterior constitution of the novices, but he will keep to himself whatever pertains to the internal forum, even things that are outside of the confessional.

## **§ 2. Care of the Novices**

### **General goals to be impressed on the novices.**

First of all, the master should strive for this especially, that with the help of God, by eradicating vices and implanting virtues, he might gradually form his novices toward perfection.

The master will carefully nurture in them the desire for the perfect life which had attracted them, under divine inspiration, to embrace the religious life in the ranks of St. Norbert's militia so that this desire is living and is constantly strengthened to resist temptation towards neglect or becoming lukewarm. Let them understand the gravity, the filth and offence of sin and consider how unsuitable and inappropriate for them whom Jesus Christ has deigned worthy to call to union with himself.

Let the novices also learn continual joy from their sublime vocation, and to nourish in their hearts a very grateful spirit toward God, who already began great things in them by preserving, strengthening, pardoning perhaps, but who is preparing far greater things, provided that they remain faithful.

Let humility likewise be impressed upon them, by which more and more they may become conscious that not only the beginnings of their vocation but also perseverance in it are a gift of God, according to what we read in St. James: "Everything perfect, every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."<sup>10</sup> The basic provision therefore is this: Show yourself ready to accept from God and to use what is received fittingly. The novices

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<sup>10</sup> James 5, 17.

should learn to make the thoughts of our Father Augustine their own thoughts by which he addressed God in this way: "The house of my soul is too narrow for you to come to it. Let it be enlarged by you. It is full of ruins. Repair it. It has things which would offend your eyes. I confess and I know it. But who will cleanse it or to whom, other than you, *can I cry out to?*"<sup>11</sup>

The master of novices should always keep before his eyes the excellent advice of Pope Pius XII: "In that which concerns the resources and interests of teaching it is evident that one must not slight that which is given to us by nature and modern human science if it is good; it is necessary, on the contrary in the majority of instances, to admit them wisely. But it would be a worse error in the formation of such excellent subjects, than to transmit by means of the supernatural according to the natural, as to depend on nature since in the search for religious and clerical perfection and the apostolic fruits that it produces, the supernatural means – which are the sacraments, prayers, mortification and the like are not only necessary but absolutely primordial and essential."<sup>12</sup>

Now that these generalities have been spoken of, let us move on to more particular items.

### **Ascetical formation to be given to the novices.**

When the aforesaid first fundamental provisions have begun to take root in the novices, the master will take up more positively and methodically their formation toward spiritual and religious life.

#### *1. For the fervor of the spiritual life.*

Accordingly let him actively strive that the novices apply to change their secular practices and habits into religious ones pleasing to God; so that the bad which they have done and which in their fervor they have already confessed and atoned for by works of penance and by curbing evil inclinations and concupiscence, by mortifying their own will and judgement because of the good of obedience, embracing humble and ordinary labor they may put off the old man with his acts and by following virtuous things may become new men in Christ Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

The continuous increase of the life of Christ in their souls: This is the end to which they should strive with all their effort and a flaming spirit, and do this by the means provided for them in the religious state and in our Premonstratensian Order. This means should be proposed to them and explained. First of all it should be shown to them that the evangelical counsels and all the regular practices come together to pursue the aforesaid end of

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<sup>11</sup> *Confessiones*, Book 1, chap. 5, n. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Constitutio Apostolica Sedes Sapientiae*, III, AAS XLVIII (1956), p. 359.

<sup>13</sup> Eph. IV, 22-24, et ritus vestitionis.



sanctification. All these precepts and disciplinary requirements usually look with a spirit of faith, not clinging to material substance, where everything leads to goals set by God and the most appropriate manner. Once this is seen, they no longer obey their eyesight but the movement will be spontaneous and lively because the reason for charity and their yearning will conform to the example which God furnished for them individually and to which he called them to pursue religious life.

In one word the master should try with every effort to gradually cultivate, instruct and form the novices entrusted to him so that they may finally become perfect and dwelling in their minds in heaven they may live the angelic life on earth so that they may be able to say with the Apostle: "Our conversation is in heaven."<sup>14</sup>

## *2. The spiritual exercises.*

Therefore the master should carefully ensure that the required spiritual exercises of the Order, by which they draw on the grace of the Divine Power, are observed accurately and fulfilled with firm devotion.

They should be taught, immediately from the outset, that the special important element in the canonical state which they desire to embrace is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the other liturgical functions.<sup>15</sup> The master should be watchful that they become accustomed to attending the divine office at dawn and throughout the day with great fervor of spirit and cheerfulness of heart, on time and devoutly. He should inspire them as to how to prepare themselves for this "*Opus Dei*" and with what reverence, devotion and attention they ought to perform it and work that they may know and truly embrace the great mercy granted them by God. This office of the angels praising God day and night is received on earth. He should strive that they might know how to read and sing flowingly and with resonant and subdued voice according to the reckoning of time; and what they should try beforehand actively and in private if necessary.

He should relate to them the manner of having two parts in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass and in it the devout receiving of the body of the Lord. He should teach them also how to prepare themselves for sacramental confession, to stir up compunction, to elicit contrition and how they can and ought to make a true and sincere proposal of amendment and a pure and integral confession. He should explain how much it is fitting for them to be grateful to God for such extraordinary sacraments as the Eucharist and Penance.

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<sup>14</sup> Phil. III, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Supra, Pars I, Sect. I, Chap. 2, Art. 2.

He should give them a form of meditating, of mental prayer and establishing an examination of conscience and teach them a way to mortify their passions and of preparing virtues; and he should do this as one, so that they may view God as always and everywhere present and all their thoughts and actions are directed toward Him as to their true and ultimate goal.

He should encourage them often that in reading and pondering the Sacred Scriptures and other spiritual books prescribed to be read, they should be careful to mark certain places that invite the love of God and the despising of terrestrial things as well as love of virtue and aspirations of the heart. And that they may really enjoy the divine reading he should teach them not to begin without previously praying so that with feelings of ardent charity, deep humility and the keenest desire, with purity of heart they can see God penetrating the mysteries of wisdom and gradually come to an understanding of the doctrine.

### *3. The religious life as such.*

“The master will seek to advance his novices in esteem and love of our Order; in his instructions and exhortations he should frequently refer to the examples of our saints and especially of our Holy Father Norbert; he should recommend that they read the ascetic books of our members; he should explain to them the main events of the history of the Order and he should spare no effort so that they take on a filial devotion toward the Order and become worthy heirs of the spirit of our fathers.”<sup>16</sup>

He should often deal with the novices about those things which in the Order are of more importance or more difficult to observe: such as perfect obedience or things to be done according to the Gospel of Christ and the Rule of St. Augustine; about things to be carried out that are inconvenient but stemming from the vow of poverty; regarding stability in place; regarding improving one’s morals or mortification of oneself in all things; regarding much silence and quiet; about abstinence and fasting and other similar things; about penitential things also which are imposed on those who transgress rules; and trying to avert in every way from what is wrong or encouraging the novices to burn with charity and be gifted with constancy so that they may prudently hope that, with the help of God, they may observe everything without violation of peace.

Let the novices understand the force of our vows, the obligation of the Rule and the Statutes, the beauty of the ceremonies. Let them value everything as important and consider

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<sup>16</sup> Statuta renovata an. 1925-1930, 1161.

them well. Let these things be seen in their manners and actions and let them neglect nothing and let nothing seem minimal, mindful that he who rejects minor things, gradually declines.<sup>17</sup>

The master should instruct them about how they are to conduct themselves in community exercises: For instance in the chapter they should be patient, silent and humble; in common conversation mild and modest; at the table temperate and sober and attentive to what is being read; vigorous at work; in relaxation of the mind joyful with religious moderation and seriousness; in study and at reading of spiritual things laborious with a great desire to learn; tireless in the carrying out of the Rule, Statutes and their exercises. Finally, putting on the spirit of the Gospel the novices should seek to become real religious, sincere, chaste, modest, true and honest.

#### *4. Raise in them the sense of their own responsibility.*

The entire responsibility of the master should be geared to the formation of the religious personality of the novices. They should be conscious of their individual “responsibility” and in addition learn to bear themselves not only orderly by serving, under the direction and vigilance of superiors, the demands of life lived in common but also, and especially, to work as perfectly as possible from internal persuasion. Thus it will happen that if they ever have to live someday outside of the community, they will be able to do spontaneously what corresponds to their vocation.

If it is fitting that the supernatural building be built above the natural foundation, there is also the need to teach novices the desire to develop also in the field of human reason, as such, and to form a really excellent human character. This will facilitate and ensure the acquisition of the qualities of Christian and religious life, and will help to overcome the difficulties which might arise around their religious vocation.

#### *5. Relationship with neighbor.*

Since the Norbertine vocation is both coenobitic and apostolic, it is imperative to teach novices the importance of love of God that must be closely related to a strong and supernatural love of neighbor because of God with a great effort for doing him well.

First of all their charity should be put into practice painstakingly toward their companion novices with whom they have daily contact and almost continual conversation. The novices should pursue with an intense spiritual love those whom Christ has deigned to call to the same vocation and whom he wished to abide with him that they might help with a dutiful benevolence and emulation of virtues.

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<sup>17</sup> Stat. 514, § 1.

The description of charity proposed by the Apostle should be put into practice for the example of that privileged part of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ: *“Charity is patient, is kind; it is not jealous, it is never boastful or conceited, it is never rude or selfish, it does not take offense, does not seek what is not his, is not irritated and does not think evil.”*<sup>18</sup> Small injuries that are sometimes mutually inflicted can be promptly overcome.

The master should also ensure that the novices, in their mutual relationships and in relating with persons from the outside, eliminate any rudeness or boorishness in their ways and meet the requirements of the *statutes*: *“They should cultivate the laws and manners of Christian and religious refinement.”*<sup>19</sup> They should carefully observe cleanliness of the body and clothing, always maintaining modesty and simplicity; also the rest of the rules which civility prescribes among laymen (e.g. as to conversations, writing of letters, eating and drinking, etc.), fraternal charity recommends to be kept also among religious. For lack of refinement, which makes clear an excessive personal pursuit of one’s own benefit and much contempt of the joy of others, cannot be anything but offensive to others and bear them harm. Otherwise *“this external composition of holding itself scatters the way by educating the mind more fully and infusing the noble senses by which the mind is drawn to avoid any offense lightly, to prevent the desires of others, to be readily grateful, preferring others to oneself.”*<sup>20</sup> In addition because in those especially who are destined for the apostolate, such as the novices of our Order, it is altogether fitting that such manners be in force which make them acceptable to lay people whose opinion and tendencies win them over in order that they may be more easily gained for God or at least to a more fervent Christian life.

Also, to talk only of essentials -- *the master should teach his novices how to observe modesty of gaze, not to speak too loudly nor too quickly and to show an attitude of humility in their capacity, that they do not have to be introduced in a conversation or in other things, what to do, but to respect everyone and behave modestly in all things. If he is questioned, answer briefly and with respect. Certainly* there can be no question of his peace at the expense of the truth, but by humility and caution. It has also the spirit of strength to support, if there is, some disadvantages regarding the sincerity and respect for the truth could result.

He should teach the novices to address with respect, submission and modesty, in particular the Abbot, but also the prior and other superiors, and likewise all the brothers. He should teach them to show respect to all including the prelate and finally how to behave religiously in the presence of all outsiders to whom they may have to speak. Moreover it is not

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<sup>18</sup> I Cor. XIII, 4 sq.

<sup>19</sup> Stat. 326, § 2.

<sup>20</sup> Decretum S.C. de Rel. *Sacrosancta Dei Ecclesia*, diei 1 Januarii 1911, AAS III (1911), p. 31; *Enchiridion*, n. 272, p. 313.

easily granted to novices that they speak to outsiders; and if this should seem useful let the days be determined on which visits, family visits especially, might be permitted.

### **Conferences to be given to the novices by the Master.**

Although novices are not permitted to spend specific work on studies, nevertheless they can, even ought, to give their minds to learning many things in respect to God, ascetical life, the religious state and about all things which are required to perform accurately their duties both in the choir and in the convent.

For this reason the master should give two lectures to the novices on each weekday or there about when opportune.

1. In the first conference he should teach them about what they should view as spiritual and practical, specifically regarding religious and Norbertine life. Hence, he should explain to them:

The Rule of our Holy Father Augustine and the Statutes of the Order, which he may furnish with ascetical-juridical commentary, especially practical, to which he should insert things which view religious and canonical life in general and the essential religious vows; a few things about the origin and evolution of the Premonstratensian Order should be added;

A plan of meditation which is suitable for beginners, so that their inexperience in this area may be helped by a systematic outline and determined method until personal practice and leadership of the Holy Spirit manifest the ways more apt to them in the exercise of mental prayer;

The rite of serving at a private Mass and performing their parts in the conventual Mass or other liturgical functions according to the norms of the *Ordinarius* or Ceremonial Book of the Order; the spirit of the sacred rites should be carefully explained to them, since they are particularly destined for canonical life according to the nature of the Premonstratensian religious order;

The sacred mysteries of the liturgical year and its system: for the accurate observation of the rubrics and chant notes is not sufficient, but it should be animated by a spiritual understanding of the mysteries that are celebrated and with holy affection oriented toward them.

Ideas about the right understanding of the Psalms with a summary exegesis of the special ones among them: so that they may learn to apply themselves to the psalmody during the divine office with greater devotion and delicacy. He should explain the liturgical

hymns to them also; they are often exceedingly pleasant but sometimes rather difficult. This should be done lest the hymns remain a hidden treasure.

At certain times they should have a test, a written one especially, about the material given in these lectures (to which can be added sections selected from Sacred Scripture): by which reason a stimulus is added for them to be carefully revolved in their minds during the time consumed in their rooms among the things proposed for them or assigned for reading.

The master should also take care that knowledge of the Latin language be perfected in the novices through his own instruction or that of another skilled confrere. It is not superfluous also to give them lessons on the rules of civility and refinement according to the practice and use of the region.

2. The second conference, which will be given three or four times a week, will be both a school of discipline and a basic course of asceticism.

Considered in the light of the previous talk, this conference offers the master the opportunity of making disciplinary warnings, by suggesting what must be observed, by amending what was wrongly done, by impressing a good spirit and by restraining in time abuses or defects that are arising. He should tirelessly recommend mutual charity and obedience inasmuch as they are virtues that are more easily broken, even more or less unconsciously, and nevertheless neglect of these gives birth to regrettable results. He should place in light the importance of silence and modesty as a necessity to be observed in general on the way of perfection, even if only a minimal one. Therefore he should not cease to impress this on the novices in the school of discipline as often as he notices any of these observable.

Directly in addition to practices of this type the master should also teach his novices ascetical doctrine, giving them a view of supernatural life accommodated to the capacity of beginners but suitable for those who gradually may open their depth which the Lord wishes to produce in their spirits and which henceforth are held to render themselves more worthy by their daily efforts toward higher things.

The master should also take note that not only are the novices to be formed as choral novices for religious life as such but after the novitiate they are to look forward to their priestly and apostolic vocation. This is altogether expressed in "Statutis Generalibus" connected to S. Cong. De Religiosis Constitutioni Apostolicae *Sedes Sapientiae*: "In the novitiate... the apostolic institution is necessarily cultivated. It constitutes an essential part and concern of nourishing a vocation; the master must always keep this before his eyes. He

must never be separated from others, religious or clerical, but must always work together with them as friend and intrinsic bond.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Use of time apart from common Exercises.**

The master should predetermine for which reason novices ought to use the time that is free from common exercises.

First of all, he should strive very diligently that the novices, seeking to live for God alone, be eager dwellers of their rooms and its quiet so that in every way they might take flight from idle sluggishness, since nothing can be more pernicious to living spiritual life. Thus let them consider their rooms as another sanctuary, beyond the church itself, in which with God they may converse familiarly and where they may strive strenuously to gradually form within themselves the image of Jesus Christ.

Therefore the master should keep watch that in their rooms they have time for the study of the material given in the above mentioned lectures and not waste time in useless and profane reading or much less in useless sleeping.

Manual work, held in great respect by the early Premonstratensians, should be moderately imposed on the novices, either in the buildings or in the convent gardens: they should perform this work diligently, keeping in mind that they are being useful and are using their physical strength without exception for the service imposed on them, which in the end is for the honor of God.

Those who appear to be especially suitable for music, mostly sacred music, or even those who, on the contrary, are not able without extra practice to take their place in choral singing, can be allowed outside of the common lessons of Gregorian chant, to practice during specified hours, under the conduct of a brother more skilled in this matter. It will be the same for additional lessons of Latin to be given to those who need it, so that they may better assimilate the liturgical texts and also so that they may be better prepared for ecclesiastical studies that will follow.

### **Care of each one individually.**

Indeed, it is certainly not sufficient that the master form his students with admonitions and teaching in common. It is fitting that in addition there be private and continual contact between them and himself, and that he always be close to them in difficult circumstances.

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<sup>21</sup> Art. 14, § 2, 1

For according to the *statutes*,<sup>22</sup> he should call each of his novices in at least once per month to listen to them paternally, to encourage them, to correct their negligences and give each of them advice adapted to their state and nature and lead them step by step to greater perfection.

By no means, however, should the master be content with prescribed conversations of this sort, but he should allow the novices free access to him in order to discuss with him difficulties that come up or disturbing doubts, temptations or faults, and to receive suitable solutions from him and inducements for good, and thus recuperate or stabilize their peace of mind.

Moreover, whenever the master suspects that a novice is having some troubles of spirit or is afflicted by some inner sadness, he should call him in and discretely and heart to heart ask about the causes of his depressed and afflicted mind. In this he should not involve himself in matters that properly pertain to the sacramental forum,<sup>23</sup> but he is not prohibited – other than if he is a properly so-called regular superior – from mildly provoking some manifestation of conscience.

It is a quality of the master to give spiritual direction, by which, in a fuller sense than only by his exterior magisterial authority, he becomes the father in Christ of his students.

The master should carefully watch that the confreres entrusted to his care be able to attain the full physical condition of an adult. Anything that might block this should be removed; this would include excessive exhaustion. It occasionally happens from negligence in this matter that unfavorable consequences occur in the house.

For this reason, whatever is required to preserve, restore or increase the health of the body, according to the physician, must be done unhesitatingly, being careful lest something that is legitimately granted might cause an undue relaxation of the spirit of mortification. Nor should sports be avoided, provided that they are used with due moderation and provided that they are not the type that is inappropriate for clerics and religious.

### **Some particular additions.**

#### *1. The Common novitiate.*

But if, according to the norm of the statutes,<sup>24</sup> the formation of the first year novices is provided for in a common novitiate, the master needs great prudence and skill so that one

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<sup>22</sup> Stat. 265, § 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Stat. 463, § 3, ad normam Can. 891

<sup>24</sup> Stat. 329, § 1.



genuine Norbertine spirit is infused into all the novices, nevertheless at the same time he keep and promote the love and dedication toward one's own proper canonry, even those variations of Norbertine spirit which are legitimately diversified for the various abbeys, especially according to the nature of the apostolic work which is used there.

On the other hand he should be very careful that an envy, which is less healthy, does not develop among the novices of the various houses. He should try to seek the result that individuals faithfully disposed toward their own abbey, willingly learn and value the peculiarities and various works of the other canonries as well, which are indeed to the honor of the great family of St. Norbert whose members all are happy to be.

It is also quite clear in this matter that the master must lead by example, showing the same concern and the same willingness to all his disciples, regardless of the abbey to which they belong. His conscience, filled with honor and joy, will compensate the burden placed on his shoulders; this is the awareness of the great usefulness which he holds with the first formation of the novices of the entire circary, if it is performed with due reason and according to the spirit of the Holy Sounder and our first fathers.

## *2. Second-year novices.*

Everything that has been said so far applies primarily to novices who are performing their first canonical year of novitiate. Changing what must be changed and except for what was said on the matter of conferences, almost everything that was said applies also to second year novices as prescribed by our Statutes.<sup>25</sup> The second year is spent in one's own canonry even if the first year was spent in the common novitiate.

The master of the second year should purposely strive that the novices continue the spiritual exercises which they had in the preceding year and continue to perfect these virtues with daily growth. As the time of profession grows closer, let this be an incentive for them to perform in such a way as to be found worthy to make profession, and be able to make a donation of themselves to God with full generosity and great fervor.

Second year novices attend schools which teach the sacred disciplines provided that this does not interfere with the spiritual exercises prescribed for them.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the master should take care that they are careful that they leave time for the study of philosophy and theology, as mentioned here regarding the professed; but at the same time he should watch that they are not so consumed by them that their solicitude regarding their formation, specifically religious and Norbertine, does not decrease.

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<sup>25</sup> Stat. 325, § 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stat. 326.

### 3. *Departure of novices from religious life.*

Since the novitiate is a time of probation and trial, while it lasts there must be inquiry with particular care, whether the novices in fact exhibit hope of a future fervent religious life and a fruitful apostolate.

In this matter, special attention should be paid to the spirit of obedience and discipline, to the facility of peaceful living together, to integrity of morals, to abnegation of one's own judgement and natural inclinations. One who in these various points of view, and despite repeated admonishments, continues to fail, even though not immoderately, should not be considered suitable for religious life and is preferably dismissed before profession – even temporary profession – rather than afterwards.

Account should also be taken of their physical fitness because once first vows have been pronounced there is no longer the possibility of dismissal for this motive. The master should apply special care in observing indications of any psychic illness. If there is any indication he should go to a physician who is skilled in such matters or a psychiatrist lest once afflicted by such illness, although still low grade, this later may become very burdensome to the community.

Judgement in this matter pertains primarily to the master. He should sincerely manifest this to the abbot of the novices together with the reasons which led him to this. They may then inform the person concerned of the motives for dismissal or retention. If the motives for dismissal pertain to the internal forum, the master (as certainly the confessor) should give this counsel to the novice the advice that he should tell his abbot that he had changed his mind and decided to return to the world.

## **ARTICLE 3**

### **Further training for professed juniors**

#### **§ 1. Their religious instruction under the Master**

The professed juniors themselves.

Once they have made their vows for three years after the novitiate, “the neo-professed should weigh with deep consideration and hold their entire life inscribed before them; their life

is engaged, they must no longer live relaxed or go back considering their own wishes but bear themselves more holy, more religious and more strictly, more strongly obligated."<sup>27</sup>

And indeed there immediately begins for them a period of special importance. We have in mind here especially those who on entering had not received any orders. During this period the foundations of their whole religious and priestly life have to be lain more deeply; or (to use another comparison) during this period the seed of their divine vocation, somewhat matured and expanded during the novitiate, has to grow further and become a tree growing green and prolific with good fruit.

Let us quickly look over the course of these years.

*1. The three year period of simple vows.*

This three year period of simple vows, which introduces a prolonged spiritual and recollected way of life given over to studies, offers the religious junior a very suitable occasion of procuring for himself a more interior and with each day a more intense life with Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, for this it is required that he take solicitous care regarding the obligations of his state.

And indeed, above all, he should be very faithful in observing his vows, which he professed with joy and generosity of heart, and in zealously exercising the virtues connected to them. He should apply himself watchfully and attentively to his clerical studies; he should continue to remain an earnest observer of religious discipline.

It must not be denied, however, that uniformity of life in this three year period brings a danger with it, at least after some months, a danger of lessening of fervor. For piety easily begins to weaken, no longer sustained by the ardent desire of profession or of the recent joy of the profession just made. The spirit of obedience more than rarely weakens a bit, while the mind, now free from the stricter regime of the novitiate, finds itself less willing to be subjected to superiors even in lesser things. Finally it happens that the passions, even of the flesh, becoming somewhat serious lie in ambush for the serenity of the mind and the peace of the youthful religious heart. But if this does not exceed the stage of temptation, if they fight bravely, using supernatural means and, in particular, their spiritual director, to say nothing of coming out weaker, their interior life and tendency toward perfection, the soul of the professed junior can on the other hand, after victory over various snares, come forth stronger, more generous and more ardent.

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<sup>27</sup> Statuta Renovata an. 1925-1930, n. 1182.

Otherwise, the final part of the three year period brings a new and even desirous expectation, namely that of the perpetual solemn profession to be made and the total donation of self to be irrevocably accomplished. Hence here and there fervor once again flares up. Certainly, the youthful religious should refer to his solemn vows lovingly so that the ardor of that day might be sufficiently intense so that he may always be able to refresh his somewhat cold days. Let his inner radiance be sufficiently bright that it may illuminate all his dark days; let the memory of the obligations he will now take be stronger than the temptations and sorrowful attacks against his soul.

## *2. The final preparation for the priesthood.*

Frequently solemn profession precedes the year of preparation for priestly ordination, the various stages of which are determined by the successive reception of major orders.

“Certainly no one should strive for honor or grow weary soliciting the prelate to be called to orders; but each one should patiently wait until he is called and sent by his prelate as Aaron was by God.”<sup>28</sup>

The morals of the ordinandi should be blameless, upright and conformable to religious profession. Indeed, the ordinandi ought to be conspicuous in piety, chastity and integrity in order that excellent examples of good works and significant life merits can be expected of them. However, whoever is a person of irreligious morals and hard headed should never be promoted to major orders, unless he has corrected himself and for some time been changed; the prelate should be certain of his conversion and constant betterment.

Censorship of morals and integrity should depend on the discretion and judgment of the prelate who should take notice and be cautious lest he allow himself to be persuaded by flesh and blood, insistence and requests of anyone or his own affection, to promote any who are unworthy or less suited to sacred orders. By so doing he may render himself guilty of grave sin and subject those promoted to danger of eternal damnation. The prelate may prohibit his clerics from proceeding to orders for any canonical reason, also occult, even extrajudicially. But he should carefully investigate about the fitness for priesthood before solemn profession so that he can dismiss those he considers unsuited for sacred orders before they make solemn profession.

## *3. The two year period following priestly ordination.*

Having received the ordination to the priesthood and aware of their obligations to live well and worthily, the confreres should endeavor to achieve the fullness of perfection and the

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<sup>28</sup> Multum insistit in hoc noster Philippus de Harvengt in suo opere *De dignitate Clericorum*, cap. 16, Migne PL 203, col 685 sq.

eminent sanctity corresponding to the eminence of their priestly status and let the light of humility, modesty, and chastity and all the virtues shine forth in their morals so that those who see them may be edified, and thus edified glorify their father who is in heaven.<sup>29</sup>

The new priests still have to spend a year in theological studies in their canonry; they remain subject to the discipline of the professors of juniors. When their theological curriculum is finished, pastoral formation of students is taken up for a full year with a special apprenticeship during which “they cultivate still more strongly priestly virtues, and exercise the priestly apostolate in a measured way engaged in the study and practice of the pastoral theology that they have to acquire *and develop*.”<sup>30</sup>

They should happily spend this time in completing their preparation for priestly duties, especially the apostolic ones, while in the meantime they become fully conscious, through meditation and reading, of the spiritual wealth they acquired from sacred ordination.

### **The Master of the professed juniors.**

The entire spiritual formation of the junior professed for religious life takes place under the leadership of the master of professed,<sup>31</sup> at least until the ordinary curriculum of studies is completed. In the Code of Canon Law this master is called the *prefect or spiritual master*.<sup>32</sup> The inexperience of the juniors in spiritual matters still requires the help of the prudence of a master.

His duty consists in this, that he take care to bring to perfection with every effort and all diligence the religious and clerical formation that was begun in the novitiate. This will never happen while the spirit and morals with which the novices were imbued are still rooted in them and maturing.

### *Qualifications of the Master.*

Basically what we said above about the qualities of the master of novices is valid here also.<sup>33</sup> The Holy See asks “*that he have the virtue, doctrine, experience, knowledge and skill to work with the salvation of another and be able to pursue and accomplish the work of teaching and testing regarding the age, maturity, level and other related aspects of his students, with the help of divine grace.*”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Stat. 284, § 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Statuta Generalia S. Cong. de Rel.* Constitutioni Apostolicae Sedes Sapientiae adnexa, art. 48, § 1.

<sup>31</sup> Stat. Dist. II, Tit. 4, Cap. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Can. 588.

<sup>33</sup> *Hic supra*, Art. 2, § 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Statuta Generalia S. Cong. de Rel.* de quibus *supra*, Art. 28, § 2, 4.

*Direction of the professed juniors.*

To properly give the necessary education to Norbertine youth aspiring to the priesthood, the rules given above for the education of novices should be sufficient.<sup>35</sup> It will be enough to add here a few considerations to facilitate their adaptation.

The Code of Canon Law prescribes that the spiritual master “should old his students for religious life with suitable advice, instructions and exhortations,”<sup>36</sup> and our Statutes determine that at least twice a week a lesson on discipline should be delivered to them.<sup>37</sup> This lesson should be spirited and come from the heart. As to theory, full ascetical and mystical theology should be accurately expounded; as to practice, there should be taught a way of achievement through forgetfulness of self and with the aid of means which are available in the Order come to a flaming love toward God, Christ Jesus and souls.

The master will take great care to determine for each of the professed entrusted to him their propensities and needs, fidelity or negligence in maintaining discipline, their difficulties as well (see above) and perhaps doubts about their vocation. Based on such knowledge as this, he should adjust his admonitions and exhortations which should be suitable for each as spiritual direction.

By no means should the master be afraid to offer to his students a very lofty plan of action and thinking. For as striving for higher things is natural for young people as well as a certain innate generosity, they are delighted and impelled by a high “ideal” concept; sometimes what is proposed to them they consider inadequate and insufficient compared with the height of religious life which they had fashioned for themselves. Therefore they should strive upwards but under the moderation of the master whose constant duty it is to keep watch so that they way ascend on the way of perfection with discretion and prudence. For otherwise there is not sufficient caution neither concerning firmness and constancy nor concerning docile obedience, movements of grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The minor orders are usually conferred during the three years of simple vows. The master of the young professed should not fail to explain the meaning and the force of this gradual ascent towards the priesthood, which at the same time conveys a greater participation, even if still rather far away, of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and a fuller attachment to the service of the Church. But especially after solemn vows the master should have close to his heart to pay attention to the proximate preparation of the elect soul for the sublime degree of

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<sup>35</sup> Art. 2, § 2.

<sup>36</sup> Can. 588, § 1.

<sup>37</sup> Stat. 258, § 2.

the priesthood. At this time, fervor reaches a high level, access to the major orders contributes strongly; the master should benefit from these conditions to instill more strongly in his student what the Church of Christ rightly expects of the priest and how much the intimate union and conformity of will with the Lord ought to be alive in him.

With special care the master should restrain in his students the merely natural desire to prematurely take action in the work of the apostolate – or perhaps this is from impatience based on supernatural motives. Rather he should strongly impress on them that a contemplative life, produced after a long time, is a necessary preparation for fruitful apostolic activity as is excellently clear from the example of the life of Christ the Lord, the Nazarene.

It is also his duty, among the various influences of men and books, which commonly cause the minds of young people to be disturbed and anticipatory, to impel them in a different direction to obtain equilibrium by which serenity, peace and agreement of activity might be happily geared toward a single end.

In a word: “it is fitting that the education and formation of our associated juniors be completely secure, enlightened, solid, correct, wise and boldly accommodated to today’s internal and external necessities, constantly perfected and carefully approved not only for religious perfection but also for the perfection of priestly and apostolic life.”<sup>38</sup>

So that he may be able to accomplish this securely and aptly, the master should use his dominative power by which he has authority over his men – commands and on occasion penances; under the circumstance, that he may appear to be led by this end – to promote the spiritual good of his students, and “so that those who are subject to his care may not fear him so much as revere him.”<sup>39</sup>

#### *Doubts that arise regarding the vocation of confreres.*

But if in the course of the three years of simple vows the master conceives some doubt regarding the vocation and likely persistence of one of his junior professed, he should not hesitate to make this known to the abbot with whom he confers regarding this serious business. Nor should shortage of confreres, needs of the canonry, ever be considered sufficient to permit solemn profession or ascent to sacred orders to a religious who does not present a sound and firm hope of a rightly composed regular life and a sound and fruitful priesthood.

According to Canon Law greater reasons are required for a professed in temporary vows to be able to be dismissed when the three years has not elapsed; less grave reasons, provided

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<sup>38</sup> Constitutio Apostolica Pii PP. XII *Sedes Sapientiae*, III AAS XLVIII (1956), p. 358.

<sup>39</sup> Constitutio Clementis PP. VIII *Cum ad regularem*, diei 19 Mart. 1603, n. 9; *Enchiridion*, n. 132, p. 101.

that they are objective and true, that they not be admitted to solemn vows. But it can also happen that, when the matter is carefully weighed before God, there is place for this, after advice is given to the temporary professed, to petition a dispensation of vows from the Holy See, indeed because individual circumstances may seem to impose an excessive burden on his shoulders.

The spiritual director should with all his heart certainly help the confrere who expresses anxious and disturbing doubts about his vocation. Frequently, by the grace of God, the young religious will overcome hesitation of this sort. However, if the difficulty, temporarily overcome a few times, returns after a brief time to the same degree or even more strongly, generally such a fluctuation is a sufficient sign of an identity defect in continuing religious life permanently.

### **Conclusion.**

It is sufficiently clear from the above how great the work of the master of junior professed is. For the hope of each canonry in regards to the growth of religious spirit in its growing youth depends in great part on this rector. Know therefore that the Holy See recommends to superiors "that they should call to this task only prudent men who are gifted with charity and piety."<sup>40</sup> Hence it is clear to the master himself that he should never cease his efforts to perfect his zealous care by which he may function more worthily and more usefully in such an office.

## **§ 2. The Intellectual Training of the juniors through ecclesiastical studies.**

### *Importance of studies in our Order.*

Since our Order was not established only for the exercise of perfection according to the evangelical councils, but also to provide assistance to the Church of Christ, and to exercise the sacred apostolate, it is fitting therefore that its fellow priests are not "carried about by every wind of doctrine,"<sup>41</sup> but that they are aptly prepared to teach the faithful. It is therefore of great importance that, during the years of formation, the students are instructed with great care for their sacred disciplines and that they apply diligently toward philosophical and theological doctrines. For thus, and thus only, will the truths of our faith be accurately protected and that priestly obligations be correctly met.

Such is the character of ecclesiastical studies that they should offer solid foundations to the spiritual life itself and appear very useful for the same. Do they not give abundantly regarding God and Christ Jesus, about the miracles effected in us of divine grace, about the instruments of sanctification, which are the Sacraments, about virtues human and Christian,

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<sup>40</sup> Instructio S. C. de Rel. *Quantum religiones*, diei 31 Dec. 1931, n. 11, AAS XXIV (1932), p. 78.

<sup>41</sup> Eph. IV, 14.



ample knowledge from divine revelation and wonderfully illustrated by investigations of the Fathers and Doctors?

### *Duties of Students.*

The junior confreres applying themselves to sacred studies should understand that the opportunity offered to them in recollection and silence for study of this kind will never happen again, and thus the opportunity of penetrating more and more those things which our God has deigned to reveal to us about his intimate life and about the wonders which he has worked for the human race, and the way he still works in individual souls will be gone when their studies are finished. It is likely that so precious an opportunity will not return since the exterior labors of future priestly life will rarely leave time to be given over to protracted studies. Therefore the students should give themselves to their sacred studies with great ardor and skill, “and not be deceived by the error of learning only those things which appear to them to be useful now, but rather, trusting the experience of their moderators and masters or professors, they should diligently work on each and every discipline imposed on them since the cultivated education of the whole man should be primary for the fruitful fulfillment of the apostolate.”<sup>42</sup>

Let them be sparing of their time, nor should they waste it on profane readings, all types of nonsense or waste idle hours assigned to study; for this way of acting turns not only to one’s own detriment but also that of other souls for whom they are being prepared as skilled teachers and leaders.

Examinations which have to be made at stated times regarding the material learned should not be the principal reason for studying. There are greater motives for them soon to be mentioned; examinations are a means for them to organize their studies and to periodically revise the material and also an occasion to show their teachers that their efforts were fruitful.

They should willingly bear whatever austerity can belong to such a life of constant work, rejoicing in the beauty, the harmony, the sublimity of revealed Truth, drawing from the sacred disciplines help for personal sanctification, and animated by the thought of the apostolic end of their studies.

### *What is the responsibility of the prelates?*

The role of the prelates (if in each abbey there is a domestic study) or at least of the vicar of the Abbot General (if in a circary a general house of studies is erected) is to very diligently take care to select only those as lecturers, who are clearly suitable for delivering the higher disciplines, “namely such that they may be by their manner of life a model and very

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<sup>42</sup> *Statuta Generalia S. Cong. de Rel.* art. 40, § 4.

learned in doctrine by which they are requested to perfect the minds of their students.”<sup>43</sup> The prelate will ensure that lecturers are always properly trained. It would be desirable that he send those of his confreres that he deems the most fit to a Catholic University, and preferably to our College in Rome, where they can pursue doctoral or any other academic degree.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, abbots should carefully keep watch that in their canonries or in the general house of studies everything should be conducted according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law, according to our Statutes,<sup>45</sup> and that the rules and norms handed down by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and imposed by the General Statutes promulgated in 1956 concerning the institute of young clerics in the state of perfection. They should pursue the progress of their religious juniors in sacred studies with great attention and not easily permit the opportunity to pass by of manifesting to them how much joy you have in hearing of their studiousness and due understanding of their instruction, while on the contrary how very displeased you would be to hear of their tardiness in studying. They should frequently encourage or correct them according to the circumstances.

#### *Roles of lecturers and the prefect of studies.*

The lecturers will spare no effort to acquire knowledge and the ability to teach to make their office really productive. Nor should they think doctrine which they have drawn from the curriculum of their studies is sufficient for them, but they should strive to continually expand and perfect it by going to recent works and periodical magazines from which they make themselves aware of the most recent discoveries of scientific inquiries or recent necessities of the times.

Moreover, they should constantly leave time for prayer and “*lectio divina*”, so that they may be enlightened by light from on high and be helped in their difficult task and so that in their lectures the spirit of faith may appear to mold and vivify them and make them truly useful and salutary for their students. Even outside the lessons, “Professors and masters are recognized as lovers of their religious vocation, priestly and apostolic, firm in both; let them be an example of all these things in their effort of virtue and discipline. Always and everywhere they should profess their teaching, illustrating it and recommending it by their way of life.”<sup>46</sup> Certainly “the students are bound to hold their lecturers in honor; but the lecturers themselves

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<sup>43</sup> Epist. Pii XI *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, diei 19 Martii 1924, AAS XVI (1924), p. 143; *Enchiridion*, n. 348, p. 409.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. Stat. 289, § 1; 355, § 2.

<sup>45</sup> Stat. 287-295.

<sup>46</sup> *Statuta Generalia S. Cong. de Rel.*, art. 30, § 2, 1.

should be careful lest their way of acting and speaking destroy or lessen their authority among the students.”<sup>47</sup>

The role of the prefect of studies is to coordinate the works of the various lecturers, arrange the distribution of lectures, to collect the results of the examinations and at the end of the scholastic year to prepare a summary table; also to take care, under the guidance of the prelate, that all requirements about the studies of clerics be carefully observed. It is also within his role to confer with the lecturers of the house and with other prefects of studies of the circary concerning suitable manuals and methods, and about the means to stimulate the zeal of students regarding studies and about other things of this sort. The role of the spiritual director and the master of novices is to inform the abbot also or abbots about the eagerness to study or the laziness of their subjects.<sup>48</sup>

#### *Roles of the Spiritual Directors and the Masters of Novices.*

The respective masters of professed juniors namely and the novices of the second year should have diligent care about the studies of the confreres committed to them. It is their job to supplement the teaching of the lecturers among their students. This is not only by teaching ascetical and mystical theology regularly, but especially by trying to accomplish that with the progress of the students in sciences, progress is joined in spiritualities as well.

Hence it is suitable that he clearly make known to them the method of studies imposed on his students and what materials should be given them. They should request a frequent report from the lecturers about their students’ application and progress and, with the help of God, they should find out whether through knowledge and doctrine their minds are lifted up to God. Thus they finally turn everything to divine charity and a more perfect union with God.

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<sup>47</sup> *Statuta Renovata* 1925-1930, n. 1205.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Stat. 290, 295.

## CHAPTER 4

### LAY BROTHERS

#### § 1. Place and work of the lay brothers in our Order.

Since the early days of our Order, there have been in the first order of Prémontré, next to the canons, lay brothers *or conversi*. Indeed, in the beginning, they were often more numerous than the canons. While St. Norbert was still living weren't there five hundred religious at the abbey of Saint Martin of Laon and about four hundred of them seem to have been *conversi*?

At first glance it can be thought strange that a place – and so great a place – was given to lay brothers in a canonical religious order and therefore essentially clerical. But it ought to be recalled that our Order had its origins in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the so-called “Apostolic Movement” was thriving, during which, many were satisfied to restore the Church of Christ to its pristine likeness as it was perceived in the primitive community at Jerusalem under the leadership of the Apostles.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, that Jerusalem community consisted not only of Apostles; for together with them was a “multitude of believers”, who were “of one heart and one mind”<sup>2</sup> that vied with them in their life of prayer and austerity and shared their community of goods.

This ardent desire to live this primitive evangelical way of life did not only attract clerics in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to live as the apostles in canonical communities by joining their sacred ministries with the practice of prayer and poverty, but also impelled many laymen to embrace a type of life similar to this which was proper to the first faithful. Thus it happened that in the early Premonstratensian houses around the canons who were emulating the tasks and life of the Apostles, there were also admitted numerous laity of both sexes who were striving for higher things.

After the double monasteries were quickly suppressed and the nuns were seeking more remote residences, the laymen remained in the canonries with the clerics striving for evangelical perfection, professing religious life and helping the canons in all their labors of mind and body pursuing one and the same social end. Incorporated into a canonical religious order, nevertheless they were not canons – by which name alone the priest members were designated – but for them – namely the lay religious, the name “*conversi*” began to be reserved, by which originally all the faithful were designated, who by embracing the religious

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Supra, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Act. IV, 32.

state, had converted his life based upon the mere observance of the precepts, in a life devoted to the observance of the Evangelical Councils.

A description of the institute of the lay brothers in the first century of our Order is given to us in the Chronicle of Menko by Emo, the first abbot of Wittewierum (Hortus Floridus), at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century: "Many laymen gathered to him, however. Among whom there were noble men of good standing; he received these as *conversi* (= lay brothers) with a willing spirit and instructed them with all care in discipline and claustral integrity. He fostered them and loved them and committed to them all the cares regarding temporalities because as much as possible he tried to spend his time with the clerics in prayer and reading as well as holy meditation and organize the divine office fully and perfectly."<sup>3</sup>

## **§ 2. What should be noted particularly regarding the lay brothers and their masters.**

There is not much to be proposed here regarding the *conversi* since a great part of the present Directory refers to them as well, with the exception of those things which pertain properly to priestly duties. Therefore their masters, if necessary, should give them various advice in the vernacular by adapting things to their particular conditions. Hence, it should be sufficient in this chapter to add certain generalities about the relationship of the *conversi* to the canons and about their particular exercise and work.

*They should foster a great estimation of their religious and Norbertine vocation.*

It should carefully be impressed on the *conversi* what they should always keep in mind, namely that they are true members of an organization which holds a special place in the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, and has a particular spiritual purpose, namely to publicly praise God and take care of souls. Whether he be cleric or layman, a Premonstratensian religious belongs to a group which tends in that direction and its activity, although it perhaps has a material substratum, nevertheless tends toward the sublime ends to which Christ the lord has destined his Church and this in a special section committed to our Order.

In recent decades, under the impetus of the sovereign pontiff, the place and role of the laity in the Church has often been mentioned, and the importance of this role appears more and more every day. But in the lay state, those should be considered first who, not marked by the priesthood, nevertheless have been called by the Lord to a high religious state. And if it is a question of a clerical religious Order, but also canonical, as ours is, its members work more closely and intimately than the rest of the laity to the priestly functions. Their labors, of

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<sup>3</sup> Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Tom 23, p. 526.

whatever type it is, are active praise of God, linking themselves to choral praise. And as much as they can, the *conversi* render the apostolate of their priestly confreres possible. The heaping up of the harvested bundles of the seed of Christ through priestly hands in the field of the Lord is also in part due to them.

*The clerics and the lay brothers should have a mutual estimation of one another.*

It is therefore of paramount importance that canons and laymen have mutual respect and charity for each other. In this regard the Holy See delivered a very useful monitum; "The laity should respect the priests from whom they receive the greatest ministries and mysteries; the priests should honor the laity,... (and) should remember ... there are many laymen in religious Orders by whom they have been served throughout their lives by their humble occupations. These have been raised to the honors of the altar and numbered among the blessed heavenly dwellers by their death. Therefore they should honor that type of life among the laity because it opened the way to such frequent and wonderful sanctity."<sup>4</sup>

*Instruction of the lay brothers.*

Nevertheless if their numbers permit it canons and *conversi* should be structured in separate categories, especially in recreation, and their religious and disciplinary instruction should be entrusted to a prudent master and one skilled in spiritual discernment.<sup>5</sup> A decree of the Sacred Congregation for Religious poses clearly and distinctly the following norm: "On set days conferences or sermons should be had for the laity, not only the new ones but for the old as well, seniors by profession of vows and age. In these conferences or sermons the topics should be not only catechism, advice on spiritual life, explanation of the Rule and Constitutions, but also practical norms and examples of practical and moderate refinement."<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the novices and the young professed *conversi*, the same must be said, changing what must be changed, which was said in the previous chapter regarding the junior clerics.

*Work to be entrusted to the lay brothers.*

The superiors should be careful to entrust to the *conversi* work, for which they are willingly capable of performing, even if they are a bit older, provided that they are capable of

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<sup>4</sup> Decretum S. C. Rel. *Sacrosancta Dei Ecclesia*, diei 1 Januarii 1911, AAS III (1911), p. 36 ; *Enchiridion de Statibus Perfectionis* I, n. 272, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Stat. 286.

<sup>6</sup> Ubi supra ; AAS III (1911), p. 33 ; *Enchiridion*, n. 272, p. 314.

performing them. The reason for this should not merely be arbitrary desire, but rather suitability which often corresponds with one's inclinations.

It is often asked whether it is opportune for the confreres-*conversi* to be assimilated into the order of life of the clerics, e.g. by admitting them into the choir so that they may assist with the convent in the psalmody. It is not easy to give a generic response to this question; for many things depend here on the circumstances of the places and persons, and the individual abbots to determine what would suit them. One should not make changes without the agreement of the competent authority for those things which are determined by the Code of Canon Law, our Statutes or the Liturgical Books.

Formerly many of the *conversi* in our Order were "extra conventuals", i.e. living outside the monastery in villas and granges, the care and culture of which was entrusted to them. Today, however, such granges are still held by abbeys far away and sometimes distant; but the *conversi* are accustomed to make themselves useful in dependent houses and in external missions. Those should be sent there who merit special confidence and are accurately watched so that their religious life is kept fervent and disciplined and not reduced to the condition of those around them and only distinguished by their religious garb.

### **§ 3. Virtues to be especially strengthened in the lay brothers.**

But if it should be asked about which virtues it is fitting in which the *conversi* should be particularly cultivated, the answer is again found in the Decree already cited regarding the *conversi*. Thus we read there: "The superiors should seek to strengthen the spirit of the laity in the virtues and qualities suited particularly to the lay state, namely humility, obedience, the spirit of prayer and sanctification of work."<sup>7</sup> We should add a few words about this.

#### *Humility and Obedience.*

It is not by chance that humility is mentioned first. It ought to be a joy for the brothers *conversi* that the humble nature of the work committed to them gives them a constant opportunity to exercise and increase the virtue which has such a fundamental function in the supernatural life.

Thus disposed, they will strive to observe more easily obedience; toward which their masters will impress upon them those things which in the first part of this book was indicated concerning the vow and virtue of obedience.

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<sup>7</sup> Ubi supra; AAS III (1911), p. 33; *Enchiridion*, n. 272, p. 314.

### *The Spirit of prayer.*

All these things must be formed and supported by the spirit and regular practice of prayer. Therefore, know that the same document mentions this: “Thus, it must be noted, that laymen should note well the virtue and exercise of prayer; that they should faithfully at the fixed hours leave time for prayer, both mental and vocal; that they should declare that the time set in the Constitutions of the Order, only and completely, is set for prayer; nor is it enough to devote oneself to meditation when they are serving at Mass. However, the superiors should check, especially after the laymen have finished their novitiate, whether they are giving themselves to meditation and prayer.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Sanctification of Work.*

The lay brothers should try to do the work entrusted to them carefully and do it as best as they can, but without seeking excuses to be absent from cloistered discipline. On the other hand, they should try with all their hearts to be zealous in their work with the aim of leading a withdrawn and austere life.

It should often be shown to them that it is easier for them than for priests – and especially than for superiors – to acquire perfection with a mind freely given to work. Most of the time the work given to them is determined, to be done diligently, but without those cares and difficulties that dominate men, which often distracts and scatters the mind toward other things impeding one’s care about “the one thing necessary.”<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, it happens quite frequently that on the one hand, free from cares, they permit themselves to be implicated by cares which come up because they imagine that the superior requires more of one than of another and so on. They should recall, led by the spirit of faith and abnegation, that there are works less pleasant and realize that it is quite certain that they are considered still more preferred.

### *Saint Joseph as Model.*

Often the lay brothers take greater esteem for their vocation by placing before their eyes the example of St. Joseph, the foster father of Christ the Lord, who meritedly is often referred to as the special patron of the brothers *conversi*.

In a special way he had to take care of the material support of the Holy Family and therefore he took on the most humble type of work. Nonetheless we count him among the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem; AAS, p. 35; *Enchiridion*, p. 316.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 10, 42.



instruments of Divine Providence used for the redemption of the human race so that all of the redeemed will profess their eternal gratitude to him.

For the same reason the *conversi* provide for the material necessities of their religious family whose end it is – besides the sanctification of its members – praise of God and the salvation of souls. By this very fact indirectly they work with the spiritual activity of their canonry, not to mention the apostolic help offered to souls by their prayers and good works and thus the gratitude of all for whom the salutary or even salvific ministry of our priests exists.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE NUNS OF OUR ORDER**

"The order founded by Saint Norbert has its own nuns who live under the Rule of St. Augustine and according to their own Statutes;" it is with these words that the statutes of the Second Order of Prémontré begin.<sup>1</sup> And indeed from the very beginnings of his foundation Our Holy Father Norbert wanted it to be open also to pious women, who sought after a higher spiritual life devoted to God. Thus it was permitted them that they might fulfill their desire, very widespread at that time, of imitating the evangelical and apostolic life of the primitive Jerusalem community and this according to the form of religious life that was well organized. Thus it happened that even in the Premonstratensian family the assertion of PP Pius XII was approved: "Nearly all monks, canons regular, especially mendicants made an effort to set up second orders, which always preserving the general rule of nuns, were viewed as the first orders, which were diverse among themselves."<sup>2</sup>

One will find therefore among the Norbertine Sisters the same mind, the same ends as those of the First Order and the general means of religious perfection to be attained were assigned to them which have already been explained in this present Directory. However, there will not be lacking adaptations to be made according to particular feminine nature and according to special functions which the nuns in our Order have to carry out.

Therefore, it will be sufficient, after a brief historical overview, to explain what the Norbertine family would expect from the Second Order.

#### **ARTICLE 1**

##### **The Origins and Evolution of our Second Order**

##### **§ 1. What St. Norbert intended and accomplished.**

It does not seem to be a desire to imitate the other orders that incited our Holy Father Norbert to give to his institute a feminine branch but rather his zeal to cooperate with the Gregorian Reform, which was in full swing at that time. For just as he wanted to reform the canonical institute in general, and free it from its raging laxity, so also he intended to furnish

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<sup>1</sup> Stat. Mon. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Constit. Apostol. *Sponsa Christi*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 8

with recollection and silence the women whose communities were often neglected by the chapters of canons on whom they everywhere depended and received inferior examples.

Already in the year 1122 Norbert gave the habit of the Order to the first Premonstratensian sister, Ricwera, who had lived as a hermitess but afterwards presided over the sisters of Prémontré and took over the care of the convent. Soon after, many others followed. Herman the monk, a contemporary of St. Norbert, writes: "This same Norbert tried to convert cohorts of man but also cohorts of women to God so that today in various places in the Premonstratensian churches we may see more than a thousand converted women serving God with such rigor and silence that in the strictest monasteries of monks there can scarcely be found a similar religious community."<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible that the large number assigned to this text is exaggerated, but at least the large number and the fervent spirit of the sisters in the monastery of Prémontré bears testimony to them.

The Holy Patriarch Norbert does not seem to have thought out precisely a determined form for the second Order (which for the rest seems to be taken from the first Order) but the addition of time had a great influence on further evolution.

## **§ 2. Further Evolution.**

### *Distinction of the monasteries.*

Initially for the most part the monasteries of our Order were "double", i.e. they consisted of a convent of men and an adjacent convent of women. An ancient chronicle relates for us about the manner of the sisters living at that time, it reads: "The women lived separately from the men, neither in the choir nor in the church, but they spent their time only in silent prayer; reading their psalters and canonical hours or that of the Blessed Virgin in private and with all humility and devotion, and performing other works for the church and the confreres, they sewed, spun, wove, washed and served."<sup>4</sup> Therefore they were practically speaking "conversae sisters".

However the General Chapter of 1140, presided over by Bl. Hugh, decided that the double monasteries were to be suppressed. Therefore, many of the sisters were moved elsewhere, but not always immediately; even in the Circary of Friesland some double monasteries remained until the end.

From that point on there existed in our Order two types of monasteries of holy virgins, namely provostries, independent or "*sui juris*" houses and priories, under the immediate

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<sup>3</sup> *De miraculis S. Mariae Laudunensis*, Lib 1, cap. 6, Migne PL 156, col. 994.

<sup>4</sup> *Chronologus Parcensis*, cit. apud Migne PL 170, col.1252.

control of a constituted canonry of some men or their abbot. Generally, the monastery of the other gender was the feminine part of the double monastery after the separation, or at least a Parthenon together with the other canonry of men established in the vicinity.

*Nature of their work and categories of sisters.*

Once the separation from the communities of the first Order was completed, the Premonstratensian nuns, who previously were able to attend and listen to the psalmody of the canons, themselves began to perform the psalmody in their oratories, so that the Statutes of the XIII century would be able to speak of “those places which from time immemorial are forever dedicated to receiving choir sisters.”<sup>5</sup> And where formerly they applied themselves very exclusively to the material cares of the monasteries of men, henceforth they became contemplative nuns dedicated to the contemplative life segregated from the world, now everywhere called “canonesses” and gradually subjected to severe claustral laws.

Henceforth of its own accord there arose a distinction between *sorores cantantes*” (= choir sisters) and “*sorores non cantantes*” (= *conversae* or lay sisters); but the legal distinction in this regard was not immediate. Later, around 1500, stricter laws were passed regarding the cloister of nuns and all lay women and maids were excluded from the cloister and it was fitting that diverse ways of life for each category were established. Thus in the Statutes of 1630 we read: “to conform to the prescriptions of the Council of Trent, all secular servants should be excluded from the cloisters of nuns, and as many “*conversae*” should be received to take care of the cloister as are considered necessary to serve and take care of the cloister.”<sup>6</sup> From that time, therefore, even the “*conversae*” were not permitted to leave the cloister.

*Conversae* in particular are assigned to more material jobs and domestic cares while work requiring more cultivated skill, such as weaving and embroidering, binding and illuminating books and the like are rather left to the choir sisters. Thus they have remained until the present time. Today, however, with the current social developments and under the benevolent influence of the Holy See, the distinction between the two classes tends to blur. The difference in the color of the habit has changed unless the particular work requires something different, even minor diversity between various occupations makes itself gradually less sensitive. Of course the nuns who are not choir sisters can be more fully engaged in manual labor than the choir nuns. Certainly the *conversae* sisters can leave more time for daily material cares than the choir sisters and thus it is possible for them to give several hours daily to the work of divine praise. But the choir sisters do not disdain work in domestic cares along with the *conversae*.

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<sup>5</sup> Editio *Pl. Lefèvre*, Lovanii 1946, Dist. IV, cap. 12, p.114.

<sup>6</sup> Dist. II, cap. 25, n. 39.

But so that even outside the boundaries of the cloister everything might be duly arranged and kept neat, but not left to secular help, there were admitted since the 16<sup>th</sup> century *donatae*, who did not pronounce vows, but who performed all the ministry which formerly the non-cloistered *conversae* used to do, when a less rigid discipline of the cloister existed.<sup>7</sup> Finally, they instituted the “extern sisters”, true nuns and members of the community, professing vows, enjoying the same favors, privileges and rights that the nuns have, and are burdened with the same duties, but outside.<sup>8</sup>

### *The fates of the Second Order.*

The canonries everywhere had to provide the necessities, spiritualities and materialities of the convents which depended on them. But it must be admitted that quite frequently the abbots neglected the convents which were under their jurisdiction. Indeed, certain General Chapters, beginning with the 12th century, showed themselves hostile to the reception of sisters, for various reasons, but not always clear.<sup>9</sup>

Hence it happened that, outside of Western Germany, Holland and Poland, the Order had only a few convents of nuns, among which those flourished which partly or totally existed independently or were given independence by the abbeys of men: Such are the convents which exist today.

Nevertheless, although in number of houses and members, our Second Order exists in a minor condition, it must not be doubted that its spiritual role is great, as will be clear from the following.

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **Various tasks of the Premonstratensian nuns**

Few documents of the early period, which would reveal the principles and practices of Norbertine spirituality as they were practiced in the Second Order at that time, still exist. Nevertheless, it doesn't take much mental effort to figure out what thrived in the ancient convents of our sisters. They were no doubt imbued with the same spirit which St. Norbert and B. Hugh imparted on the Institute of Prémontré; there were many things common for both branches of the Norbertine family: periods of fervor, relaxation and restoration as well as times of peace, torments and persecutions.

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<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Ibidem, n. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Stat. Mon., Appendix 1, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Erens, *Les Soeurs dans l'Ordre de Prémontré*, in *Analecta Praemonstratensia* V (1929), pp. 8-13.

In the same way, keeping your eyes fixed on the spirituality of the Order in general, it will suffice for us to reflect how the Premonstratensian nuns existing today apply the same in order for us to be able to say what the particular role of the Second Order in the family of St. Norbert is.

This role is clearly stated in the introductory statement placed at the beginning of the book of Statutes of our nuns: "The purpose of the Second Order, as religious, intends through its cloistered and contemplative life to work toward its own sanctification in fulfilling the divine office, and helping the priests of the First Order in their apostolic work through a life of prayer and penance."<sup>10</sup>

Referring back to the first part of this Directory they may see everything which views the fundamental obligations of religious and Norbertine life and we will now add only what more specifically refers to the nuns, namely the contemplative and liturgical which is performed as an aid to the apostolate of the First Order as well as the disciplinary and penitential practices.

### **§ 1. The contemplative and liturgical life of our sisters.**

#### **Life closely united to Christ their Spouse.**

*Consecrated virgin, Spouse of Christ.*

Christ the Lord once declared that "The Kingdom of heaven is like a king who celebrated the wedding of his son,"<sup>11</sup> i.e. a solemn wedding banquet. The participants of such a solemnity could clearly be distinguished into the invited or banqueters, the relatives or those serving at the table, the sons of the king who is the host and finally the still virgin wife who is very close to the king's son.

It is certainly true that St. Paul called the whole body of the faithful "a chaste virgin presented to Christ,"<sup>12</sup> but who would dare to deny that a much more perfect image of the spouse of Christ is to refer to souls who, having left everything,<sup>13</sup> give themselves to Christ by binding themselves by religious vows, and more especially from the nature of the image, souls of virgins consecrated to Christ? The pontiff who passes the ring to the finger of the virgin dedicated expresses this idea well: "I espouse you to Jesus Christ, Son of the Sovereign Father. Receive the ring of faith,... that you may be called the Spouse of God."<sup>14</sup> Each of them thus

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<sup>10</sup> Stat. Mon. 3; et cfr. Primi Ordinis 405, § 1.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 22, 2.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor. II, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 5, 28.

<sup>14</sup> *Pontificale Romanum*, In kBenedictione et Consecratione Virginum.

hands herself to Christ so that “they may admit no lover except him”; and devotes herself entirely to “the one that is thus the spouse of her perpetual virginity just as he is the son of perpetual virginity.”<sup>15</sup>

#### *Virginal joy of dealing with Christ.*

Happy are they, if they truly strive to live according to their holy vocation; for *it is good for them to adhere to God*,<sup>16</sup> not only willing to *lift their eyes to the Lord their God, like handmaidens in the hands of their mistress*,<sup>17</sup> but to converse more intimately with the beloved; to really live all the mysteries of Christ the Lord, so that they may say with Paul: *I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me*.<sup>18</sup> This exclusive love for Jesus, who is special to the holy virgins, is the font of unspeakable joys for them, as St. Augustine very beautifully bears witness: “The joys proper to virgins of Christ are not the same as those of non-virgins even if they are devoted to Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

#### *Zealously adhering to the contemplative life.*

All of our nuns should fix deeply in their hearts the following words of the Supreme Pontiff: “With respect to the contemplative life of nuns this, which according to the mind of the Church is always in force, ought to be kept firm and inviolate: all monasteries of nuns ought to, canonically always and everywhere, acknowledge contemplative life as their first and special end. For which reason, the work and ministry to which these nuns can and ought to give themselves – to the point of view of locality, hours, and manner of doing it – ought to be arranged and disposed so that a real and strong contemplative life, either of the whole community or of the individual nuns, is not only preserved but always nourished and strengthened.”<sup>20</sup>

#### **The divine praise liturgically celebrated.**

##### *The Importance of the Liturgy in the life of our sisters.*

The intimate communication of the Norbertine nun with Christ her spouse is wholly nourished in a particular manner by the continuous harmony of praise, which she expresses in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, Praefatio.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 72, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 122, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Gal. II, 20.

<sup>19</sup> De Sancta Virginitate, cap. 27, n. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Pius PP. XII, Constitutio *Sponsa Christi*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 11. Assidue quoque est legendus ac meditandus tripartitus *Nuntius radiophonicus ejusdem Pontificis* Monialibus universis clausura adstrictis datus, de vocatione sua ad vitam contemplativam melius cognoscendam, intensius diligendam, generosius sectandam, AAS I. (1958), pp. 562-586.

the name of the Church seven times a day by reciting the divine office,<sup>21</sup> and the center of which is the Eucharistic Sacrifice celebrated conventually with the participation, as close as possible, of the Divine Victim.

The Sacred Liturgy is an essential part of the life of the sisters of our Second Order. Indeed it specifies their religious manner of living and their service in the Holy Church; it allows them to exist as organs of that voice of the Spouse of the Church, by which the praise of God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer constantly ascend to heaven; It is due to this that in their life their prayers remain united to the Church, avoiding individualism. The nuns of our Order are persuaded not to cling to devotional accessories so that they give effort rather to the substantial liturgical piety. "Pray with the Church" is the principle traditionally instilled in them.

By this very fact, the "Conversation is in heaven"<sup>22</sup> of our nuns, according as they are living among divine realities, mysteries, symbols and the Holy Eucharist, becomes the center of their thoughts and actions. Here must be repeated what was said in Part I, section I, chapter 2, article 2.

*Care must be used concerning the Divine Office.*

Wherefore, may it be in the heart of our nuns to perform the divine office zealously since here lies the special font of the fervor of their religious life and the opportunity of fulfilling the most holy duty of exhibiting publicly due honor to the divine majesty. The daily schedule of the monastery should assure that this function be accomplished at the prescribed times. Similarly the community itself should be in union with the spirit of the annual liturgical time, preparation or enjoyment of the coming of the Lord, penance or joy and so on.

The provost of a convent of nuns in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote: "Indeed, we are particularly obligated by our profession to praise God day and night and to perform his divine office; and moreover because (it is a matter of serious obligation) by force of holy obedience it is commanded of us by the Holy Church that all the hours, both day and night hours, are to be sung or recited devoutly, attentively and reverently, it is therefore necessary that each of you be carefully prepared for the divine offices."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> « Ecclesia ad orationem publicam, quae ejus nomine, sive in choro sive privatim Deo funditur, solas Moniales inter mulieres Deo sacras deputat ». (*Statuta generalia Monialium*, Constitutioni *Sponsa Christi* adnexa, art. V, paragr. 1,) AAS XLIII (1951) p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Phil. III, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Codex a Cruyt, praeposito Vallis S. Catharinae in Oosterhout conscriptus, p. 3.



## **§ 2. Help offered by the nuns to the apostolate of the First Order.**

The life of a Premonstratensian virgin, intimately united to Christ her Spouse, will necessarily verify the words of Christ: "He who remains in me and I in him, brings forth much fruit,"<sup>24</sup> and indeed not only within "the enclosed garden"<sup>25</sup> of the cloister but even outside.

In the infant Premonstratensian foundation, the sisters gave themselves totally to the material cares of the men's monasteries, as we have said above,<sup>26</sup> offering service to guests in the hostel and providing for the poor who knocked at the door. After the separation of the canonries and convents, the sisters were clearly able to give themselves to contemplation in their own monasteries; but from that point on they were even more helpful to the confreres of the First Order, but spiritually rather for the good of their priestly labors.

How many examples are there for us in the Old Testament of the just obtaining graces of pardon and healing through their prayers from God in favor of sinners who suffered from the wrath of God! The intercessions of Abraham and Moses are among these memories by which "the Lord was pleased lest he do the evil which he had spoken against his people."<sup>27</sup> And indeed if God will perform the will of those who fear him,<sup>28</sup> how much more will he be bound by those who love him. And if the prayer of one person is so powerful, what of the petitions of a whole community of virgins consecrated to God? St. Gregory the Great wrote: "The life of (Sacred Virgins) is such and bound to such a degree by tears and abstinence, that we believe that if they didn't exist, none of us would have been able to last in this place for so many years among the swords of the Lombards."<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt, therefore, that the prayers of our nuns obtain from the Lord abundant graces of conversion or perseverance for sinners and those who are troubled and in particular certainly for those toward whom the priestly ministry of the canons of the First Order is directed. Our priests especially make this spiritual aid mutual, and in turn the fervor of the nuns burns all the more by the hope conceived of the fruits of salvation coming through their prayers and penances for the souls entrusted to them.

The priests of our First Order are frequently impeded by the ministry of souls and apostolic cares and thus cannot give to the contemplative part of their vocation what they want to devote to it. But our nuns' diligently giving work to contemplation alone restores the

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<sup>24</sup> John 15, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Cant. 4, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Artic. 1, § 2.

<sup>27</sup> Exod. 32, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Psalm 144, 19

<sup>29</sup> Epist. 26, lib. 7.

equilibrium in the Norbertine family in this regard, and brings the copious help of God to the priestly work of the Order. “For this other Christ”, the Premonstratensian priest, they are a true help to his own priestly life for further sanctifying and making his sweat, spilled in the Lord’s field, more fruitful. And by whom, more than by the consecrated virgin, by her life of self-sacrifice to God alone, could be produced abundant fruits of salvation in souls. Is it not correct to speak here of a sort of spiritual maternity?

Certainly the convents of our Second Order should verify the words of Pius XII: “Who will be able to examine and consider ... the flowers and fruits of sanctity which these closed gardens have brought to Christ and the Church; who will be able to express the effectiveness of their prayers, the wealth of their surrender, finally who will be able to express the good works of every kind by which the nuns have troubled to love the Church their mother, to sustain, to comfort her with all their strength?”<sup>30</sup>

### **§ 3. Regular observances in the Second Order.**

The life of union with God of our nuns and their beneficent influence toward the apostolic fruitfulness of the minsters of Christ are not completed by prayer alone. For charity, which is the foundation of life united to God and the root of its fruits demands also sacrifice and denial; for this requirement satisfaction is made in the life of the nuns our Order. Not because mortification of penance holds primacy in their life as it does especially in certain religious orders of women; but because all their life in God, fully oriented towards the spiritual, has naturally with it austerity and renunciation of natural propensities.

Certainly the living spirit of faith after the example of St. Norbert, controlled according to the norm of the Rule and life of St. Augustine, constant attention to the infinite goodness of God on the occasion of reading the texts of the Holy Office; all of these are the reason why a smiling face and simplicity are found in a conversation with the daughters of St. Norbert which is more noted than among other congregations of nuns. However, this serenity, both of which we see in their behavior of spirit, cannot hide the austerity of life, itself worthy to be reported in the first place.

Indeed the regular observances of the Second Order hardly seem to be different from those of the First Order; however we find some additions that differentiate them, which most often make them sterner in the Second Order. As to the spirit to which they refer, it will suffice to refer the reader back to those things which we said in the second section of the first part of

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<sup>30</sup> *Constitutio Apostolica Sponsa Christi*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 8.

this Directory,<sup>31</sup> which pertain to the entire Premonstratensian Order. We want to mention here certain things insofar as their observation is imposed more strictly or is exercised more severely in the feminine houses.

### **The Vows.**

The vows constitute the essence of the total gift which the religious soul makes of herself to the Lord; the nuns fulfill this lovingly and carefully.

Mindful of the special value of **Obedience**, which is the summary of all her religious doctrine, the nun will have it in her heart to strictly observe the command of the Rule: "The superior should be obeyed as a mother, preserving her honor, lest God be offended in her; much more the priest who bears the care of all of you." This will immediately choke off all incongruous manifestation of the spirit of independence. Humble subjection adds a particular honor to a woman devoted to God; while on the other hand, all petulance or arrogance is altogether unworthy as it is contrary to her natural gifts and innate modesty.

The custody of **Chastity** in general has been mentioned above.<sup>32</sup> What has been said must be observed by the nuns with greater care, namely more ardent affection and more careful vigilance. "For the ancient enemy, who infects the most excellent efforts with more subtle pitfalls, obscures the palm of perfect continence through a certain carelessness of mind."<sup>33</sup> The enemy stretches out his nets especially to the charity and humility of virgins to begin to shake the unstable foundations of her spiritual building, and then the practice of continence begins to fail. The ten virgins of the Gospel parable<sup>34</sup> were all of an intact chastity but yet there were only five who could enter into marriage.

What pertains to **Poverty**, with extraordinary insistence, is already recommended in the Statutes of the Premonstratensian Order of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the chapter entitled "On the Reception of Sisters"<sup>35</sup> and in the Statutes of 1630 we still read: "In the female sex especially, the vice of ownership usually strikes its roots more secretly and more deeply."<sup>36</sup> It does not appear that this propensity, so special to women, is also so virulent today. Nevertheless, sisters should be careful lest, if negligence creeps in on this point, the opportunity be given again to relaxation on this point, which was so feared in previous centuries. Rather let them have at heart to practice the warning of the present Statutes: "The spirit of poverty also requires that

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<sup>31</sup> Chap. 1-3.

<sup>32</sup> Pars I, Sectio II, cap. 1, artic. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Pontif. Roman.*, In benediction et consecration Virginum, praefatio.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 25, 1-13.

<sup>35</sup> Dist. IV, cap. 11, Edit. Pl Lefèvre, Lovanii 1946, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> Dist. II, cap. 25, n. 8.

religious detach themselves from attachment to temporal things and accept their deprivation, if any, with courage and good will.”<sup>37</sup>

### **The Cloistered Discipline.**

#### *The Cloister.*

Among religious women in general, but most particularly among nuns, the law of cloister has special importance, and therefore, as much as possible, is strictly enforced.

While among men the cloister functions to keep women from entering, much less however from keeping the men from leaving. Among the nuns on the contrary the law of the cloister prevents entry, not only of men but also of other women and moreover strictly prohibits its sisters from going beyond it.

Our sisters were not always bound to such a rigid law of the cloister, but only since the 15<sup>th</sup> century was such a major cloister in force, which absolutely forbade any nuns from leaving, “even for a brief time and for any reason, unless due to fire, infirmity, leprosy or epidemic.”<sup>38</sup> Today, however, “the Holy See provides for more necessities or utilities, maternally and more abundantly, which at one time were not considered sufficiently serious enough to allow the Papal cloister to be broken or removed.”<sup>39</sup> However, this mitigation is only to more easily recognize extraordinary cases. For the monasteries, as those of our Second Order, that are entirely dedicated to the contemplative life, the requirements of the cloister remain strictly in force. Nor are these arrangements or so-called adaptations of the “minor cloister” granted to them. They are for those monasteries which “from legitimate prescriptions of the Holy See have joined contemplative life to the exercise of some ministries for which they generously agree to lend their monastic buildings.”<sup>40</sup>

Our nuns should be happy that the strict prescriptions of the papal cloister have been kept for them. For in this way their life has been segregated from the tumult of the world and from secular relationships, by which the interior solitude of their spirit remains undisturbed, so beneficial for intimate communication with the Lord in holy recollection. “The law is holy” Adam the Premonstratensian said about the cloister, “useful and good for the soul, and salutary for the body, containing health of both in itself.”<sup>41</sup> By no means therefore should the sisters seek opportunities to lessen their segregation enclosed by the discipline of the cloister, rather

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<sup>37</sup> Stat. Mon. 335.

<sup>38</sup> Stat. an. 1630, Dist. II, cap. 25, n. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Constit. Apostol. *Sponsa Christi*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Soliloquium de Instructione animae, lib. I, cap. 6, Migne 198, col. 855.

let them willingly embrace the wise arrangements of the Church in this matter and observe them with generous honesty.

### *Silence.*

Religious silence is intimately connected with the observance of the cloister. Without silence the spiritual benefit of the cloister itself suffers great loss. It is commonly said that for women the rigor of silence is particularly troublesome. Whatever it is, it is clear that the contemplative character of the life of the Premonstratensian nuns demands the recollection of silence much more strongly than the mixed life of the First Order. This was said above about the recollection of silence;<sup>42</sup> this should be attentively considered by our nuns and carefully put into practice.

Keep in mind the daily observances of this sort of thing, as well as the spirit of obedience and abnegation, among which clearly must be included the hard interruption of night sleep in order to perform the Divine Office, add also the most excellent supply of mortification to be added with the minor danger of vanity and one's own sense of the added corporal practices of penance freely chosen. Hence even there lies the major apostolic efficacy, that "may be fulfilled what is lacking of the passion of Christ Jesus in his body which is the Church."<sup>43</sup>

### **Manual labor.**

*Why manual labor is imposed on our nuns.*

"Manual labor, accommodated to the strength and talent of each one, is prescribed for all religious"<sup>44</sup> and for various reasons.

The first reason views its usefulness for fostering contemplative life, "by which (the sisters) perfectly refreshed may be able to apply themselves more promptly and more closely to deeper contemplation."<sup>45</sup> And in fact manual labor allows the mind to remain joined to God without harm to the good execution of the material occupation. It prevents the attention of the soul from getting tired for too long a time by the tending of the mind toward the sublime. It permits calm contemplation and provides an opportunity to efficiently join a restful contemplation to an outside activity undertaken toward a supernatural goal. Moreover, after hours of peaceful labor the soul is found more disposed to giving itself totally to prayer at the proper time.

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<sup>42</sup> Pars I, Sect. II, cap. 2, art. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Col. I, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Stat. Monial. 387.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Another reason is that “not only a natural law obliges everyone to work, men and women without exception, who give themselves to contemplative life, but also the duty of penance and satisfaction... For the labor of nuns ... it is fitting to be such ...that whoever undertakes it, does so out of obedience, and links it with voluntary castigation of self.”<sup>46</sup> Whatever therefore generates boredom in the prescript of labor or seems somewhat difficult, nevertheless is done in the spirit of mortification. On the contrary whatever in the work given to her seems to agree with her natural propensities should be confined within the limits of the assigned work so that it may be completed without the attraction of one’s own love. The Statutes speak of this in the best way: “All religious women should assume quickly and humbly the work enjoined on them by the superioress as if commanded by God himself; they should shun all precipitation or passion lest, while it was a help to spiritual life, it now becomes more an obstacle.”<sup>47</sup>

Finally here is a third reason. In our time in which the dowry of the sisters is frequently insufficient, labor “should not only be equal to the strength of the nuns, but ought to be arranged and suited that, for any period of time and the additional things that the nuns need, necessary food ... and, with subsidies supplied by divine providence, render secure and suitable sustenance for the nuns.”<sup>48</sup> The Holy See more than once stressed that the nuns be held in conscience “to live honestly by the sweat of their brow in order to earn their bread.”<sup>49</sup> This seems consistent today, with the intentions of divine providence. Indeed the spirit of poverty fits this idea that work is necessary to ensure material livelihood.

### **Primacy of charity.**

Our nuns should follow with the greatest care and full intensity what has been stressed above regarding the mutual charity to be particularly followed by Premonstratensians, according as it was given by Jesus Christ in “*Mandatum novum*”<sup>50</sup> and the Rule of Saint Augustine.<sup>51</sup>

Specifically, there must be developed among the nuns and *conversae* a full union of souls, founded on the likeness of their holy profession insofar as all are truly nuns striving for the same end of perfection and salvation of souls, desiring to promote the good of the same Order and house, and applying more and more on the same works. Various circumstances

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<sup>46</sup> Pius PP. XII, Constit. Apostol. *Sponsa Christi*, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Stat. Monial. 389.

<sup>48</sup> *Sponsa Christi*, pp. 14, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 20. – Cfr. etiam *Nuntius radiophonicus* PII PP. XII, AAS L (1958), pp. 582-584.

<sup>50</sup> John 13, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Pars I, Sect. II, cap. 5, art. 2, paragr. 3.

most often taking on the character of each, determined by the character of one or the other but an identical supernatural intention is everywhere identical.

Therefore, all religious of the Second Order of St. Norbert, nuns, *conversae* and extern sisters should do their very best to pursue the work to which God called them out of love; and they should pursue it with truly supernatural love and mutual estimation of one another. The value of their life before God and the Holy Church does not depend on the division to which they belong in the Order of Prémontré, but on the charity with which they are ignited and by which they witness to their vocation and *“through the good works imposed on them they make their vocation and election certain.”*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> 2 Peter I, 10.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE TERTIARIES OF OUR ORDER

#### ARTICLE 1

##### The Premonstratensian Third Order in general

##### **Historical Introduction.**

In what better way can we begin this tract on the Third Order of Prémontré than by recording what Pope Pius XI wrote at the beginning of a letter in which he confirmed and expanded the indulgences and privileges granted by his predecessors to this same Third Order? There will excellently be described the origin and special nature of a pious association of this sort. Here are the words of the Pontiff:

“For centuries many faithful, led by love of a more perfect religious life, have always clung to ancient monasteries of religious Orders, although they lived their life outside of the cloister and in the midst of the tumult of the world. These men, bound neither by the strictness of vows nor by the laws of common life, nevertheless under certain rules, constituted after the confreres and nuns a Third group of that Order to which they preferred to adhere, taking on the spirit of its rule rather than its burden. Among these groups of Tertiaries, that one must be considered the oldest which flourished in the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré, and rejoices in having St. Norbert, the founder of the Order, as their founder. For when Theobald, the Count of Aquitaine, a nobleman and a man of great fortune, had offered himself and his property to our Blessed Founder, wishing to be admitted into the Order of Prémontré, Norbert, divinely inspired, persuaded him not to leave the world but, that even among the dangers of the world he might remain attached to the Order he had chosen, wrote a rule of Christian life for him and as a mark of his spiritual union with the Norbertine community clothed him with a white scapular. This was the origin of the secular Third Order of Prémontré, and a great number of the faithful, of both sexes, both in Gaul and in all Europe followed the example of Theobald and formed the assembly of the Norbertine Tertiaries.”<sup>1</sup>

And indeed, like the example of Theobald, whose name is listed in the necrologies of the Abbeys of Prémontré and Valsecret, many are inscribed in the necrologies of almost all the canonries as brothers and sisters “ad succurendum” (= for support), which represents the Tertiaries in shadowy form. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, an affiliation to our Order was granted to the faithful of the parish of BVM in Antwerp, who opted to take on the rule and garb of the Order;

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<sup>1</sup> Breve PII PP. XI *Antiquis Monasteriis*, diei 30 Martii 1923.



again evidence of a certain Third Order – only the name is still lacking.<sup>2</sup> Likewise at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was at the Abbey of Beauport in France a Confraternity of the White Scapular approved by a papal brief. We have something similar in the following century in Bavaria where Pope Benedict XIV was addressed, with the agreement of the Abbot of Prémontré, a plea which the sovereign pontiff favorably responded to and definitively instituted the Third Order of Prémontré.<sup>3</sup>

### **The particular spirit of the Third Order of Prémontré.**

Holy Mother Church clearly shows great confidence toward those religious Orders which she allows to add a Third Order to themselves. For she testifies that she considers them suitable to bring the faithful to genuine Christian perfection by their example and spirit. Our Order is honored by this confidence of the Church since it is permitted to direct the spiritual life of select faithful who are allowed to participate in its prayers and sacrifices and from whom it requires that they model a Christian life as an example.

According to the norms of law, “Tertiaries are lay people who live in the world and strive to contend toward Christian perfection under the direction of some Order in a suitable secular form of life, according to the rules approved for them by the Apostolic See.”<sup>4</sup> The goal toward which the Tertiaries strive does not differ from that end toward which the religious themselves are striving, the perfection namely of Christian life; clearly this is not attained by common life and religious vows, but by the help of other means related to these, namely, by a profession, by which their life is publicly dedicated to God; by a rule, by which a discipline is imposed that is salutary for the total way of life; finally, and in particular by the spirit of the Order which instills into their hearts the fervor and abnegation in their pursuit of God.

#### *Liturgical Spirit.*

And because the Premonstratensian Order is a canonical religious Order, it should offer to the Tertiaries joined to it a deepened knowledge and great love of the liturgical life of the Holy Church. Their daily devotion, as much as possible – at least for a measure of possibility – should be ordered around the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, participation of which should include the outstanding approach to Sacred Communion, and this is surrounded by the canonical office or the Marian office recited at least partially, or at least “the psalter of the BVM” called the

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<sup>2</sup> Videsis Papebrock in *Actis Sanctorum*, Tom. XX, p. 922.

<sup>3</sup> Breve Benedicti PP, XIV *Exponi nobis*, diei 22 Maii 1751.

<sup>4</sup> Codex J. C., can. 702, § 1.

“rosary”.<sup>5</sup> The annual changes of their piety should be accommodated to the liturgical times of the year and their prayers be nourished by the ecclesiastical feasts.

Accordingly, the moderators should work with solicitous care that the Tertiaries advance daily in active participation rightly understood and fervently in public worship offered to God by the Holy Church and, in it, by our Order.

### *Meditation and Spiritual Reading.*

However, it is fitting that liturgical prayer be prepared and sustained by private prayer. For in the Statutes it is prescribed at least on Sundays and Feast days and, if it can be done, they should daily spend a quarter of an hour on meditation.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, on the occasion of instructions given to novices or members, a method of meditating on the Word of God should be taught and they should heartily encourage them to have vivifying and ardent conversations with God.

Intimate participation in liturgical life no doubt depends greatly on knowledge of Holy Scripture with which the faithful are provided. It is not strange that in the Statutes of our Tertiaries we read: “The members should diligently read the Holy Scriptures, especially the New Testament.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless since a prudent and fruitful reading of Sacred Scripture can hardly be obtained without a certain introduction, the moderators of the Tertiaries should take care that they nourish their own spiritual lives carefully concerning the Scriptures by which they may be able to lead the members to these saving pastures.

### *The practice of traditional devotions in the Order.*

The Tertiaries should faithfully be instructed in the traditional devotions of the Order<sup>8</sup> because they are very “Catholic” devotions which exercised a very beneficial influence both at the time of the “Gregorian Reform” when the Order was founded and at the time of the Counter Reformation, a time recently after that. These should strongly be impressed on them: a vivid devotion toward the Most Holy Humanity of Christ, and the highest reverence toward the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar with a most grateful spirit toward Christ Jesus who deigned to establish it. Also a filial and very tender devotion should be exhibited toward the

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<sup>5</sup> Statuta Tertiariorum saecularium Ord. Praem., art. 8-11.

<sup>6</sup> Stat. Tertiari., art. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Art. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. hic supra, Pars I, Sect II, cap. 4, art. 2.

Blessed Virgin Mary, the special patron of our Order, particularly in the mysteries of her Immaculate Conception, her glorious Assumption and universal Mediation of graces, which indeed have been held for centuries among the Premonstratensians with special honor and were very often defended by them.

### *The Spirit of Penance.*

It is quite sad to see that the spirit of penance decreases terribly, even among the most pious worshippers, whereas offences against God are increasingly growing around the world. For this reason it should be tirelessly impressed on our Tertiaries "to lead a life of penance and mortification,"<sup>9</sup> and in like manner give an example of a serious life without any unsuitable worldliness. Moreover let them work at imposing on themselves victory over love of self and moderate privations in themselves, but let them stimulate divine charity, strengthen their will, sharpen their vigilance against sin, let them turn to diligent fulfillment of their status, and not lack satisfactory strength against their own sins and those of others.

In particular, "avoiding not only sin but everything which breathes the spirit of the world; the members, although living in the world, should not live according to the world and should not take part in the shows, dances and indecent games."<sup>10</sup>

### **Apostolic Zeal.**

Since the Third Order is not a section of Catholic Action, it is not one of its tasks to set up or moderate works of zeal. However, the members must be constantly, and eagerly stimulated to burn with excessive zeal for souls after the example of Our Holy Father Norbert,<sup>11</sup> and therefore be in the Holy Church as *burning and glittering lamps*,<sup>12</sup> and in addition to being a discrete apostolate among individual persons to be loved, advised, taught, they should willingly and generously collaborate with sections of Catholic or Missionary Actions. They should never fail to the extent of their ability to help the clergy in their parochial works, such as catechetics, sponsorships, groups for making vestments and sacred linens, etc. ... Doing these things they will conform themselves to the priestly nature of the Order of Prémontré, and at the same time perform well what their Statutes urge them to do: "that at all times they be prepared to help their neighbors in need both in spiritualities and temporalities."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stat. Tertiarior., art. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, art. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. art. 22.

<sup>12</sup> John 5, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Stat. Tertiari., art. 24.

Whether it is expedient for one who has a duty in the administration of the Sodality of the Third Order, should also participate in the administration of Catholic Action can be called into question. The laity, in general, do not have much free time and it would be unwise to share it between several important functions, because ultimately the outcome of this dispersion could likely impair their spiritual life.

Finally let the Tertiaries understand and carefully observe this admonition of their Statutes which is to be attended to: “They should offer help through their life of prayer and penance to all priests, especially those of the First Order and most especially to those of the canonry to which they are affiliated, and they should freely help them as much as they can.”<sup>14</sup>

Not without reason the same Statutes recommend to them that “they take care to reconcile enemies according to the example of St. Norbert.”<sup>15</sup> They ought to live in society like the Holy Founder of the Premonstratensians, “the Angel of Peace”. They should foster peace therefore, given the opportunity, in every way, both among individuals and, whenever possible, stabilize it among peoples. Those who strive in favor of peace gather the fruits of ardent charity towards their neighbor and make themselves emulators of another Father Legislator of the Order of Prémontré, namely, St. Augustine.

### **Erection of Fraternities.**

Although anyone individually affiliated to some canonry of the First Order can live the Norbertine life of the Tertiaries, nevertheless the prelates should strive, whenever possible, that Sodalities or Fraternities of the Third Order be established. For although, according to the current discipline, canonical convenience of such an arrangement is not insisted on, nevertheless its spiritual utility should not be spurned. For it is easier for solid ascetical formation to be given to Tertiaries – especially given to them as a group – since they can grow in mutual knowledge with the help of active and fraternal charity; by this association they become aware of some of the conveniences of common life.

The administration of the fraternities is in the hands of the prelate, “whom all should revere and honor as a father, and he should be reverently obeyed,”<sup>16</sup> *and in the hands of the moderator whom “the prelate assumes to himself to carry the burden of the administration,” and who should be a priest of the Premonstratensian Order.*<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless according to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., art. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., art. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., art. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., art. 45.

desire and tradition of the Church, the notable part of the administration of the fraternities rests in the hands of the council, consisting of the prior, master of novices and councilors,<sup>18</sup> taken from among the members. Care should be taken that the masters or mistresses of novices chosen for this institution are spiritually suitable and who may function in their job with due experience and fruitfulness.

*Attitude towards the First Order.*

The tertiaries should be totally attached to the Norbertine Order and the canonry of the First Order to which they are affiliated individually or through their fraternity, “in order to consider it their paternal house and live intimately with it.”<sup>19</sup> Hence their moderator should watch over them paternally so that “he may promote and stir up not only friendly relations among these members but especially even with the canonry to which they pertain.”<sup>20</sup>

In the Statutes of the tertiaries “it is recommended to everyone that they select a priest as spiritual leader whom they may approach with confidence, revealing to him also their doubts and anxieties.”<sup>21</sup> The members of the sodality can elect to such leadership any priest who is devout and duly trained in spiritual things. Nevertheless, it is suggested that as often as it is convenient they commit the care of their soul to a Premonstratensian priest, a member of the First or Third Order of St. Norbert. Canons or priest Tertiaries should willingly assume such a task and offer themselves as dutiful, patient and firm, in order to form their brother Tertiaries to a genuine and fervent spiritual and Norbertine life.

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **The priestly Third Order in particular.**

*Usefulness of the Third Order for clerics in general.*

Just as religious life, as such, is basically the same for cleric and lay, so also affiliation to a certain Third Order does not bring different promises for priest and for other faithful. The end is the intent, i.e. the pursuit and practice of Christian perfection; it is the same for each; the same Statutes give to all members norms of acting; nor can the spirit be different since it is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., art. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., art. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., art. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., art. 15.

none other than the mind of the Holy Founder, by which afterwards they were imbued as other sons of the same religious family.

Nevertheless, it must not be denied that each Third Order benefits priests more than laity. Necessity more strictly urges the former more than the latter to lead a holy life and emulate Christian perfection. For their sacred tasks demand this of them and their relationship to the faithful people for whom implicitly they say with Paul: "Be imitators of us as we are of Christ."<sup>22</sup>

*The Norbertine Third Order is most particularly accommodated to clerics.*

It cannot be seriously called into question that the Third Order of St. Norbert is the most accommodated, before all others, to promote priestly sanctity. For as canonical our Order is essentially directed to this, that priests of the Church of Christ be ready to be holy and self-denying, devout and perform the divine cult with dignity, with zeal and always be prepared to help souls with abnegation of self and lead them to God. It is not sufficient to do this by accurately forming the clerics of the First Order, but also by instilling the spirit of St. Norbert into those priests and clerics who give their names to the Third Order. Hence it is understandable that the formula of profession of our Tertiaries contains a promise to observe throughout their lives not only the commands of God, but also, if fitting, the particular obligations of clerics.

Otherwise, it is sufficient to review what was explained in the preceding article about the proper spirit of the Third Order of Prémontré so that it may be clear immediately that priests imbued with such a spirit will be strongly moved to foster themselves toward a clerical fervor.

And in fact, isn't liturgical piety with the highest estimation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Divine Praise; isn't frequent and pious reading of Holy Scripture; isn't the practice of restorative penance; isn't fiery apostolic zeal; -- just as many dispositions and practices which are most especially fitting for priests, even more so required of them? These are devotions also customary in our Order toward the Blessed Sacrament namely and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and are especially priestly devotions. The priest is directed to the Eucharist and Marian devotion is in the full tradition of the Church for the good of souls and perfect purity of conscience, heart and body, these are the best food of the soul. The effort to reduce and consolidate the peace framework is fully with the priestly office. The priest, because of his sacramental character, is he not the mediator to unite men into a single Mystical Body?

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<sup>22</sup> Phil. III, 17.

Finally, to whom are we better able to lead the pastors of souls so that they may laudably respond to today's requirements of abnegation and contempt of riches except to our Father Norbert, who used to say "that they truly live who do not live for themselves, but in whom the Poor Christ lives,"<sup>23</sup> and "who instructed the novices of the spiritual militia in the fear of God and humility, so that, having put aside the spirit of pride, the Holy Spirit may direct their way to heaven?"<sup>24</sup>

Nor can nothing be said about the influence which the Tertiary priest – prudently and modestly by the example of his charity and other virtues, sometimes even by his salutary advice and fraternal correction – can exercise on his secular confreres inciting them on to fervor, even silently. Thus a Third Order Premonstratensian is able to offer an opportunity to the Apostolate of priests, toward priests.

*Priest Tertiaries should observe the Statutes more strictly.*

One can expect to notice from clerical Tertiaries a stricter observation of the Third Order Statutes than from the laity and not so easily are relaxations and dispensation granted to them which the conditions of life of the laity often demand. For the cleric's life is indeed a lot more oriented toward the prayer, austerity and the practice of merciful deeds than the lay condition which is often caught up in the nets of married life or professional cares and is prey to worries of all kinds.

*They should be closely united with the bishop and their secular colleagues.*

By no means should the priest members of our Third Order remain less closely united to their bishop and fraternally related to their secular colleagues. On the other hand they must strive with all their strength so that, before others, they might stand out in love of a particular church to which they are dedicated by incardination, show themselves docile to their ordinary, the bishop, and devote themselves totally to a portion of the Lord's field, whose care has been entrusted to them. This is clearly very well arranged with a mind very favorable toward the Premonstratensian abbey to which they are affiliated and toward their associate Norbertines with fraternal affection.

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<sup>23</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, Tom. XX, p. 825. C.

<sup>24</sup> *Breviar. Praemonstr.*, 2a Ant. II Nocturni in Festo S. P. Norberti.

*Associations or other means of fraternity.*

The erection of a priestly fraternity of the Third Order is frequently subject to many difficulties, because clerics ascribed to one and the same canonry of the First Order are usually far apart from one another.

Nevertheless, heed must be taken lest mere incorporation to a Third Order is equal to a display of attachment of one's spirit toward the Premonstratensian religious Order. On the contrary there must be care that this is a true source of spiritual help. For this they can compose, among other means, a periodic table by which spiritual fervor and favorable desire toward the Norbertine family may be stimulated; and the meetings, annual or semiannual, of the priests of the Third Order, and indeed as often as possible, can be held in the canonry of the First Order where the associate priests are affiliated along with the Premonstratensian canons and together they may enjoy the beauty of the ceremonies and conventual recollection.

The sodality of clerics should be received into the canonry to which they are affiliated with abundant and courteous hospitality so that they may feel they actually belong to the Norbertine family and that their brothers of the First Order are concerned about them and their spiritual and temporal comfort.

**Translated by:** Theodore J. Antry, O. Praem.

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