

EXORDIUM PARVUM

1 *Here begin the customs of the Cistercians*

[Prologue]

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

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

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Chapter One

The Origin of the Monastery of Cîteaux

1

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

5

Chapter Two

The Letter of Hugh

1

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

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

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

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

Chapter Three

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Four

1 How that Place Rose to Become an Abbey

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

Chapter Five

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

for the return of Abbot Robert

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

Chapter Six

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

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

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

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

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

7

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

1

Chapter Seven

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

2

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

3

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

6

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

7

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

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

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

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

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

11

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

12

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

13

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

14

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

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

Chapter Eight

1 The commendatory letter of Abbot Robert

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

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

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

Chapter Nine

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

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

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

Chapter Ten

1 **About the Roman Privilege.**

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

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

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

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

Chapter Eleven

1 The Letter of Cardinals John and Benedict

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

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

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

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

Chapter Twelve

1 **The Letter of Hugh of Lyon**

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Thirteen

The Letter of the Bishop of Chalon

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

2

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

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

Chapter Fourteen

The Roman Privilege

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Fifteen

The Institutes of the Monks of Cîteaux who Came from Molesme

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Sixteen

Of Their Sorrow

1

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

Chapter Seventeen

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

1

2

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Eighteen

Of the Abbeys

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

