

## *Exordium Cistercii: The Beginning of Cîteaux*

### early document of the Cistercian Order

#### I. Departure of the Cistercian Monks from Molesme

In the diocese of Langres there lay, as is well known, a monastery by the name of Molesme; it was of great renown and outstanding in religious fervor. Within a short time of its foundation God in his goodness enriched it with the gift of his graces, raised it to honor with the presence of distinguished men, and caused it to be as great in possessions as it was resplendent in virtues. But, because possessions and virtues are not usually steady companions, several members of that holy community, men truly wise and filled with higher aspirations, decided to pursue heavenly studies rather than to be entangled in earthly affairs.

Accordingly, these lovers of virtue soon came to think about that poverty which is fruitful to man. They realized that, although life in that place was a godly and upright life, they observed the Rule they had vowed to keep in a way short of their desire and intention. They spoke amongst themselves and asked one another how they were to fulfill the verse: "I will fulfill my vows to you, vows which I made with my own lips" (Ps 65:13). What more needs to be said? After common deliberation, together with the father of that monastery, Robert of blessed memory, twenty-one monks went out to try to carry out jointly what they had conceived with one spirit.

Eventually, after many labors and extreme difficulties, which all who wish to devote their life to Christ must endure, they reached their goal. They came to Cîteaux, which was then a

#### I. De egressu cisterciensium monachorum de Molismo.

In episcopatu. Lingonensi situm noscitur esse coenobium nomine Molismus, fama celeberrimum, religione conspicuum. Hoc a sui exordio magnis sub brevi tempore divina clementia suae gratiae muneribus illustravit, viris illustribus nobilitavit, nec minus amplum possessionibus quam clarum virtutibus reddidit. 3 Ceterum quia possessionibus virtutibusque diuturna non solet esse societas, hoc quidam ex illa sancta congregatione uiri nimirum sapientes, altius intelligentes, elegerunt potius studiis coelestibus occupari quam terrenis implicare negotiis.

Unde et mox virtutum amatores de paupertate foecunda virorum cogitare coeperunt. Simulque advertentes ibidem etsi sancte honesteque viveretur, minus tamen pro sui desiderio atque proposito, ipsam quam professi fuerant regulam observari. Loquuntur alterutrum qui singulos movet, pariterque inter se tractant qualiter illum versiculum adimpleant : Reddam tibi vota mea quae distinxerunt labia mea. Quid plura? Viginti et unus monachi una cum patre ipsius monasterii, beatae videlicet memoriae Roberto egressi, communi consilio, communi perficere nituntur assensu quod uno spiritu conceperunt.

Igitur post multos labores ac nimias difficultates quas omnes in Christo pie vivere volentes pati necesse est, tandem desiderio potiti Cistercium devenerunt, locum tunc scilicet horroris et

place of horror, a vast wilderness. Realizing that the asperity of the place accorded well with the strict design they had already conceived in their minds, the soldiers of Christ found the place, almost as though divinely prepared, to be as alluring as their design had been dear.

## II. Beginnings of the Monastery of Cîteaux

Thus in the year 1098 of the Incarnation of Our Lord, supported with the counsel and strengthened with the authority of the venerable Hugh, archbishop of the church of Lyons, and at the time legate of the Apostolic See, and of the God-fearing man, Walter, bishop of Chalon, and of Odo, the illustrious duke of Burgundy, these men began to transform the solitude they had found into an abbey; abbot Robert received the care of the monks and the shepherd's staff from the bishop of the diocese; and under him the others vowed stability in that place.

But, after a short time it happened that the same abbot Robert was reclaimed by the monks of Molesme, and was returned to Molesme on the order of Pope Urban II and with the permission and consent of Walter, bishop of Chalon. He was replaced by Alberic, a religious and holy man. For the sake of peace this wise agreement was made between the monasteries and confirmed by the pope: henceforth neither of them would permanently accept the other's monk without a proper recommendation.

Through the solicitude and industry of its new father and with God's generous assistance, the New Monastery thereafter advanced in holiness, excelled in fame, and witnessed the increase of its temporal goods. The man of God, Alberic, who successfully ran his race for nine years, obtained the crown of eternity in the tenth year.

vastae solitudinis. Sed milites Christi loci asperitatem ab arto proposito quod jam animo conceperunt non discedere judicantes, ut vere sibi divinitus praeparatum, tamen gratum habuere locum quam carum propositum.

## II De exordio cisterciensis coenobii.

Anno itaque ab Incarnatione Domini millesimo nonagesimo octavo, venerabilis Hugonis Lugdunensis ecclesiae archiepiscopi, sedis apostolicae tunc Legati, et religiosi viri Walteri Cabilonensis episcopi necnon et clarissimi principis Odonis Burgundiae ducis freti consilio, auctoritate roborati, inventam heremum in abbacia < m > construere coeperunt, praefato < abbate > Roberto ab illius dioecesis episcopo, videlicet cabilonense, suscipiente curam virgamque pastorem, ceteris sub ipso in eodem loco firmantibus stabilitatem.

At vero post non multum temporis factum est ut idem abbas Robertus requirentibus eum monachis Molismensibus, Papae Urbani secundi jussu, Walterii cabilonensis episcopi licentia et assensu, Molismum reduceretur, et Albericus, vir religiosus et sanctus, in ipsius loco substitueretur. Hoc sane inter utramque ecclesiam sequestrae pacis gratia retento, et apostolica auctoritate confirmato, ut ex eo jam tempore neutra illarum utriuslibet monachum ad habitandum sine commendatione regulari susciperet.

Quo facto novum monasterium novi paris sollicitudine et industria, in brevi, non mediocriter Deo cooperante, in sancta conversatione profecit, opinione claruit, rebus necessariis crevit. Sed vir Dei Albericus supernae vocationis bravium. ad quod ibidem per novem annos non in vacuum cucurrit, decimo apprehendit.

He was succeeded by the lord Stephen, an Englishman by nationality, an ardent lover of and staunch champion of religious life, poverty, and regular discipline. In his days the words of Scripture came true: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just and His ears hear their prayer" (Ps 33:16). The little flock voiced its one and only complaint: that it was small in number. As I said, the "poor of Christ" came to fear and to dread almost to the point of despair one thing alone: that they might not be able to leave behind heirs to their poverty. For their neighbors applauded their holy life but abhorred its austerity and thus kept from imitating the men whose fervor they approved. Yet God, who can easily make great things from small ones and many things from a few, beyond all expectation, so aroused the hearts of many to the imitation of these monks that in the cell where the novices are tested, thirty had come to live under the same discipline: clerics as well as laymen, even nobles and men of power in the eyes of the world.

Upon this so sudden and happy heavenly visitation the barren one which had no offspring began, not without reason, to rejoice; "Once forsaken, she now came to have many sons" (Is 54:1). And God did not cease to multiply His people, and to increase their joy, so that within about twelve years the happy mother came to see twenty abbots, drawn from her own sons as well as from the sons of her sons, like olive branches around her table. Indeed she did not think it out of order to follow the example of the holy Father Benedict whose Rule she embraced.

Hence, as soon as the new plantation began to produce offshoots, blessed Father Stephen in his watchful wisdom provided a document of admirable discretion; it served as a trimming knife which was to cut off the outgrowth of division which, if unchecked, could suffocate the fruit of mutual peace. Very

Cui successit domnus Stephanus, homo natione anglicus, religionis, paupertatis disciplinaeque regularis ardentissimus amator, fidelissimus aemulator. In hujus vere diebus verum esse patuit quod scriptum est : Oculi Domini super justos et aures ejus ad preces eorum. Nam cum pusillus grex hoc solurn plangeret quod pusillus esset, hoc solum. inquam metuerent et metuerent pene usque ad desperationem, Christi pauperes suae se non posse relinquere paupertatis heredes, vicinis quippe hominibus vitae quidem in eis honorantibus sanctitatem sed abhorrentibus austeritatem, et ita resilientibus ab illorum imitatione quibus appropinquabant devotione. Deus cui facile est de exiguis magna de paucis facere multa, multorum praeter spem ad ipsorum imitationem excitavit corda, ita ut in cella probandi novitiorum tam clerici quam laici et ipsi secundum saeculum nobiles atque potentes, triginta pariter cohabitarent.

Ex qua caelica visitatione tam subita tam laeta laetari non immerito jam tandem cepit sterilis quae non pariebat, quam multi facti sunt desertae filii. Nec cessavit ei Deus in dies multiplicare gentem magnificare laetitiam, donec tam de suis quam de filiis filiorum suorum viginti infra annos circiter duodecim de solis patribus monasteriorum tamquam novella olivarum in circuitu mensae suae laeta mater conspiceret. Non enim arbitrata est incongruum si sancti patris Benedicti cujus amplectabatur instituta, imitaretur et exempla.

Porro a principio cum novos in ramos novella coepisset pullulare plantatio, venerabilis pater Stephanus sagacitate pervigili mirae providerat discretionis scriptum, tamquam putationis ferramentum ad praecidendos videlicet scismatum surculos qui quandoque succrescentes mutuae pacis exorturum praefocare poterant

appropriately, he wished the document to be called a Charter of Charity, for, clearly, its whole content so breathed love that almost nothing else is seen to be treated there than this: “Owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Rom 13:8). This charter, arranged by the same father and confirmed by the aforementioned twenty abbots, was also approved by apostolic authority. It contains in greater detail those things which we have said... .

fructum. Unde et scriptum illud cartam caritatis competenter voluit nominari, quod ea tantum quae sunt caritatis tota ej us series redoleat, ita ut pene nil aliud ubique sui pro sequi videatur, quarn nemini quicquam debeatis nisi ut invicern diligatis. Quae quidem carta sicut ab eodern patre digesta et a prefatis viginti abbatibus confirmata sigilli quoque apostolici auctoritate munita est largius continet ea quae diximus... .