

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION
UMBRATILEM
OF OUR MOST HOLY FATHER POPE PIUS XI
APPROVING THE STATUTES OF THE CARTHUSIAN ORDER

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PIUS BISHOP
SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

For a perpetual memorial of the matter

1. EXCELLENCE OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

All those, who, according to their rule, lead a life of solitude remote from the din and follies of the world, and who not only assiduously contemplate the divine mysteries and the eternal truths, and pour forth ardent and continual prayers to God that His kingdom may flourish and be daily spread more widely, but who also atone for the sins of other men still more than for their own by mortification, prescribed or voluntary, of mind and body — such indeed must be said to have chosen the better part, like Mary of Bethany.

For no more perfect state and rule of life than that can be proposed for men to take up and embrace, if the Lord calls them to it. Moreover, by the inward holiness of those who lead the solitary life in the silence of the cloister and by their most intimate union with God, is kept brightly shining the halo of that holiness which the spotless Bride of Jesus Christ holds up to the admiration and imitation of all.

2. VALUE OF THE PRAYERS AND PENANCES OF CONTEMPLATIVES

No wonder, then, that ecclesiastical writers of former ages, wishing to explain and extol the power and efficacy of the prayers of these same religious men and women, should have gone so far as to liken their prayers to those of Moses, quoting a well-known fact, namely, that when Joshua was engaged in battle with the Amalekites on the plain and Moses on the top of a hill nearby was praying and beseeching God for the victory of his people, it happened that as long as Moses held his hands raised heavenward, the Israelites conquered, but if from weariness he lowered them a little, then the Amalekites overcame the Israelites; wherefore, Aaron and Hur on either side held up his arms until Joshua left the field victorious.

This example most aptly symbolizes the effect of the prayers of the religious we have spoken of, since those prayers are being nourished by the sublime Sacrifice of the Altar on one hand, and on the other hand by works of penance, as by two supports typified respectively in a certain way, by Aaron and Hur; it being the usual and indeed the principal duty of these solitaries, as we have remarked above, to offer themselves up to God and devote themselves as propitiatory victims and hostages of peace for their own salvation and that of the world — a function which they fulfill in an official way, as it were.

3. ORIGIN OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Therefore, from the earliest times this mode of life, most perfect and at the same time useful and fruitful for the whole of Christendom more than anyone can conceive, took root in the Church and spread on all sides.

For if we pass over the ‘ascetics’ who right from the very outset of our religion used to live so austere, though in their own houses, that Saint Cyprian of Carthage considered them as “the noblest part of Christ’s flock,” it is known that many of the faithful in Egypt, persecuted under the Emperor Decius on account of their religion, had fled into the desert parts of the land and had found by experience that the solitary sort of life they led there was most profitable for attaining perfection. They continued that way of living even after peace had been granted to the Church.

The number of these anchorites was so immense that there were said to be as many inhabitants in the wilderness as there were citizens in the towns. Some of them went to live far away from all human society, while others, under the leadership of Anthony the Great, began to live in *lauras*.¹

That was the origin of the common life — life in community — which gradually evolved, organized and ruled by certain definite laws, was quickly propagated throughout all the countries of the East and then spread over Italy, Gaul and Proconsular Africa, while monasteries rose up on all sides.

4. GOAL OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Since the whole object of this institution lay in this, that the monks, each one in the privacy of his cell, unoccupied with any exterior ministry and having nothing to do with it, should fix their thoughts exclusively on things of heaven, wonderful was the benefit that accrued from it to Christian society.

Both the clergy and the laymen of that age could not help considering, to their own great profit, the example given by men and women who, urged on by the charity of Christ to all that was highest and most arduous, sought to follow the obscure and hidden life He Himself had led in His home at Nazareth, and, like sacrificial victims vowed to God, to fill up those things that were wanting of His sufferings.

5. DECAY OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Nevertheless, in course of time the institution so preeminent that is called the contemplative life, declined somewhat and lost in vigor. The reason was that, although the monks, as a rule, shunned the care of souls and other exterior ministry, yet they came by degrees to combine the works of active life with their pondering on divine things and their contemplation.

They thought that they ought to comply with the earnest request of the bishops and assist in the labors of the secular priests who were not able to cope with the many needs of the faithful; or, that it behooved them to take charge of popular instruction — an object of Charlemagne’s² solicitude. Moreover, owing to the widespread disturbances of those times, monasteries had perhaps suffered some harm and had slackened.

¹ *Laura* is a Greek word meaning ‘street’ or ‘path’. It indicates a group of hermitages built around a communal core and linked by a path.

² Charlemagne (c. 742-814), Charles I, emperor of the West (800-814) and king of the Franks (768-814). His reign was notable for administrative, judicial and ecclesiastical reforms, and for the development of foreign trade. His palace in Aachen (present day Germany) was the center of a great intellectual revival under the leadership of Alcuin.

6. NEED OF RESTORATION

Consequently it was highly important for the Church that this most holy form of life, which had been kept unimpaired for so many centuries in monasteries, should be restored to its pristine vigor, so that there should never be lacking men and women of prayer who, unimpeded by any other care, would be perpetually imploring the Divine Mercy and would thus draw down from heaven benefits of every sort upon men, who are often too neglectful of their salvation.

7. THE RESTORER SAINT BRUNO, FOUNDER OF THE CARTHUSIANS

Accordingly in His great kindness, God, Who is ever attentive to the needs and well-being of His Church, chose BRUNO, a man of eminent sanctity, for the work of bringing the contemplative life back to the glory of its original integrity. To that intent BRUNO founded the Carthusian Order, imbued it thoroughly with his own spirit and provided it with those laws which might efficaciously induce its members, freed from the demands of every sort of exterior ministry and office, to advance speedily along the way of inward sanctity and of the most rigorous penance; laws which would also impel them to persevere with steadfast hearts in the same austere and hard life. And it is a recognized fact that through nearly nine hundred years the Carthusians have so well retained the spirit of their founder, Father and law-giver that unlike other religious institutes, their Order has never in so long a space of time needed any amendment, or, as they say, reform.

8. CARTHUSIAN HIDDEN AND SILENT APOSTOLATE

Who can help feeling admiration for these men? Shut off completely and for all their lifetime from the society of other men in order to give themselves up to a sort of hidden and silent apostolate for the eternal salvation of their fellow creatures, they live each one in the solitude of his cell all the year round and never leave it for any reason whatsoever.

At fixed hours of the day and of the night they assemble in the monastic church, to chant the divine office singing the whole of it “*viva et rotunda voce*” — with a voice that is lively and full — according to the very ancient Gregorian melodies of their choir books, and with the accompaniment of no musical instrument.

How should God Who is so merciful, fail to grant the prayers of those most pious brethren who thus raise their voices to Him in behalf of the Church and of sinners who need conversion?

9. ESTEEM OF THE HOLY SEE FOR SAINT BRUNO AND HIS ORDER

Wherefore, just as BRUNO never lacked the esteem and benevolence of our predecessor, Urban II (1088-1099), who, having had that very learned and holy man for his master in the school of Rheims, later on, when he was Pope, took him for his counselor and made use of him in that capacity, in like manner the Carthusian Order has continuously enjoyed the special favor of the Apostolic See, commendable as it has ever been for the simplicity together with a certain holy rusticity in the way of living of its members. We ourselves bear the Carthusian monks no less goodwill and we wish as much as anyone that so valuable an institution should spread and increase.

10. SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CARTHUSIANS FOR OUR PRESENT TIMES

For, if ever it was needful that there should be anchorites of that sort in the Church of God it is most specially expedient nowadays when we see so many Christians living without a thought for the things of the next world and utterly regardless of their eternal salvation, giving

rein to their desire for earthly riches and the pleasures of the flesh and adopting and exhibiting publicly as well as in their private life pagan manners altogether opposed to the Gospel.

11. RENEWED CENSURE OF “ACTIVISM”

And there are perhaps some who still deem that the virtues which are misnamed passive have long grown obsolete and that the broader and more liberal exercise of active virtues should be substituted for the ancient discipline of the cloister. This opinion our predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII, refuted and condemned in his Letter *Testem benevolentiae* given on the 22 of January in the year 1899. No one can fail to see how harmful and pernicious that opinion is to Christian perfection as it is taught and practiced in the Church.

12. PRAYER AND PENANCE HELP THE CHURCH MORE THAN TILLING THE MASTER’S FIELD

It is, besides, easy to understand how they who assiduously fulfill the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labor in tilling the Master’s field; for unless the former drew down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, the evangelical laborers would reap in truth from their toil a more scanty crop.

13. WHAT THE POPE EXPECTS OF CARTHUSIANS

It is hardly necessary to say what great hope and expectation the Carthusian monks inspire in us, seeing that since they keep the Rule of their Order not only accurately but also with generous ardor, and since that Rule easily carries those who observe it to the higher degree of sanctity, it is impossible that those religious should not become and remain powerful pleaders with our most merciful God for all Christendom.

14. THE CHURCH’S PRAISE OF CARTHUSIAN LEGISLATION

Those same Statutes, by which the Carthusian Order is governed, did indeed seem to our predecessor, Innocent XI, worthy of being strengthened with “the favor of Apostolic protection”; wherefore by the Apostolic Constitution *Injunctum Nobis*, given on the 27 March in the year 1688, he approved them “in a specific way” as it is called. In which Constitution we see the many great praises lavished by our same predecessor on the Carthusians, and that expression of high praise has all the more weight in that it comes from a Pontiff illustrious for the great sanctity of his life. He did not hesitate to affirm that the Roman Pontiffs, his predecessors, had rightly called that Order “a good tree planted by the Lord’s right hand in the field of the Church, and bearing continually abundant fruits of righteousness.” He said, too, that he “especially loved the aforementioned Order and the members thereof who unceasingly serve the Lord in the contemplation of divine and lofty things.” Congregation for Religious to be examined. Their tenor is as follows, namely:

THE STATUTES OF THE CARTHUSIAN ORDER CONFORMED TO THE PRESCRIPTIONS OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW

[Here follows the entire text of the Carthusian Statutes]

17. APPROVAL OF THE STATUTES BY THE HOLY SEE

Since, however the Minister General of the Carthusian Order and all those who of right had assembled in General Chapter, humbly prayed us to approve by our Apostolic Authority,

these Statutes inserted above and included in this present Apostolic Constitution, We have determined to accede and consent to their wishes. Therefore, we do approve and confirm by our Apostolic Authority the Statutes of the Carthusian Order corrected and revised as they appear above. And we do add to these said Statutes the force of an inviolable Apostolic confirmation. We do supply and make good all and each defect that may perchance have crept into them.

18. THE POPE EXHORTS CARTHUSIANS TO BE FAITHFUL

We know for certain that the Carthusians have no need of our exhortations to observe for the future and with the greatest zeal these Constitutions which they have constantly and faithfully observed in the past. However, for their encouragement to give them yet another particular proof of our fatherly goodwill towards them, we grant in perpetuity, by these same letters, to all Carthusians who visit their Church and fulfill the other customary conditions, that annually they may gain in the Lord a plenary indulgence of all their faults, on the 8th day of July, the anniversary, so memorable for them, of this new approbation by the Apostolic See, of their Statutes.

19. LEGAL CLAUSES

And thus do We ordain and decree that these present Letters and these Statutes, therein inserted and included shall possess and keep in perpetuity their force, validity and efficacy, and shall receive and obtain their full and entire effect; and that they shall constitute a right of the first order both now and for the future in favor of those whom they concern or may concern in the future. And thus judgments to be given or decisions to be taken must be conformable to them; and any measure that may be taken contrary to them no matter by whom or by what authority, knowingly or not is to be considered henceforth null and void. All things to the contrary notwithstanding, even when worthy of special and individual mention, we will further that to copies and extracts of these Letters, even in print, provided that they be witnessed by some notary public and sealed with the seal of some person of ecclesiastical dignity, there shall be given the same credence as these Letters, were they shown and presented.

Given at Rome at S. Peter's, the 8 day of July 1924, the third year of Our Pontificate.

P. Card. GASPARRI Secretary of State

C. Card. LAURENTI Prefect of the S. Cong. of Religious

Dominic JORIO, Protonotary Apostolic

Vincent BIANCHI-CAGLIESI, Protonotary Apostolic