



The Exordium Cistercii

¹Here begin the Usages of Cistercian monks

Chapter One: ²Of the Departure of the Monks of Cîteaux from Molesme

³It is well known that in the episcopate of Langres there is a monastery, Molesme by name, of the most celebrated renown, and remarkable for monastic observance. From its origin, God's clemency within a short while made it illustrious by the gifts of his grace, and ennobled it with illustrious men; nor did he render it less ample in possessions than resplendent in virtues.

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

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

⁸After many labours, therefore, and exceedingly great difficulties, which all who will to live in Christ must needs suffer, they at length attained their desire and arrived at Cîteaux at that time a place of horror and of vast solitude. ⁹But judging that the harshness of the place was not at variance with the strict purpose they had already conceived in mind, the soldiers of Christ held the place as truly prepared for them by God: a place as agreeable as their purpose was dear.

Chapter Two: ¹Of the Origins of the Monastery of Cîteaux

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

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

⁵This done, and through the solicitude and industry of the new father, the New Monastery in a short while made no little progress – God working withal – in its holy way of life; it shone in popular esteem, it grew in necessary resources. ⁶But the man of God, Alberic, who for nine years had been running there toward the prize of the upward call-and not in vain-in the tenth year laid hold of it.

⁷He was succeeded by Dom Stephen, of English nationality, a most ardent lover and most faithful promoter of religious observance, of poverty, and of the discipline of the Rule. ⁸In his days it truly became manifest how true is what stands written: The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayer. For since the little flock had this alone to lament, the fact that it was little, this alone did they fear, and fear it, I say, well nigh to desperation: that Christ's poor could leave after them no heirs to their poverty; for neighbouring folk, while honouring in them holiness of life, shrank from their austerity; and thus they recoiled from imitating those to whom they were drawing nigh by devotion.

⁹God, for whom it is easy to make great things from small, many things from few, beyond all hope stirred up the heart of many to imitate them, so that in the cell for the testing of novices, counting both clerics as well as laymen – and these, according to the world, noble and powerful – thirty were dwelling together. ¹⁰As a result of this visitation from on high – so sudden, so joyous – the barren one who had borne no offspring now began at last, and not without reason! to rejoice: for many were the children of the desolate.

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

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

of the apostolic seal; it contains in greater detail what we have said, but here we shall touch only briefly on a summary of them.

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