

THE CONSTITUTIONS (1575)  
OF THE CAPUCHIN FRIARS MINOR

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, here begin the Constitutions of the Friars Minor, called Capuchins:

So that our Order, as the Vineyard of the Most High Son of God, may be confirmed in the spiritual observance of the Seraphic Rule, the General Chapter held at our friary of Santa Euphemia in Rome in the year 1536 saw fit to draw up certain statutes which might serve as a fence to protect the said Rule, so that like the invincible tower of David it might protect itself against all that is hostile to the living spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and keep out all relaxations opposed to the fervent zeal of our Father Saint Francis.

But since the sacred Council of Trent, and the Supreme Pontiff, have issued Decrees which it was necessary to insert into these Ordinances of ours, the Reverend Father General and Definitors have thought fit, with the consent of the whole Chapter, held in Rome in the year 1575, to reprint the same Statutes with the additions required by the aforesaid Decrees of the Council and of the Supreme Pontiff.

These statutes are as follows:

**CHAPTER ONE**

1. The teaching of the Gospel, completely clear, supremely perfect and divine, brought down to us from heaven by the supremely wise Son of God, preached by Him in word and deed and moreover authenticated by His Father at the river Jordan and in glory on Mount Tabor, when he said: 'This is my beloved Son; listen to Him', perfectly points out the straight path that leads to God. Therefore all are obliged to keep and observe it, particularly Christians who, by baptism, have promised to do so. All the more is this true of us Lesser Brothers, for our Father expressly mentions observance of the Holy Gospel at the beginning and end of his Rule. Indeed, his Rule is nothing other than the marrow of the Gospel, which is why he says in his Testament that God revealed to him that he should live according to its model.

Therefore, in order that the brothers may always have our Saviour's teaching and life before the eyes of their mind, and like the virgin Cecilia may always bear the holy Gospel in their inmost hearts, we ordain that every morning except Friday, in all our houses, a passage from the holy Gospel be read at table.

2. And since the Rule of St Francis is like a clear mirror reflecting evangelical perfection, we direct that each Friday in all our houses it be read distinctly, with due reverence and devotion, so that being impressed on our minds it may be the better observed. On other days, after the Gospel, let some spiritual work be read during the meal, so that not only the body, but much more so the spirit may be fed, and the brothers be encouraged to follow Christ crucified.

3. Since it was the desire, not only of our Father Francis but of Christ our Lord that the Rule be observed simply, literally and without gloss, as our first fathers observed it, and since our Rule is very clear, (so that it may be observed more clearly), we renounce, now and for ever in the future, all privileges and explanations which

relax it, for these wrest the Rule from its pure observance and from the merciful, just and holy intentions of Christ our Lord, who spoke in St Francis. As the single living commentary on our Rule we accept the declarations of the Supreme Pontiffs, especially Nicholas III and Clement V, and the holy life, teaching and example of our Father St Francis.

4. In order that we, as true and legitimate sons of Jesus Christ our Father and Lord, begotten again by Him in St Francis, may have a share in His inheritance, we exhort everyone to observe the Testament made by our Father when, near to his blessed death and adorned with the sacred stigmata, full of fervour and the Holy Spirit, he ardently desired our salvation. This we accept as a spiritual commentary and explanation of the Rule, since he wrote it in order to ensure that the Rule we had promised would be the better observed in a more Catholic manner.

5. And since we are true sons of St Francis only in so far as we imitate his example, as our Saviour said to the Jews: "*If you are children of Abraham, do as Abraham did*", we too, if we are sons of St Francis, should do as he did. We therefore call upon every brother to strive to imitate our Father, who has been given to us as our guide, model and example. Indeed, they should imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in him, not only in the Rule and Testament, but also in all his fervent words and divine deeds. For this reason they shall frequently read his life and that of his blessed companions.

6. Considering that our holy Father was so absorbed in the contemplation of the divine that he saw God in every creature, especially in humanity, chiefly in Christians, but especially in priests and in a very special way in the Supreme Pontiff, who is the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth and head of the whole Church Militant, he therefore wished all his brothers, according to the Apostle's teaching, to be subject to God in every human creature, out of love for Him who, being God, humbled Himself so much for us. For this reason he called them lesser brothers, so that they should consider themselves lower than everyone else, and that not only in their hearts, but that being invited to the marriage feast of the most holy Bridegroom Jesus Christ, they should try to stand in the lowest place, according to his own advice and example. Therefore, in order to conform ourselves to our humble, crucified Lord, who came in order to serve us and became obedient even to the harsh death of the cross, we earnestly exhort every brother, as our Father wished, always to have due reverence for all priests, and to obey in all humility the Supreme Pontiff, who is the chief Father of all Christians, and to show fitting honour to all other Catholic Prelates. Indeed, they should be subject to every creature, for this shows us God's way, since we know that the more lowly the person we obey for love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more splendid our obedience and the more pleasing it is to God.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

7. We desire that our Order should constantly increase in virtue and spiritual perfection, rather than in numbers, and we know what the Infallible Truth says: "Many are called, but few are chosen". We are also aware, as our Father foretold when near to his death, that nothing is a greater hindrance to the pure observance of the Rule than a multitude of useless and self-indulgent brothers. We therefore order that the Vicars carefully enquire into the condition and qualities (of prospective brothers) before admitting them, even if they are religious from any other Order. They must meet the following conditions:

First, the candidate must be Catholic, in other words, he must firmly believe everything the Holy Roman Church holds and teaches.

He must be healthy in mind and body, and it must be understood that he comes with a good intention in order to serve God.

He must be of good repute: but those of evil reputation, such as convicted heretics or abominable sinners, or anyone who has been in prison or suffered public flogging or similar penalties, are not to be admitted. Similarly, anyone who has committed a scandalous crime such as publishing a notorious pamphlet, or treason, or other such, shall not be admitted.

Anyone with a father, mother or poor children who would be unable to live without him, shall not be admitted.

Anyone with debts shall similarly not be admitted until he has settled them if he is able, or has been acquitted by his creditor.

In the case of one who is married, in a consummated marriage, the Rule is to be observed.

One who was formerly a novice with us may only be received by the Vicar of the same province which he left, provided he has committed no scandal and has not left more than once.

No-one shall be admitted who has apostatised from any other religious Order.

No young man shall ordinarily be admitted as a cleric unless he is over 17 years old. But if he has a boyish face he shall not be admitted even if he is over 17. Laybrothers shall ordinarily be at least 19. Nor shall anyone be received over the age of 45, unless this would be greatly edifying to the people.

And should any Vicar admit any Novice into the Order contrarily to these instructions, we order him to take a discipline in the refectory at the subsequent Chapter.

If anyone infected with leprosy, venereal disease, falling sickness or other contagious or incurable disease, applies for admission and, when questioned, fails to mention the fact, we declare that the Order is not bound to keep him. The same applies to apostates from our Order when they return to us and are found to be infected with any of the above-mentioned diseases. These are to be sent away by all means, and no Prelate shall dare to admit them against the present statute, under pain of the penalty mentioned above.

8. We further order that those who are to be received into our life, before they are clothed, shall be tested in one of our houses for a few days, in all the observances of the brothers, so that their good will may be plainly seen and they may embrace so great an undertaking with greater enlightenment, maturity and deliberation. This applies also to religious who wish to enter our life. Moreover, we exhort the Vicars that when they receive such persons into the Order they consult the more discerning brothers living in the place where (the candidates) are.

9. Since Christ our teacher, in his great wisdom, told the young man who showed he desired to be saved, that if he wished to become His disciple he should first go and sell all that he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor, and then come and follow him. His imitator, Francis, not only observed that counsel and taught it by example, both in himself and in those he received, but also wrote it into his Rule. In order therefore to conform ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ and our Seraphic Father, we order that before receiving them, the Vicars shall address to them the words of the holy Gospel, as the Rule directs, that they go and sell all their goods and freely give them to the poor, if they can, so that they may dedicate themselves completely to the worship of God for ever, with greater peace of mind and resolution.

And the brothers, fleeing all occasion of involvement in the distribution of their property, shall remain single minded in the peace of the Lord, without interfering.

But if they have not given away their own possessions before entering the Order, they shall not be permitted to do so after taking the habit, before the time laid down by the Council of Trent, with the conditions contained in the Chapter *Nulla quoque renuntiatio*. However, this is not intended to prevent the Novices from making a will should they wish to do so, as declared by Pope Pius V and the Congregation appointed for the purpose.

We further order that the clothing of the Novices coming from the world shall be kept until their profession; likewise those of religious who persevere. The clothes of seculars are to be given to the poor by their own hand if they are able, or else with their consent. The clothing of religious shall be disposed of directly by the Vicars, or through the medium of some spiritual person.

10. And lest we should incur the reproach the most Holy Christ uttered against the scribes and pharisees: "Alas to you, who travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when you have him, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are", we lay down that in every Province the novices are to be placed in one or two houses well suited for the spiritual life, designated for the purpose by the Chapter.

11. They shall be given Masters who are mature, experienced and enlightened in the ways of God. These shall take great care to teach them not only the ceremonies but the spiritual things necessary for the perfect imitation of Christ, our light, our way, our truth and our life. By word and example they shall show them in what the life of a perfect Christian and a true lesser brother consists.

12. They shall not be received to profession unless they are fully acquainted with what they are to profess and observe. For this reason, during their novitiate year the Masters shall take care to make them learn the entire Rule by heart, and teach them the commandments and counsels of the Rule, and the admonitions given to us by our Seraphic Father, showing them what was the intention of our most holy Father concerning the observance of the Rule, so that by the time the year is over they may be fully acquainted with their future obligations.

Those who come to us from the Conventual Fathers, and from the Zoccolanti, shall make the probationary year and afterwards make profession.

And in order that the novices may in peace, recollection and silence be the more strengthened in spirit, we order that no-one except the Father Guardian and their Master is to speak at length with them. No-one is to enter their cells, nor they the cells of others, without special permission of the Master.

13. In order that they may better learn to bear the yoke of the Lord, we order that after profession they shall remain under the discipline of a Master at least for three years. Their Guardian shall be their Master, making them observe what novices observe. They shall also say their fault each day, and take the discipline every Friday in the refectory, unless they are on occasion dispensed from it for a reasonable cause. In this way they will not easily lose the newly-acquired spirit, but rather grow gradually stronger and more deeply rooted in the love of Christ, our Lord and God.

14. Since some Doctors maintain that novices who make profession with the due dispositions are restored to their baptismal innocence, we order that, in order to clothe themselves in the new nature, they carefully prepare themselves for profession

by confession, communion and humble and devout prayer, having previously made a general confession on entry into religious life.

15. In receiving the said novices, both into the Order and to profession, the customary rites and ceremonies approved in our Order are to be used. No novice is to be received without consultation with the majority of the brothers who have lived with him in that place for four months continuously or thereabouts. Moreover, within that period, the Vicars shall not transfer a novice who is close to making profession from the place where he made his novitiate. If however a transfer becomes necessary, or if it happens that the family is transferred from that place after a Chapter, the vote is to be taken before the moves take place. The young brothers shall not have a vote in the reception of novices to profession, until they have been three years in religious life, but they shall only give their opinion.

16. Furthermore, we order that the fact of profession be written down, with the age of the one making profession, in his own hand if he is able to write. If not, it shall be written down by others, with witnesses present, and the document shall be carefully kept. It shall also be written by the Father Vicar General in a book which each Vicar will take care to have as a register of professions. And no novice shall be received to profession as a cleric, if he cannot say the office by himself.

17. Since it was not without good reason that our blessed Saviour commended his great Precursor John the Baptist's austerity in clothing, when he said: "Those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces", we order that the brothers, who have chosen to be menials in the house of the Lord, shall wear the most abject, austere, coarse and despised clothes conveniently available in the provinces where they live. Let them remember that the sack-cloth with which our Father wanted us to patch our clothing, and the cords he wished us to use to gird ourselves, are ill-suited to fine clothing and to the rich ones of the world.

The General Chapter once again makes a heartfelt exhortation to all the brothers, if they can, to be content with one habit, as our holy Father in his Testament specified about himself when he said: "We were content with one tunic, patched inside and out". Nevertheless, if a brother is weak he is allowed the favour of a second tunic according to the Rule. Such brothers, however, shall not be allowed a mantle without necessity and the permission of their Superior, since we know that for a healthy brother to use three items of clothing is an obvious sign of a lax spirit.

18. Desiring above all that holy poverty - so loved by the Son of God and bequeathed to us as a mother by Him and by our blessed Father - may shine forth in everything we use, we order that mantles shall not extend beyond the tips of the fingers, and shall be without a hood, except when travelling. Nor shall they be worn without necessity. The habit shall be no more than ankle-length, eleven palms wide, or twelve for the corpulent; the sleeves no wider than is necessary to pass the arms in and out, and long enough to reach to the middle of the hands, or little more. The tunics shall be very coarse, nine or ten palms wide and at least half a palm shorter than the habit. The hood shall be square, like those of our Father St Francis and his companions, which still exist as relics. In addition, as is apparent in ancient pictures and described in the "Book of Conformity", our habit shall have the shape of a cross, to remind us that we are totally dead to the world, and the world to us. Our cincture shall be a rough rope, very cheap and thick with simple knots and without any singularity, so that being despised by the world we may have all the more occasion to mortify ourselves. The brothers shall not wear caps or hats, or keep two of anything, or anything superfluous.

19. In each of our houses there shall be a small room where the clothes of the community are kept by a brother appointed for the purpose, and he shall keep them clean and mended for the needs of the poor brothers who, having used them according to their needs, shall return them clean with humble thanks.

20. In order that our beds may in some way resemble his, who when on earth said: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head", (so that we may become as much as possible watchful and ready for prayer, and more like our blessed Father, whose bed was often the bare ground), and like Jesus Christ, holiest of the saints, who had such a bed in the harsh wilderness, we order that no brother, unless he is ill or very weak, shall sleep on anything but bare boards or straw covered with a mat or a piece of rough sacking, and not on cloaks.

21. In addition, we order that, after the example of Our Lord, the young brothers and others who can do so shall go barefoot as a sign of humility, poverty and the mortification of sensuality, and to give good example to their neighbour. If they cannot do so let them follow the teaching of the Gospel and wear sandals with the permission of their superior, but these shall be simple, plain, cheap and poor, without any ornamentation.

22. In order to rise to the summit of most exalted Poverty, our beloved mother and Queen, Spouse of the Son of God and of our glorious Father Francis, we earnestly exhort all our brothers not to be attached to anything on earth, but in heaven, using the base things of this world sparingly as if compelled by human frailty. They should consider themselves rich with the wealth of our poverty, and be content to possess Christ crucified, with two handkerchiefs and two undergarments for necessary use. Let them remember what our blessed Father used to say: "A lesser brother should be nothing other than a mirror of every virtue, and chiefly of poverty."

23. The tonsure shall be cut every twenty days or every month, with scissors. They shall not have basins, but only one razor for bloodletting, and following the example of Christ and of all our ancient holy Fathers the beard shall be worn, since it is manly, natural, austere and despised. But they shall not to trim it, as the canon says.

### ***CHAPTER THREE***

24. Our Seraphic Father, thoroughly Catholic, apostolic and godly, always held the Roman Church in special veneration, as the judge and mother of all other Churches. Hence he laid down in the Rule that the clerics should say the office according to the custom of the Holy Roman Church, and in his Testament forbade them to alter it in any way. We therefore order that the brothers, united in spirit under the same standard and called to the same end, shall observe the same rites as those used by the Holy Roman Church as regards the Missal, Breviary and Calendar.

Both cleric and lay brothers shall say the five Offices for the dead for our benefactors, according to ancient custom, and in choir the night office of the dead shall be said every month during the year. In Advent and Lent it shall be said every week without fail. During Lent, and on the days appointed according to the rubrics

of the Breviary, the gradual psalms and the seven penitential psalms shall be recited with the Litanies. We exhort everyone to remember to pray often for all the souls of the faithful departed, since our Seraphic Father has a special admonition about this in the Rule. This is true especially for our benefactors, towards whom we have a greater obligation.

Clerics and priests who are not very literate should prepare what they have to read publicly at Mass and the Divine Office, lest by failing in respect for the things of God they disturb their hearers and provoke the holy angels, who stand before God to sing His praises.

25. At Mass and Divine Office only the words contained in the missals and breviaries shall be said, with the correct ceremonies. When incense is used, a cleric shall serve the Mass.

26. We exhort priests that, when celebrating Mass, they do not allow the eye of their mind to turn towards human favour or glory or anything temporal, but with a simple, pure and clean heart they shall celebrate out of pure charity, with the most humble faith and devotion, seeking only the glory of God. Let them prepare themselves with as much care as their frailty will permit, since sacred Scripture denounces as accursed anyone who performs this work of God negligently. And since this act above all others pertains to God, He is highly displeased when it is performed irreverently. Neither should they desire any earthly reward for celebrating, but follow the example of Christ the High Priest, who without any temporal advantage offered Himself for us on the painful cross. Let them rather realise that they have acquired a greater obligation in the sight of God.

We exhort all brothers who attend the celebrations of priests to do so with the utmost reverence; their attitude in the presence of such a sublime mystery should be like that of the angels before the face of God. They too should celebrate and communicate spiritually together with the priest, offering so great a sacrifice to God in union with them.

Since the celebration of Mass is a ministry of the greatest importance, we order that no cleric be promoted to the subdiaconate before the age of twenty two, to the diaconate before twenty three, or to the priesthood before he is twenty-five years of age, in accordance with the Decree of the Council of Trent, and those who have been ordained shall not say Mass until they have reached that age. Nor shall any cleric be ordained to the priesthood unless, in addition to a good spirit, he also has sufficient intelligence to enable him to pronounce and understand the words he utters when celebrating. Nor shall he be ordained without the permission of the Reverend Father General unless he has been four years in the religious life, and anyone who is ordained before that time shall be automatically suspended, and likewise not be promoted.

And in all their Masses and prayers they shall remember our benefactors - the living as well as the dead - imploring God to reward them abundantly in the present and future life.

27. On hearing the first sound of the bell for the Divine Office, the clerics and priests not legitimately prevented shall make their way to the choir as quickly as they can to prepare their hearts for the Lord. There, with devotion, composure, mortification, recollection and silence, they shall remember that they are in the

presence of God, about to engage in the angelic function of singing the praises of God.

28. The Divine Office, and that of Our Lady, shall be said with all due devotion, attention, gravity, uniformity of voice and harmony of mind, without embellishments or harmonies and with proper pauses, with the voice pitched neither too high nor too low, but moderately. The brothers shall endeavour to sing to God more with their hearts than with their lips, so that none shall be able to say to us what our Saviour said to the Jews: "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me".

29. The lay brothers shall assemble at the beginning of Vespers, Compline and Matins, and for the *Te Deum Laudamus*. When the communal preparation is over and the Office commences they may retire into some place to suit their devotion, and say the Our Fathers laid down by the Rule. On all festivals the clerics and lay brothers who are not prevented for a reasonable cause shall assist at Vespers and at as many Masses as they can. And every day they shall try, if possible, to attend the conventual Mass.

30. In addition, to avoid anything that could offend the most sublime poverty, spiritual peace and tranquil humility, and in order to maintain peace between ourselves and other clerics and priests, and to avoid anything that might in time leave a blemish on our Order, we order that the dead shall not be buried in our places, except in the case of someone too poor to find someone to bury him, in which case he may be received with permission of the Ordinary.

31. No burials, either of seculars or of our brothers, shall be performed in our places. Our brothers shall be buried in some becoming place close to the church. Where possible a chapel shall be build adjacent to it for this purpose, or else near to the church, with an altar on which to say Mass and a place to bury the brothers who die there.

When the brothers visit sick seculars, they shall take care not to induce them to be buried in our places, and if they request it they shall in no way be allowed. Lest such a new practice cause scandal to those ignorant of the good reasons for it, they should be informed and helped to understand.

32. When one of our brothers dies, the others shall be careful to commend his soul to God with devout charity. And in the province where he dies, each priest shall say Mass for him, the clerics shall say Matins for the Dead and the lay brothers one hundred Our Fathers. And every week each priest shall say one Mass or a collect for our deceased brothers.

33. Since holy prayer is our spiritual mistress, the mother and nurse of all true virtue, in order that the spirit of devotion should, of all things, never fail, but continually burn on the sacred altar of our heart and be enkindled more and more, as our good Father wished, we order that, whilst a good devout brother should always pray inwardly, nevertheless at least two special hours be set aside for prayer, one after Compline during the whole year, the other from Easter until the Nativity of Our Lady immediately after None, except on fast days when it shall be after Sext, and from the Nativity of Our Lady until Easter, after Matins.

34. Let the brothers remember that prayer is nothing other than speaking to God with the heart. Consequently, he does not pray who speaks to God only with his lips. Therefore, whenever possible, there must be room not just for vocal prayer but



also mental prayer, and according to the teaching of Christ, our highest teacher, let the brothers worship the Eternal Father in spirit and truth, taking great care to enlighten their minds and enkindle their affections, far more than to utter words. Before the ordinary prayer, after None or Matins, and on fast days after Sext, they shall recite the litanies, calling upon the Saints to pray for us. No other Offices shall be added in choir except that of Our Lady, so that the brothers have more time to devote to private mental and prayer, which is far more fruitful than vocal prayer alone.

35. Since our Father, Catholic as he was, ordered at the beginning and end of his Rule that special reverence be paid to the Pope as Vicar of Christ our Lord and God on earth, as well as to other Prelates and priests, we order that in addition to the ordinary prayers each friar, during his private prayers, shall pray the divine Goodness for the welfare of the Church Militant and for His Holiness, that he may be given the grace to see clearly, to will effectively and to carry out successfully everything that is to the glory and honour of the divine Majesty, the salvation of the Christian people and the conversion of unbelievers. They shall do the same for all reverend Cardinals, Bishops and Prelates who are subject to the Supreme Pontiff: for His Highness the Emperor, for all Kings and Christian Princes, and for all people, especially for those to whom we are most indebted.

36. In addition, since silence is the safeguard of the religious spirit, and since according to St James the religion of the man who does not refrain his tongue is vain, we order that, as far as our human frailty allows we shall observe evangelical silence, knowing, as the Divine Truth said, that we shall have to give account on the last day for every idle word. So great is the abundance of divine grace towards us that it is no small fault for a brother dedicated to praising God to speak unnecessarily of worldly things.

37. As regards regular silence, it shall be perpetual in the church and in the dormitory. In these places it shall not be lawful to speak without necessity, and then only in a low voice and briefly. In the refectory silence shall be kept from the first sign given at table until grace has been said. And in general, from Easter onwards the signal shall be given for silence everywhere from the beginning of evening prayer. After lunch at a suitable time silence shall be observed by all until the prayer of None has been said, and likewise from midnight until the bell for Prime the following morning. Anyone breaking the silence is to recite five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys in the refectory with arms extended in the form of a cross. Always and everywhere the brothers shall accustom themselves to speaking in a religious manner, without making a noise, for such a fault is unbecoming in religious.

38. We order that the brothers shall not go outside the house alone, but with a companion, after the example of the holy disciples of the Eternal Shepherd. When necessary they shall correct one another according to the Gospel, and if they do not amend, shall report each other's faults to their Prelate. And they shall not travel without their Prelate's obedience, sealed with the seal of the Province or of the house. For this purpose each of our houses shall not fail to have a seal, according to the Order's ancient tradition. They shall not part company on the way, nor quarrel, but with all humility and charity, following the example of Christ the blessed one, let each strive to serve and obey his companion, considering him as a brother in Christ.

39. We order that in the lands where our houses are, no brother shall dare to go and conduct any kind of business without first being presented to the Father Guardian or else to the Vicar of that place. And no-one, without his permission, shall

dare to go and eat or sleep in the house of seculars, even of their relatives, and the Prelate is not to give such permission easily.

40. And since our Father tells us in his Testament that God revealed this greeting to him: "The Lord give you peace", we order the brothers to use this gospel form of greeting.

41. Because true lesser brothers should depend on their loving heavenly Father with lively faith, we order that when they are travelling they follow the counsel of Christ and take no provisions of food with them, except in case of real necessity. When they go among people they shall be meek, familiar and devout, not going far from place to place but leaving all care of themselves to God, who feeds not only the animals but also those who constantly offend Him.. They shall not stop to sleep or eat in cities or towns that are near our places, except in case of great necessity.

42. Since delight in worldly feasts easily brings defilement, we order that the brothers are not to attend feasts except in order to preach the word of God, after the example of Christ our only Master who, when invited to a feast did not wish to go, but later went in order to preach. We should remember that, as the Blessed Paul said, we have been made a public spectacle before God, the angels and mankind; and they should strive to live such exemplary lives that God may be glorified through them.

43. Since abstinence, austerity and discipline are praised especially by the saints, and since after the example of Christ our Lord and of St. Francis we have chosen a strict life, the brothers are exhorted to keep the holy Lents that our blessed Father used to keep, although a penitential brother will always fast. They are not to have excessive or superfluous meals, but rather ordinary ones. On Wednesdays, they shall not eat meat.

In order to limit the insatiable desires of the body, no more than one kind of soup shall be served at table. On fast days some cooked or raw salad may be added. And let them remember that, whereas a little suffices to satisfy necessity, nothing can satisfy sensuality.

44. And in order that, according to our holy Saviour's teaching, our hearts are not coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness, but our minds may be clear and our senses mortified, we order that wine shall not be served at table unless mixed with a reasonable amount of water. Even then, it ought to appear a sensual delight, when we remember that, according to St Bonaventure, our Father St Francis did not dare drink enough water to quench his thirst, because he said it was difficult to satisfy necessity without giving in to sensuality. It will seem delightful to them if they remember that Our Lord Jesus Christ was denied water on the cross, and He was given wine mixed with myrrh, or vinegar and gall. And St Jerome writes that in his day even the sick monks would drink cold water and to eat anything cooked was considered sensual.

45. No special treatment shall be given at table, except to sick, travelling, aged or very weak brothers, And if any brother wishes to abstain from wine, meat, eggs or other foods, or to fast more often, his Prelate shall not prevent him if he sees that it will do him no harm, but rather encourage him, provided he eats at table with the others. As a sign of poverty, tablecloths are not to be used, but only a small napkin for each brother. .

They shall be careful not to allow any secular person to eat in the refectory with the brothers, except when this cannot be avoided without giving grave offence.

46. Since some of the ancient patriarchs, through their hospitality, merited the privilege of entertaining angels, we order that in each place a brother be appointed to welcome strangers with great care and with all Christian charity. Following the example of the humble Son of God, he shall wash their feet, with all the brothers assembling for this act of charity, reciting as they do so some devout hymn or psalm, and always considering themselves as useless servants, while doing everything they possibly can.

47. In order that we may run more freely along the way of the divine commandments, no animal for riding shall be kept in any of our houses. However, in case of need, according to the example of Christ and His imitator Francis, it is permissible to ride a donkey, if one can be had. In this way our lives will always preach the humble Christ crucified. If anyone does ride without such manifest necessity he shall eat bread and water on the ground for five times, more or less, as the Vicar shall decide depending on the gravity of the excess.

48. In order that our body may not rebel against the spirit but obey the spirit in all things, and in memory of the bitter passion of our sweet Saviour, we order that the customary disciplines, namely on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, shall not be omitted even on major feasts. The discipline shall be taken after Matins, except when it is very cold, in which case it shall be done in the evening. During Holy Week the discipline shall be taken every night. And the brothers, while they discipline themselves, shall think with compassionate hearts of the sweet Christ, the innocent Son of God, bound to the pillar, and shall strive to experience at least some part of his cruel sufferings. And after the *Salve Regina* they shall say five devout prayers.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

49. Our Father St Francis, aware of the apostolic teaching that avarice is the root of all evil, and wishing to eradicate it completely from the hearts of his sons, commanded them in the Rule that they on no account receive money, either by themselves or through intermediaries. He repeated this three times in the Rule, the better to imprint on our minds something which was so close to his own heart. Our Lord also said in the Gospel: "Beware of all covetousness". Therefore, desiring to carry out our Father's devout intention fully and completely, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit, we order that the brothers shall in no way have a procurator or any other person - by whatever name he may be called - to keep or receive coin or money on behalf of the brothers or at their instigation or request, or in their name, for any cause whatsoever. Our Procurator and Advocate is to be Christ our Lord and God, our defender and helper his sweet Mother, and all the Angels and Saints our spiritual friends.

Therefore the Guardians shall make sure to forbid our building supervisors, once the buildings are completed, to receive more money at the request of the brothers.

50. Since sublime poverty was the beloved spouse of Christ the Son of God, and greatly loved by our Father St Francis, the brothers should remember that they cannot injure her without greatly displeasing God, and those who offend her offend the apple of His eye. Our Seraphic Father used to say that his true brothers ought to

value money no more than dust, in fact that they should flee from it with horror as from a poisonous snake.

How often our loving and zealous Father, foreseeing in spirit that many brothers would abandon this pearl of the Gospel and would become lax by accepting legacies, inheritances and superfluous alms, wept over their downfall, saying that any brother who had more regard for money than for mud was on the road to perdition.

51. Experience clearly shows us all that as soon as a brother drives away holy poverty from himself, he at once falls into every other abominable vice. Let the brothers therefore strive to follow the example of Christ and His beloved Mother, to be poor in the things of this world, so that they may be rich in divine grace, in holy virtues and heavenly wealth. In any case they shall take care, when visiting a sick person, not to induce him, directly or indirectly, to leave us any temporal thing. Indeed, should he wish to do so he shall not be allowed, but dissuaded as far as they can do so fairly, knowing that both riches and poverty cannot be possessed at the same time. They shall not accept legacies contrary to the explanations of the Rule given by Nicholas III and Clement V.

52. As far as recourse to spiritual friends is concerned, in order to possess this treasure of poverty more securely we forbid the brothers to have any such recourse, even for necessary things when these can be conveniently procured in some other way permitted by the Rule. And in order to be less of a burden to our friends, no brother shall cause anything of significant value to be bought, nor any satisfaction made, without the permission of his Provincial Vicar. Recourse (to spiritual friends) is allowed, however, for things that are truly necessary and that cannot be obtained by other means, but always with the permission of the superiors, so that in every case of recourse there is real necessity and due permission.

53. And since we have been called to this life to mortify the outward man and quicken the inward man and the spirit, we exhort the brothers to become accustomed to suffer the want of earthly things, after the example of Christ, who, though Lord of all, chose to be poor and to suffer for our sakes.

54. Let the brothers beware of the noon-day devil who transforms himself into an angel of light. This happens when the world, out of devotion to us, flatters and pampers us with worldly wealth and honours. This has often been the cause of many evils in religion. Nor shall they wish to be counted among the false poor, who, in the words of St Bernard, wish to be poor in such a way that they lack nothing.

They should remember that gospel poverty consists in not having affection for earthly things, in using the things of this world most sparingly and as though forced by necessity, and as a way of glorifying God, whom we should recognise as the source of everything.

## ***CHAPTER FIVE***

55. Mindful that our ultimate end is God alone, to whom each of us should tend and aspire to be transformed into Him, we exhort all the brothers to turn their every thought and all their intentions and desires towards this end, with every possible yearning of love, so that with all our hearts and all our mind, soul, power and

strength, with actual, continuous, intense and pure love, we may unite ourselves to our supremely good Father.

56. But since it is impossible to reach the end without the means, let each one strive to lay aside as useless and harmful everything which hinders or prevents us from walking in the way of salvation. Let them not be concerned about irrelevant matters, but choose rather those things that are most useful or necessary for our journey to God, such as sublime poverty, spotless chastity and humble obedience, together with the other evangelical virtues which the Son of God taught us by word and by His own example and that of His saints.

57. But it is difficult for man to have his mind always raised up to God. Therefore we order that the brothers, when not engaged in spiritual exercises, shall do some honest manual work. This will avoid to avoid idleness, the root of all evil, make us less burdensome to the world and give good example to our neighbour. In this matter we wish to follow the example of the chosen vessel Paul, whose preaching was his work, and that of many other holy Fathers, to observe the admonition given in the Rule, and conform to the will of our Father St Francis expressed in his Testament. However, during that time, as far as human frailty allows, they shall not fail to occupy their minds in some spiritual meditation. For this reason, while working they shall either speak of God in softly and humbly, or read some spiritual book. And all shall either listen with great modesty and charity, or else keep silent

58. The brothers shall take care not to make their work their sole aim, or to set their hearts on it or become so engrossed in it that the spirit, to which everything should be subservient, is extinguished or lessened or hindered. With their eyes fixed always on God, let them take the highest and shortest road, so that the labour imposed on man by God and accepted and commended by the saints as a means of preserving recollection, may not become an occasion of distraction and laxity for them.

59. But since, as St Bernard writes, nothing is more precious than time, though today it is reckoned worthless, and since he also says that we shall be rigorously examined as to how we have spent our time, we beg and exhort all our brothers never to be idle or to spend their time doing things of little or no importance, or speaking vain and useless words. Let them always remember that fearful sentence in the mouth of unutterable truth, that we shall have to give account on the day of judgement for every vain word we utter. Rather let them spend all this precious time acquiring the kingdom of heaven in praiseworthy, honest and useful exercises, whether spiritual or corporal, for the glory and honour of the Divine Majesty and the edification of our neighbours, both religious and secular.

60. We forbid all the brothers to practice any act of medicine outside the Order, nor shall they as doctors prescribe any syrup or medicine, draw blood or perform any similar medical practice. Anyone who goes against this is to be severely punished by his Provincial Vicar.

## ***CHAPTER SIX***

61. Contemplating the sublime poverty of Christ, the King of heaven and earth, who at His birth could not even find a small space at the inn; who during His lifetime lodged as a pilgrim in the houses of others, and who at His death had nowhere to lay

His head; and considering further that in all other things He was most poor, our Seraphic Father Francis, wishing to imitate and follow Him closely, forbade his brothers to have anything of their own, so that unencumbered, like pilgrims on earth and citizens of heaven, they might run with spiritual fervour on their journey to God.

Therefore we, wishing to follow such a worthy example of Christ our leader, and in reality to observe the seraphic precept of celestial poverty, we declare and determine that we have no jurisdiction, dominion, ownership, legal possession, usufruct or legal use of anything at all, even of the things we use of necessity, or of the places where we live, in such a way that the true, full owners can send us away whenever they wish, and take back anything that belongs to them.

62. Therefore we order that when the brothers wish to establish a new house, according to the teaching of St Francis they shall first go to the Bishop, or to his Vicar, and ask permission to take that place in his diocese. When the permission has been obtained, and with his blessing, they shall go to the civil authorities or to the owner and ask for the loan of a house or a piece of land to build on. Or else they should wait until the authorities or the owner ask them to take a house in their territory.

63. They shall be careful not to accept any place except with the express protest that they must be able to leave the place whenever this is necessary for the pure observance of the Rule we have promised. In this way, should they leave a place no scandal will ensue.

64. Since, following the example of the Patriarchs of old, we should live in humble and poor places, we exhort the brothers to remember the words of our Seraphic Father in his Testament, where he forbids them on any account to accept churches or houses built for them, unless they are in keeping with the highest poverty.

Still less, obviously, should the brothers themselves build sumptuous buildings, or allow them to be built. Lesser brothers must not, in order to please the world, displease God, abuse the Rule and scandalise their neighbours by offending against the gospel poverty they have promised to observe. There should be a big difference between the palatial residences of the rich, and the small dwellings of poor mendicant pilgrims and penitents. Therefore we order that no place shall be accepted or built, or allowed to be built, whether by us or by others, if it is not in accordance with the most high and holy poverty we have vowed in the Rule to observe.

65. Therefore, for this purpose a small model has been constructed, and all the houses of the Order are to be built in accordance with it. The cells shall not exceed nine palms in length and width, and ten in height. The doors shall be seven palms high, and two-and-a-half palms wide. The windows shall be two-and-a-half palms high, and one-and-a-half palms wide. The dormitory corridor shall be six palms in width, and the height of the refectory from floor to ceiling, either in wood or brick, shall not exceed thirteen palms. But where the air is very bad, it can be up to fourteen palms high. Similarly, the other offices shall be small, poor, humble and low, so that everything preaches humility, poverty and contempt for the world. And since palms are not all of the same size, the measure of half a palm has been added at the end of this book, and all our buildings and our clothing shall be measured in accordance with it. Our churches shall be small and poor, but devotional, simple and very clean. We should not want to have big churches so as to be able to preach in them, for as our Father used to say, we give better example by preaching in the churches of others than in our own, especially if by having them we offend against holy poverty.

66. Again, in order to avoid whatever might obscure the splendour of poverty, we order that the brothers who have been entrusted by the Chapter or by their Provincial Vicar with responsibility for buildings, are to be diligent and well able to enjoin and observe the poor form and measurements of the prescribed model. Any significant and unnecessary excess will be a weight on their conscience. Let them take as their models the small houses of the poor, not the large palaces of the rich.

And all the brothers shall strive to give manual assistance, with all humility, peace and charity, whenever they are ordered to do so. Otherwise we expressly forbid the brothers to interfere in having money spent on those buildings. They should leave such concerns to those in charge of the buildings, but pointing out to them humbly and charitably any disorder or superfluous expense of which they may be aware.

67. To avoid all disturbance no place shall be accepted or abandoned, built or destroyed without permission of the provincial Chapter and of the Reverend Father General.

And in order to avoid mistakes, either in the choice of sites, or by making the rooms larger than the model and measurements given above, we order that when it comes to choosing a place, the Chapter shall elect four of the best, most suitable and zealous brothers in the Province, who shall have the task of going, together with the Father Vicar, to take possession of the site where the foundation is to be made, and together to provide the plan for the construction of the house. And they shall arrange everything wisely, in such a way that nothing is later wasted. And if a disagreement arises among them, either about choosing the site or about making the plan, we wish a secret vote to be taken, and the majority shall prevail. And the Provincial shall have only one vote, like any of the fabricists.

No Guardian may build or pull down anything except as commanded by his Provincial Vicar, who shall keep his eyes open, and not grant permission unless he sees that there is evident need. And whenever the Guardian wishes to do anything substantial, he must have the permission of the above-mentioned fabricists.

68. In order that lay people may avail of our spiritual services and assist us in our temporal needs, we order that friaries shall not be built too far from cities, towns or villages, nor too close to them either, lest we suffer harm from too many visits. A distance of about a mile is sufficient, but following the example of our holy fathers, and especially of St Francis, we should prefer to go to solitary and deserted places, rather than to fine cities.

69. We also determine that if possible our houses shall have a small room with a fireplace so that, as charity demands, hospitality can be given to pilgrims and travellers whenever the need arises and as far as our poverty allows, especially to religious and people dedicated to the service of God. In addition, if there are vines or superfluous trees in the places we have accepted they shall not be cut down without permission of the Father Provincial Vicar. If anyone contravenes this order, if he is a Guardian he shall take the discipline in the refectory as many times as he has cut down trees, and eat bread and water on the floor. If he is a subject he shall take the discipline for the same number of times, and wear the caparone for a month.

70. The Gospel teaches that Christians (and therefore much more so we lesser brothers, who have specially embraced the life and following of Jesus Christ our

Sovereign Lord, the unblemished mirror of the highest poverty) are bound to remember that their heavenly Father is able and willing to provide for them and has them in His special care. Therefore, we should not be like pagans, who do not believe in divine providence, anxiously procuring the things of this world with excessive concern, when God's generous hand provides them even to the animals. Rather, as true sons of the Eternal Father, putting aside all unspiritual anxiety, we should depend totally on that divine generosity and abandon ourselves to God's infinite goodness. We therefore order that in our houses no provision shall be made of anything, even the necessities of life such as those that can be obtained daily by begging, beyond one week's supply according to the needs of times and places. Fruit shall not be gathered and stored for a long period.

71. To preclude the storing of superfluous provisions we order that no barrels shall be kept in our house, but only a few small vessels or flasks. Where, however, because of the number of brothers their needs cannot be supplied with the said flasks and a few barrels are required, this may be done with permission of the Reverend Father Provincial Vicar, who will be able to judge whether the need is real or not. In winter, wood may be stored for up to two or three months more or less, according to the judgement of the provincial Chapter.

72. And in order that the brothers' mendicant state be truly such, and not rich or delicate or in name alone, we order that, even in Carnival time, no meat, eggs, cheese or fish or other precious foods unbecoming our poor state be collected for the brothers who are healthy. However, should these things be given to us without our requesting them we may accept them according to need. Spices of any sort are not to be used, except when this is necessary for the sick, to whom all possible and due charity is to be shown, as our Rule and justice requires, after the example of our Seraphic Father, who for the sake of his sick brothers was not ashamed to ask for food publicly. The Guardians and infirmarians shall not fail to give them all the help they need. If they do otherwise, they are to be punished by the Father Provincial Vicar.

Should any surplus food be sent to the brothers, they should receive it with humble thanks, or else distribute it to the poor, remembering that we are like pilgrims at the inn, living off the sins of the people, and that we shall be called to give account of everything.

73. Above all the brothers must take care, when alms abound through the favour of the great, the faith of the people or the devotion of the world, that they do not abandon Poverty, their most holy mother, and become illegitimate sons of St Francis. Let them remember the beautiful words he used to say: I thank God that through His goodness and favour I have always been faithful to my beloved spouse, Poverty, nor was I ever a robber of alms, because I always accepted less than I needed, so that other poor people would not be deprived of their share. To have done otherwise would be theft in the sight of God."

74. Since voluntary poverty possesses nothing yet is rich in all things, is happy, has no fear, no desire and can lose nothing because its treasure is placed in the safest keeping, in order to uproot, really and truly, all occasion of proprietorship, we determine that no brother shall have the keys to cells, chests, desks or any other thing, except the officials who have charge of such things and dispense them on behalf of the community as is just and reasonable.

And if any brother is found to be the proprietor of anything, he is to be deprived of all offices in the Order. And anyone to whom this punishment does not



apply shall wear the caparone for as long as the Father Provincial Vicar sees fit. And if anyone is found in this state at the time of death (which God forbid), he is to be deprived of ecclesiastical burial. The same penalties of proprietorship shall apply to anyone who disposes of books or any other thing whatsoever outside of our houses, without the permission of the Father Provincial Vicar or of his Guardian, and without the knowledge of the brothers who live with him in the religious community.

75. Since we possess nothing in this world, the brothers are not allowed to give anything to seculars without permission of the Guardians, and even they may not dispose of any but small and worthless things without the permission of their Provincial Vicar.

76. To relieve the needs of the sick brothers as common sense suggests and the Rule and holy charity require, we order that when any brother falls sick, the Guardian shall immediately appoint a suitable brother to attend to his needs. Should a change of place be appropriate it shall be seen to at once, and each brother should consider how he would wish to be treated himself in such a case. As our compassionate Father clearly says in the Rule, no mother is so tender and loving towards her only son, as each of us should be and show compassion to our spiritual brother.

## ***CHAPTER SEVEN***

77. In order to avoid danger from Prelates and subjects, we order that no brother shall hear the confessions of seculars without the permission of the Father General. Since this office requires not only sufficient knowledge and study but also experience, it shall not be exercised by unsuitable brothers. This is in order to avoid all danger and mental distraction, so that they remain composed and recollected in Christ and may run their course safely and unhindered towards their heavenly home.

78. Furthermore, we order that the brothers shall confess twice a week and receive communion each Sunday throughout the year, or more often if they wish, and if their Prelate considers it a good thing he shall give permission. They must take care to examine themselves carefully beforehand, as the Apostle reminds us, reflecting on their own nothingness and unworthiness and on this noble gift of God given to us with so much love. In this way it will not bring them condemnation but rather growth in light, grace and virtue. And this most sublime, Divine Sacrament, in which our sweet Saviour so lovingly condescends to dwell, shall be kept in all our churches in a spotless place and treated by all with the utmost reverence, the brothers remaining before it in prayer as if in the company of the holy angels in our heavenly fatherland.

79. We order that in reserved cases the transgressors, as soon as they can conveniently do so, shall humbly have recourse to their Vicars, in whom they may and must confide. And their Prelates, if they recognise them to be truly contrite and humbled, firmly resolved to amend and prepared to do the appropriate penance in sorrow for their sin, shall follow the example of Christ, our true Father and shepherd, and receive them in the same way that the merciful Father received the prodigal son in the Gospel, and together with Christ they shall joyfully carry the lost sheep on their shoulders, back to the evangelical sheepfold.

80. Let them recall what our Father used to say: Anyone who wants to raise up one who has fallen to the ground must first bend down to give him a hand, as Christ our most merciful Saviour did when the adulteress was brought before Him, not showing a rigid justice and severity. We should rather remember that Christ Jesus, the gentle Son of God, came down to earth from heaven to save us and did not hesitate to die on a cross, and He showed all possible tenderness to sinners who were truly contrite. They should also bear in mind that if God were to judge us with strict justice, certainly few or none at all would be saved. Therefore, when they impose penances, their aim should always be to save the wounded soul and not to lose it, and to safeguard the poor brother's reputation as far as possible. No-one should be scandalised over a brother's sin, or be ashamed of him or avoid him or consider him with repugnance. On the contrary, he should be shown even greater compassion and love than before, since he needs it more, for it is certain, as our Father St Francis says, that each of us would be worse than we are if God in His grace did not preserve us. Then, when Christ left St Peter as the world's universal Pastor, He told him to forgive the sinner with courtesy even if he sinned seventy times seven times. .

This is why St Francis said in one of his letters that, however greatly a brother may have sinned, he wished that brother to look into his Minister's eyes and not go away without finding mercy if he humbly requested it, and that even if he did not request it, he wished the Minister to offer him mercy, and should he appear before him a thousand times, he was not to be indignant and remember the brother's sin, but rather, in order to draw him to Christ our most merciful Lord, he should truly love him from the heart.

81. On the other hand, they must nevertheless seriously consider that to leave a sinner unpunished is to open the door to every vice and scandal, and provokes the vicious to commit the same or even worse excesses. Therefore the superiors, in accordance with the Rule, shall mercifully impose a proportionate penance, so that our Order, the Lord's little portion, is kept safe by good fences. We order that in dealing with our affairs, especially in the correction and punishment of the brothers, no legal subtleties shall be used according to the concession of Boniface VIII.

82. Therefore, lest wrongdoers and the insolent be a hindrance to good and disciplined brothers, they shall be duly punished by their Prelates with holy rigour. As the illustrious Doctor St Augustine says, both punishment and pardon have the same aim, namely, the reform of a person's life. Therefore, when inflicting punishments, let justice be tempered with mercy, in such a way that, while the rigour of discipline is not lacking, an excess of cruelty is avoided. Punishment should be a cure for sickness, in such a way that mercy and truth meet.

For this purpose, Prelates are to be elected from among brothers who are mature, discerning, knowledgeable, conscientious and experienced, and who in all things will act according to the advice of the most senior Fathers and brothers.

83. According to the concessions of Popes Boniface VIII, Innocent and Clement of happy memory, no brother shall be allowed to appeal against his Prelates to others outside the Order under pain of automatic excommunication, imprisonment and expulsion from our Order. We did not come to religious life to litigate but to weep for our sins, amend our life, obey and carry the cross of penitence, following our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

84. And since all Christians, and much more so we lesser brothers, must always keep the Apostolic faith of the Holy Roman Church in its integrity and purity,

steadfastly hold it and sincerely preach it, and even be ready to shed our very blood in its defence, we order that if any brother is found, through the temptation of the devil - which God forbid - to be stained by any error contrary to the Catholic faith, he shall be imprisoned by the Father Vicar, and the Holy Office shall be informed, and the brothers shall observe the prescriptions of the Testament of our holy Father, that such a one is to be delivered into the hands of his Vicar. Hence we order that for the punishment of these and similar delinquents our houses be equipped with secure but humane prisons.

85. Lest any brother, disliking our secluded and quiet life, should return to the fleshpots of Egypt after having been once set free from the furnace of Babylon, we order that he be excommunicated by our Father General and by the whole General Chapter. And the present Constitutions declare excommunicated all apostates from our Order.

86. In addition we order that any professed brother who leaves the Order and returns to the world, having laid aside the habit, or who goes wandering around still wearing the habit, if he does not return within one month, shall not be received back without the permission of the Reverend Father General. If he does return within that time he may be received by his Provincial Vicar, and when he is received, we order that in addition to the other penances he must be given for his errors, he be put in prison for a full month, during which time he is to fast on bread and water three days a week, namely on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. And each Friday he shall take the discipline publicly in the refectory for the length of a miserere, wear the caparone for a full year, say his fault every day as the novices do, sit in the last place at table and be perpetually deprived of active and passive voice. If he is a preacher he shall be deprived of the office of preacher at the discretion of the Father General. When he is received back, he is to be absolved from the excommunication he incurred for apostasy, publicly in the refectory with the customary ceremonies. This practice is always to be observed in all cases of apostasy. But if anyone leaves a second time, laying aside our habit, he is not to be received back without permission of the General Chapter.

Furthermore we order that if anyone leaves us and takes the habit of any other religious Order or Congregation and does not return within three months, he may not be received without the permission of the Reverend Father General. If however he does return within that time, he may be taken back by his Provincial Vicar, with the following penances: he is to be put in prison for fifteen days, fasting for three days a week on bread and water, and taking the discipline in the refectory on Fridays. He shall wear the caparone for six months and say his fault every day, and sit in the last place at table. He shall be deprived of active and passive voice for three years, during which time he may not have charge over the brothers. If he is a preacher he shall be deprived of preaching for a year. But if he leaves a second time and again tries to return within the stated time of three months, he may be received back in the same way but his penances are to be doubled, and he is to be deprived of active and passive voice in perpetuity. Should anyone leave more than twice, he is not to be received back without permission of the General Chapter.

We furthermore order that if anyone goes from one province to another without written permission of his Prelate, he can only be received back by the Reverend Father General or by his Provincial Vicar, and with the following penances: he is to be imprisoned for eight days, fasting three days a week on bread and water. He shall take the discipline in the refectory and wear the caparone for three months,

saying his fault every day and being deprived of active and passive voice for two years.

And anyone who goes from one place to another, within the same province, without permission of his Prelate, when he is received by his Provincial Vicar, shall perform the following penances: he shall be imprisoned and eat on the floor for eight days, fasting on bread and water for three days. He shall take the discipline, as above, and wear the caparone for two months, say his fault every day and be deprived of voting rights for a year.

And if anyone (in addition to leaving) has committed any excesses or offences, either within or outside the Order as mentioned above, he shall be punished additionally for those offences according to their kind and gravity. And should any Provincial Vicar contravene the foregoing orders concerning the reception of such brothers, he shall be deprived of his office at the subsequent Chapter, if the Father General so decides. Also, he may not be elected to any office for a period of three years, or he is to perform other penances at the discretion of the Father General. And the reception of any brothers he received is null and void, therefore they must be sent away.

Since it has been decreed by the Sacred Council of Trent that no brother may lawfully leave his place or friary, even under pretext of going to see his superiors, unless he has been sent or called by the same superiors with a written obedience. Therefore, if any brother be found without it, he can be punished by his ordinary as a deserter from the Order. Consequently, if any brother needs to go to his Provincial, he must tell his Guardian the reason; and if the Guardian judges it expedient, he shall give him an obedience and a companion. But if it does not seem expedient to send him, and the subject is unwilling to accept it calmly, the Father Guardian must call in two or three brothers of more mature judgement and, in the presence of the subject, put the case to them. If they judge it appropriate for him to go, the Father Guardian is obliged to send him. And if he does not send him, the Father Vicar must impose on him a penance. If the subject's case is one that he does not wish to divulge, he must write to the Provincial asking for an obedience to come to him, and he must wait for the reply before going.

87. In order that the punishments inflicted by us with commendable zeal are not impeded or misconstrued, and so that there may be greater freedom to proceed against delinquents, we command and enjoin that the secrets of the Order shall not be disclosed. Each brother's reputation shall be preserved as far as this is possible, seeking always those things that are for the praise and glory of God, and for the peace, edification and salvation of our neighbours.

Anyone who does divulge the secrets of our religious family outside the Order shall be severely punished by the Father Vicar, or by the Provincial or General Chapter.

## ***CHAPTER EIGHT***

88. According to the teaching of Christ our humble Lord, Christian Prelates are not to be like the leaders of the Gentiles, who lord it over their subjects. Rather, the greater the weight on their shoulders, the more they should humble themselves and remember that, whereas the other brothers have to obey their Prelates, the latter have

to obey all the brothers. The Chapter which elects them imposes upon them by obedience the duty of serving and ministering to the brothers in all their needs, especially in their spiritual needs - after the example of Christ who came to serve and minister to us and to lay down His life for us. We therefore exhort all the Prelates to be the ministers and servants of all their brothers. This they will be, if in accordance with the teaching of our Seraphic Father they minister spirit and life to them by their teaching and example.

89. In every election the proceedings shall be single-minded, simple, holy and canonical. We shall endeavour to follow the advice of Our gracious Lord, and when we are invited to the marriage feast, take the lowest place with Him, and not the highest place with Lucifer, since we know that the first shall be last, and the last first. Let the brothers shun dignities as Christ did, and accept them only when, like Aaron, they are called by God through holy obedience.

90. As regards the General Chapter, we order that it shall take place once every three years on the Feast of Pentecost, which our Seraphic Father's Rule designates as the most appropriate for a matter of such importance. Provincial Chapters shall be held every year, on the second or third Friday after Easter, even in the Province where the General Chapter is held.

In every Provincial Chapter the Custodes shall be elected by the Vicar and Definitors, according to ancient custom. If any urgent matter arises in their Custodies and the Provincial Vicar cannot be present, the Custodes shall make whatever provision they deem just and appropriate.

91. During the year of the General Chapter, the Vocals of the Chapter shall be elected by all the Custodes at the Provincial Chapter. The first ballot shall be for the election of the first Custos. He will bring to the General Chapter the defects of the outgoing Provincial Vicar together with the needs of the Province. In this first ballot, only he is elected and the outgoing Provincial Vicar shall not have passive voice. All the other Custodes are immediately elected in another ballot, in which the aforesaid Vicar may have passive voice, but he shall not be appointed or proposed to remain in office as Provincial Commissary until all the Custodes have been elected. The number of the aforementioned Provincial Custodes shall not exceed five, or be less than three, except for the Provinces of Sicily and Corsica; in these, the previously given order shall be continued, namely, there shall be only two Custodes.

92. In the election of the Discreet, the companions of the Provincial Vicars shall have active and passive voice in the place where the Provincial Chapter is held, just as the companions of the Father Vicar General shall have active and passive voice in the place of the General Chapter, when they can attend it.

. We declare to all the brothers that in each election it is necessary and sufficient that the person elected have more than one half of the votes. Secular clergy and other religious, after the first year and once they have made profession, shall have active voice, but not passive until the end of the fourth year, unless they are dispensed by the Father Vicar Provincial for some necessary or just cause.

93. We also decree that in each election the brothers are obliged under pain of sin to elect the one they consider the best and most qualified for the office to which he is being elected, leaving aside all other considerations.

94. Also, in order to establish a convenient and expeditious method of appointing the Guardians, we declare that the Vicars and Definitors may first meet together to discuss who should be excluded. After this, each of them (i.e. the Vicar and the Definitors) shall personally draw up a secret list on which he writes the names of as many Fathers as there are Guardians required, freely choosing those he conscientiously judges to be the best. Then, each one being called into the Definition shall place his list into the hands of those who were scrutineers at the Chapter, or else new scrutineers can be provided when this seems appropriate. After the scrutineers have secretly collected all the votes, the Vicar and Definitors shall be called to the Definition, and the names and votes of the elected brothers shall be announced. If not all the Guardians are elected in one ballot, there shall be a second, third and fourth ballot, or as many as necessary until all the Guardians have been elected. If more than the required number are elected, the Father Vicar and Definitors may at their discretion declare null the election of the surplus names, as they see fit. After the election of the Guardians, a similar one is held for the Custodes, who shall be installed in places that properly require a Custos. Once again, having taken common counsel, they shall distribute the Guardians already elected in those places they consider suitable. Since some Provinces have a few friaries in main or important cities, the Custodes may, if they think it expedient in order to remove all suspicion, appoint Guardians to those places by secret vote. They shall do the same for other matters too, should any disagreement arise.

95. If a Guardian leaves office less than six months before the Chapter, a new Guardian shall not be appointed. If the vacancy occurs six months before, another shall be appointed in the manner mentioned above. But if it should happen that the Vicar and Definitors are unable to meet together in one place, they may act through a procurator. But all other votes at our General, Provincial, Custodial and local Chapters must be made *viva voce* and in secret, in such a way that the names of the electors are never published, as commanded by the Sacred Council of Trent. Neither is it lawful to supply the votes of those who are absent. If anyone is elected to any office whatsoever in contravention of this decree, that election is utterly null and void. Clerics who are not subdeacons, notwithstanding the Decree of the Sacred Council of Trent, may have a voice in elections, in virtue of the declaration or concession of Pope Pius V of happy memory. All the brothers, whether clerics or lay, once they have made profession among us, shall have active voice; but none shall have passive voice unless he has completed four years as a member of our Congregation.

96. Preachers, if their Lenten preaching does not take them too far afield, shall return to their own friary for the election of the Discreet, but when they are so far away that they cannot, or lack the courage to, return in time, they shall have a vote in the friary nearest to the place where they have preached.

97. Furthermore, we order that as a sign of humility and to show our sincere detachment from every kind of ambition, the General Vicar in the General Chapter and the Provincial Vicar in the Provincial Chapter shall spontaneously resign their offices and all their authority into the hands of the Definitors elected by the Chapter. As proof of their complete resignation they shall place the seals into the hands of the aforesaid Definitors.

98. Should the Father General Vicar die during his term of office, we order that the first Definitor of the previous Chapter shall become Commissary General. Should he have died, it shall be the second Definitor, and so on for the others. The same procedure shall apply in the case of the Provincial Vicars who die in office, namely,

that the First Definitor shall be Commissary of the Province, and shall take care to convoke the Chapter at the proper time for the election of the Vicar, as the General shall command him. And in the Province where a General dies, the General Chapter shall be convoked by the Vicar of that Province, with the advice of the Vicars of the two nearest Provinces. And all this is in accordance with the Bull concerning Regulars.

99. After the election of the Reverend Father General, the Father General of the Conventuals is to be asked for his confirmation, according to the Bull of Paul III of happy memory; similarly in the Provincial Chapters when the Vicars are elected, the Definitors in the name of the Chapter send for the confirmation of our Reverend Father General according to the Bull of Pope Clement. While waiting for the reply they may exercise their office as elected Vicars when they are in that Province.

100. We further determine that our Father Vicar General, at the conclusion of his second triennium, is to remain free of all prelacies for three years. Similarly the Provincial Vicars, having concluded their triennium, cannot be re-elected in the same Province, but must remain free of all prelacies in that province for one year. If however they are elected Vicar in another Province they may exercise that office for a further three years, after which they must remain free of any prelacy for one year.

101. In the same way, Guardians may not be elected to that office for more than three years in the same place, but in a different place they can serve for three more years, and after they have been Guardians for six years they are to be free of the guardianship for one year, unless the Father General gives permission for their appointment because of some need. However, there is nothing to prevent the aforesaid Guardians after that time being elected Provincial Vicar, or even General.

And since the Prelates must be guides and examples to their subjects, in their deeds more than in their words, we order that any brother who cannot attend choir by day and by night, or the refectory with the other brothers, or who has an obvious need for special foods, shall by no means be made Guardian, nor shall he be put in charge of novices. And those who are unable to walk shall not be elected Discreets to go to the Provincial Chapter, except if they have been General, or Definitors at the General Chapter. But in no way can they be elected as Provincial.

102. We furthermore decree that in the election of the Definitors all the Vocals present in the place of the Chapter shall have passive voice, and in that election all the Vicars shall have active voice: that is, the General in the General Chapter, and the Provincials in the Provincial Chapters.

Six Definitors are to be elected at the General Chapter, of whom not more than four can be taken from among those elected at the Chapter immediately preceding. At Provincial Chapters four Definitors are sufficient, of whom two at the most may be from among those elected at the previous Chapter.

103. While the General Chapter is being held, all the brothers shall offer continuous fervent prayer, and likewise in the Provinces during the Provincial Chapter, asking Divine Providence to see fit to order all our affairs according to His good pleasure, to the praise and glory of His Infinite Majesty, and for the welfare of His holy Catholic Church.

## *CHAPTER NINE*

104. Preaching the Word of God after the example of Christ, teacher of eternal life, is one of the most honourable, useful and divine duties of His Church on earth, on which, under God, the salvation of the world principally depends. Therefore we order that none of our brothers shall dare preach to the people unless he has first been examined and approved by the General Chapter or by the Father General Vicar, as the Rule lays down. This office is not to be conferred upon anyone who is not seen to be living a holy and exemplary life, clear and mature in his judgement, and of strong and fervent will, because we know that knowledge and eloquence without charity are often destructive rather than edifying. In fact, often it is destructive, as St Gregory says, because the preaching of one who lives a despicable or careless life is easily despised. For this reason, the Prelates shall take great care not to show any respect for persons when assigning this office: they must not be swayed by human friendship or favour, but act solely out of zeal for God's honour, aiming to have a few capable preachers rather than many who are incapable. In this they should imitate the profound wisdom of Christ, Who from so great a number of the Jews chose only twelve apostles and seventy-two disciples, and then only after having prayed at length to His heavenly Father.

105. In addition we order all preachers to refrain from using trivialities, novelties, poems, stories, or other vain, redundant, strange or useless notions, still less pernicious doctrines. But imitating the example of the Apostle Paul, let them preach Christ crucified, in Whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God are to be found. This is that height of divine wisdom which the blessed Apostle Paul preached to the perfect after he had become an adult Christian, for while still a Jew he thought, reasoned and spoke as a child about the shadows and figures of the Old Testament. And the preachers shall refuse to base themselves on anything other than Christ, whose authority carries more weight than any other persons or reasons in the world. Let them add to this Sacred Scripture, and afterwards they may quote the holy Doctors.

106. Complicated, rhetorical and affected phrases are unworthy of our naked, humble, crucified Lord. So our words should be simple, clear, plain, humble and lowly, and above all inspired, ardent and full of charity, after the example of that chosen vessel Paul, who did not preach in the high-flown words of human eloquence but with the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we exhort preachers to strive to imprint upon their hearts Jesus Christ our blessed Saviour through humble, fervent and constant prayer, so that He can take peaceful possession of them, and that He may speak and act in them through overflowing love, like Paul, the Teacher of the Gentiles, who did not dare to preach virtue to others unless Christ had first accomplished it in him. This was commanded and taught to us by Christ Himself, our perfect Teacher, not only in word but by His own example, when He taught that those will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven who first do God's will themselves, and then preach and teach it to others. We therefore order and command that those who cannot fast and keep to the Lenten regime while preaching shall by no means be allowed to preach.

107. Our preachers are forbidden to accept superfluous or sumptuous meals, but they shall live like poor mendicants, as they have freely promised out of love for Christ. Being content with what is necessary for their keep, let them above all things beware of any kind of avarice, so that by freely and sincerely preaching Christ they may reap more abundant fruit. We forbid them when preaching to ask for money



either for themselves or for our brothers, so that as the Apostle teaches all will know that they seek the interests of Christ Jesus, and not their own.

Still more do we forbid and command them not to accept from the communities or from any individual any reward or monetary wage on account of their preaching, which would be simony; nor shall they have books, habits, clothes or anything else bought for them that would appear as payment or reward for their preaching. The Provincial Vicar shall make transgressors take the discipline in the refectory for the space of a *Miserere*, and if they do not mend their ways they shall be suspended from the office of preacher.

But if the need arises, for piety's sake, to make some recommendation on behalf of a poor person, they must by no means involve themselves in receiving or distributing alms, either themselves or through third parties acting in their name.

108. Anyone who does not know how to read and imitate Christ, the Book of Life, lacks the learning necessary for preaching. Therefore, so that they may study Him, we order preachers not to carry many books, because the blessed Christ Himself contains all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, and because the office of preacher is so outstanding, so pleasing to Christ our God, as He showed us when He wished to exercise it Himself, with all the fervour of His divine Love, feeding us with His wholesome Gospel teaching for the salvation of our souls. And the better to impress on the hearts of our preachers the norm and method they are to follow in order to preach Christ crucified more worthily, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and fervently bringing about the conversion and salvation of souls, we once more enjoin on them that when preaching they use sacred scripture, especially the New Testament and above all His holy Gospel, as the principal foundation of all their discourses, so that by being preachers of the Gospel ourselves, we may also form people according to the Gospel.

109. Let them leave aside all vain and useless questions and opinions, and entertaining songs, and subtle arguments which few understand, and like the holy Forerunner John the Baptist, the most holy Apostles and other saintly preachers who were on fire with the love of God, let them imitate our sweet Saviour, and cry out with a loud, impassioned voice: "Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Following the admonition of our Seraphic Father in his Rule, let them preach vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with few words, seeking and desiring nothing but the glory of God and the salvation of the poor souls redeemed by the precious blood of the spotless Lamb, Christ Jesus.

Let their discourses be careful and honest, without descending into criticism of any particular person, least of all Religious and Prelates of the Church. If they do otherwise they are to be severely punished. In their preaching and their every action they must, as our Seraphic Father exhorts us in his Testament, fear, love and honour priests, the Reverend Cardinals and Bishops, and above all others the Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, the Father, Head and Pastor of all Christians and Governor of the whole Church Militant, and similarly all other ecclesiastics who live according to the orders of the Holy Roman Church and are humbly subject to the Pope. And as our Father teaches us in his Testament, we must always honour all preachers and teachers who minister spirit and life to us.

110. In order that, while preaching to others they do not themselves become outcasts, they shall sometimes leave the crowds behind and return to solitude, to ascend the mountain of holy prayer and contemplation with our gentle Saviour,

staying there long enough to be so filled with God that the impulse of the Holy Spirit will once more move them to sow the divine graces in the world. They shall endeavour, like the Seraphs, to be inflamed with love for God, so that their own fervour may enkindle others. By doing this, now serving in the ministry like Martha, now in silence like Mary, they will be following Christ in the mixed life, who after praying on the mountain, went down to the temple to preach, or rather, He came down to earth from heaven in order to save souls.

Therefore all preachers shall strive to ensure that, as soon as possible once they have finished the course of Lenten sermons, they leave the town or place where they have been preaching and return to their friaries, unless compelled by necessity, lest the fruit they have harvested in the Lenten season be lost through over-frequent conversation and familiarity with seculars, and the authority and reputation of their ministry is diminished. We likewise order preachers who are healthy that when they are not engaged in preaching they attend choir for all the canonical hours and for the ordinary prayers, and live common life with the other brothers.

111. Since it was always our Seraphic Father's intention that all necessary books of the brothers be kept in common and not individually, so that poverty would be better observed and all individualistic attachments would be removed from our hearts, we order that in each house there shall be a small room where the sacred scriptures shall be kept, together with a few holy Doctors and spiritual books. But useless and worldly books which make a man more pagan than Christian are not to be kept in our houses, and if there are any such let them be given back to their owners or else burned, as the General or Provincial Vicar shall determine.

We also forbid anyone to presume to have books printed or published, either by himself or through others, without written permission from the Reverend Father General. And the General shall not give permission without first having them seen and examined by a few learned persons. Once they have been examined and approved, he may allow them to be publicly printed, with the permission of the Ordinary. If anyone acts to the contrary, he shall be deprived of all legitimate acts, in addition to the penalties prescribed by the Lateran Council.

112. Since anyone who would preach worthily and with due order needs to have some understanding of scripture as well as a religious and upright life; and since this is naturally impossible except through some literary study, in order to ensure that the noble and fruitful work of preaching is never lost among us (which would cause grave harm to souls), we order that in every Province, where possible, there shall be a few places for devout and holy studies abounding in charity and humility, both in grammar and in sacred letters, and other sciences necessary for a better understanding of sacred and scholastic theology. Brothers shall only be admitted to studies by the Provincial Vicar of the Province, by the Definitors at a Provincial Chapter, or by the Father General, if they have fervent charity, irreproachable conduct, humble and holy conversation, and are able to learn, so that later by their life and teaching they may be useful and productive in the house of the Lord. Admission to studies shall be by secret ballot. Normally, brothers shall not be admitted to study logic and philosophy if, in addition to their good conduct, they have not spent at least two years in religion after their profession. We also command that those who do not have the good qualities mentioned above, or who are slow-witted, shall not be made to study, and if they have been, they should be removed as soon as they are discovered to be unfit and unworthy of study.

113. Let the students not seek to attain the sort of knowledge that only inflames pride, but let them strive to profit from the love of Christ, which gives the light and fire of charity. They should not be so absorbed in literary study that they neglect zeal for holy prayer. This would be against the expressed intention of our Holy Father, who wished that holy prayer should never be abandoned for the sake of any literary study whatsoever. On the contrary, in order to possess the spirit of Christ our Lord more securely, both lectors and students should endeavour in their studies to pay more attention to the spirit than to the letter, since without the spirit true learning is never acquired, in fact the letter alone blinds and kills.

114. Therefore we order that all our lectors who are healthy should turn up for the night office in choir, at least for Matins, and they should strive as far as they can to attend office, and prayer, and readings. They should take care of themselves under obedience to their Prelates, and should not normally preach during the year. Finally, we enjoin upon the students attendance at Matins and all the canonical hours, and at prayer; if they do otherwise they shall be removed from study.

115. Those who are put to study should also strive, while maintaining holy poverty, never to leave the royal road that leads to heaven: that is, holy humility. Let them often remember the fine saying of Blessed Jacopone, that knowledge without a humble heart inflicts a mortal wound. It will be an occasion of humility for them if they realise that they have acquired new obligations in the sight of God through being found worthy of sacred studies and being admitted to the true and consoling understanding of the divine scriptures, under which lies hidden Him, the Supreme Good, Whose Spirit is sweeter than honey to those who taste it.

We exhort them, each time they go to lectures, to recollect themselves in a spirit of humility, and with a contrite heart to raise their minds to God, saying: *LORD, I am the lowliest of your servants, unworthy of anything good, but I wish to enter and see your treasures. May it please you to let me come in, unworthy as I am, and grant that, through these words and holy reading, I may not only learn about you, but learn to love you, for I wish to know you only so that I may love you, my Creator, my Lord and my God. Amen.*

## **CHAPTER TEN**

116. We order that the Father General Vicar, during his period of office, shall endeavour to visit personally all the Provinces of our Order, and all the houses and brothers, as far as he can, or at least to see all the brothers of our Congregation. And the Provincial Vicars shall strive to visit all their houses and brothers three times, or at least twice a year, and both they and the Guardians shall continually and charitably exhort those same brothers to the perfect observance of the divine evangelical precepts and the counsels of the Rule we have promised, of the present Ordinances and especially of most holy poverty, which is the firmest foundation of all religious observance. They shall correct transgressors with zealous charity, always mixing the wine of strict justice with the oil of gentle mercy.

117. The brothers who are subjects shall obey their Prelates with all humility, in all things which they know are not offensive to God. They are to show due reverence to their Prelates, as Vicars of St Francis, indeed of Christ our God. And when they are rebuked and corrected by them, let them follow the praiseworthy custom of our ancient humble Fathers and brothers, and kneel down, bearing all rebukes and correction patiently, without answering back proudly. And whenever they are

corrected in chapter in the refectory they shall in no way presume to answer their Prelates without first having asked and obtained their permission, under pain of taking the discipline in the presence of the brothers for the length of a Miserere. All the brothers shall continuously strive to correct their faults, and acquire the heavenly virtues through frequent virtuous acts, and to overcome corrupting evil influences through the acquisition of good habits. On the other hand, the Prelates should refrain from binding the souls of their subjects by imposing precepts under obedience, unless religious observance or the demands of charity force them to do so.

118. We also order that visiting brothers shall be received in our houses with fraternal charity by all the brothers. As true sons of our heavenly Father they shall first visit the church, and having spent some time in devout prayer they shall present themselves to the Prelate and show him their obedience. And when the brothers of the same house go out on some business they shall, in addition to requesting the Prelate's permission, kneel and ask for his blessing. They shall do the same on returning home.

119. So that everything is done with the merit of saving obedience and with due religious spirit, no brother shall presume to take any bodily refreshment either at home or outside, without the blessing of the Prelate, or if he is not at home, of the senior Father or brother.

120. Let all the brothers strive to avoid unnecessary conversation. To avoid possible trouble, we order that no brother, especially the young, shall send or receive letters without permission of their Prelate.

121. All the brothers, following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of our Seraphic Father should always wish to be obedient subjects, rather than Prelates who give orders to others. Nevertheless, those on whom a prelacy is imposed by obedience shall not obstinately refuse it, but shall fulfil the ministry entrusted to them with all humility and care.

122. We also exhort all the brothers, in accordance with the admonition given by our blessed Father in the tenth chapter of the Rule, to beware of all pride, vain glory, envy, avarice, care and solicitude about worldly matters, of all detraction and complaining about any category of persons whatsoever, especially about the Prelates of the Church, or clergy and all other religious. We should show respect to everyone according to their state, considering them all as our brothers, fathers and seniors in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

## ***CHAPTER ELEVEN***

123. According to the opinion of holy Doctors, especially St Jerome, familiarity with women, however holy, should be avoided with holy prudence by the servants of God. Therefore, the entire General Chapter issues the present decree after due consultation and profound deliberation, to be observed inviolably by our entire Order. The brothers shall in no way accept the care of monasteries or other religious houses of men or women, not even for any kind of good, virtuous or holy purpose, or at the request of any persons or nobles, nor of any Congregations of men or women. They shall not provide them with confessors or have any care of them, trusting more in the salutary teaching of the saints than in human persuasion.

124. And since Religious, as Christ's true servants, should avoid not only what is manifestly evil and sinful, but even what might appear to be so, we order that the brothers shall not go to any monastery or other house of religious women without the permission of the Provincial Vicar. He is to be vigilant in this matter, and take great care not to grant such permission except to tried and mature brothers, and only in case of need or great piety, and with permission of the Ordinary.

125. In order that being pure in heart we may see God with the eyes of a sincere heart, and become more fit for the things of heaven, the brothers shall not have any suspicious relationships or dealings with women, or have unnecessary conversations with them. And whenever they are obliged by necessity to speak to women, they shall stay in an open place where they can be seen by their companion, so as to give good example to everyone and for their own greater security. In this way, their purity, discretion and modesty will spread the good reputation of Christ our Lord in every place. Let them remember the memorable example of that holy brother we read about in our chronicles, who, setting fire to a wisp of straw, said: "What the straw gains from the fire, the religious servant of God gains from conversing with women". Pope John XX said of our brother the Bishop St Louis at his canonization, that even from childhood the love of chastity was so deeply rooted in his heart, that in order to guard it faithfully he used to flee from the company of women, so that he never spoke with a woman alone except his mother and sister, since he knew that woman is more bitter than death. And St Bernard says there are two things which defile a religious: familiarity with women and special foods.

126. We therefore warn all our brothers that, by decree of the Supreme Pontiff Pius V, women of whatsoever rank, station or condition are not to be admitted into the enclosure of our houses, under pain of the penalties contained in the same decree. Our dealings with seculars, men as well as women, shall be rare and discreet, since excess and indiscretion in our dealings with them are harmful to us and are a great obstacle to spiritual growth.

## ***CHAPTER TWELVE***

127. In order to safeguard the pure observance of the Rule, ensure the orderly conduct of divine services and at the same time observe the highest poverty, we order that in our places wherever possible there shall not be fewer than six brothers. United in the name of Jesus they shall be of one mind and heart, ever striving for greater perfection. They shall show that they are true disciples of Christ by loving one another from the heart, bearing with one another's defects and constantly practising the love of God and brotherly charity, giving one another good example at all times and edifying everyone. Let them likewise do violence to their own corrupt passions, not forgetting what our Saviour says: the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and those who do violence to themselves take it by storm.

128. We also order that in our churches there shall be only one small bell, weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds. There shall be no sacristy in our churches, except for a cupboard or a chest with a strong key, which one of the professed brothers shall always carry with him. The things needed for divine worship shall be kept in that chest or cupboard: there shall generally be two small chalices with the cup in silver and their patens well gilded. There must be no more chalices or vestments than are required by the needs of the place. No gold, silver or silk or any other precious or unusual materials are to be used. Everything shall be very clean

and neat, especially the priestly vestments. Corporals and purificators shall be fine and spotless. The candlesticks must be made of wood, and our missals and breviaries and other books simply bound without unusual fastenings.

129. The brothers shall be careful to ensure that among the things pertaining to divine worship, in the buildings and furnishings we use, nothing rare, superfluous or precious is to be found, since we know that what God wants from us most of all, more than any other sacrifice, is the purity of the obedience we show to Him when we live the poverty we have promised. Indeed, as Pope Clement says in his Declaration, God takes more delight in a pure heart and in our holy way of life than in precious externals. Nevertheless, cleanliness must be evident in our poverty. We must see to it that the sublime height of poverty shines forth in everything we use, making us yearn for the riches of heaven, where all our treasure, our delight and our glory are stored.

Therefore we forbid the brothers to receive anything, even the smallest thing, made of gold, silver, velvet or silk, except for the chalice, the pyx for the Blessed Sacrament, the tabernacle, and the tabernacle veil. And whenever the Father Provincial Vicars find such things on the occasion of their visitations, they shall impose a penance on those who received them, for being disobedient and having no love for our simple lifestyle. They are to make sure that the objects are returned to their owners, and if they are not known, the objects are to be given to other poor churches.

Nonetheless we exhort the brothers to ensure that the utmost cleanliness and tidiness shines forth in our poverty, particularly in the things pertaining to the sacred altar, the towels, purificators and corporals, which should be of the finest, as well as the other things used for divine worship.

130. To maintain uniformity in the ceremonies, both in choir and in every other place, the teaching of St Bonaventure and the Ordinances of our ancient Fathers shall be read. And in order the better to understand the mind of our Seraphic Father, his "Fioretti", the "Book of Conformities" and his other writings, and those of his holy companions, shall be read.

131. As our Seraphic Father had the conversion of unbelievers very much at heart, therefore for the glory of God and their salvation and in accordance with the Rule, we order that if any mature brothers, inflamed with love for the blessed Christ and zeal for the Catholic faith, wish through divine inspiration to go among them to preach the faith, they shall have recourse to their Provincial Vicars or to the Father General. And if the latter judge them suitable, they may undertake such an arduous mission with their permission and blessing. But these subjects shall not presume to judge themselves suitable for such a difficult and dangerous task, but with all fear and humility let them submit their wish to their prelate. It will be well to draw a distinction between unbelievers who are meek and easily led to the Christian faith, such as those recently found by the Spanish and Portuguese in the Indies, and the Turks and Agarenes, who only defend their erroneous and pernicious beliefs by force of arms and by torture. Smallness of numbers or the departure of good brothers shall not be a factor in the minds of the prelates; rather, casting all their care upon Him who takes unceasing care of us, let them in everything be guided by the Spirit of God and by charity, which does all things well.

132. Since it is impossible to lay down laws and statutes for every individual case that may arise, their number being indefinite, we exhort all brothers that in everything they do they keep before their eyes the holy Gospel, the Rule they have

promised to God to observe, and the holy and praiseworthy customs and examples of the saints, directing their every thought, word and action to the honour and glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour. In this way the Holy Spirit will be their teacher in everything.

133. Since we know that our Saviour first began to do and then to teach others, so shall our Prelates be the first to comply with these Constitutions, and then with holy and efficacious zeal induce their subjects to observe them unfailingly. And if certain things appear somewhat difficult at first, habit will make them easy and pleasant. So that they are more firmly impressed upon the minds of the brothers, and more faithfully observed, all the Guardians are to have them read at table at least once every two months. And although we do not intend by these Constitutions to bind the brothers under pain of any sin, except in so far as we are already bound by God, the Rule and the Church, yet it is our wish and command that transgressors against them be severely punished. And if the Guardians are remiss in observing the Constitutions, or in causing them to be observed, or in punishing transgressors, they shall be still more severely punished by the Provincial Vicars, and the latter by the Father General Vicar.

134. Since the present Constitutions were drawn up with the greatest care, and again revised and corrected with no less diligence with the consent of the entire General Chapter meeting in Rome, they shall not be changed without the consent of the General Chapter. We also exhort all our fathers and brothers present and to come not to change these Constitutions again in the Chapters, for experience has shown that great injury has been done to religious Orders by so many changes in Constitutions. Nor shall provincial Constitutions be drawn up, but if other particular cases arise the General Chapters shall make appropriate provision. The present Constitutions shall be left intact, and our entire Order shall live and be governed in accordance with them in holy uniformity.

135. Our Seraphic Father on his death-bed bequeathed the generous blessing of the Holy Trinity to those who would be zealous for the true observance of the Rule, and also added his own fatherly blessing. Therefore, leaving aside all negligence, let us diligently intend, and lovingly and effectively observe, the perfection demonstrated to us in the Rule and taught by our Order.

136. To serve God with the sole intention of escaping punishment is proper to slaves and hirelings, whereas to work for love of God and in order to please Him, for His glory and the salvation of one's neighbour, and similar motives, this alone is characteristic of true sons of God. Therefore the brothers must take great care not to transgress against these Constitutions, even though they do not oblige under pain of sin.

Rather, knowing of what spirit they are made, let them observe inviolably the laws, ordinances and statutes of religion, thus adding new graces upon their heads. Through such holy service they will deserve the divine mercy and become more like the Son of God, who, while not being obliged by His own laws, wished to observe them for the salvation of all. Let us therefore with all our strength maintain the sublimity of our religious state, so that we may be the occasion of much benefit to others. Certainly, servants who are good and loved not only carry out what has been imposed on them with threats, but strive to please their masters in every possible way.

For this reason, while strenuously complying with what has been imposed on us, let us look to our Redeemer, that we may know His will and do what is pleasing to Him - not merely by not despising these Constitutions - for to despise them would be a grave sin - but rather out of love for Him, avoiding all negligence in their observance. This observance will without a doubt be a help to us to be faithful not only to the Rule but to the divine law and the evangelical counsels. The grace of God, through Jesus Christ, will free us from all dangers, and as our labours abound, so also will our consolations in Christ. We can do all things in Him who gives us strength, that is, in Christ Jesus almighty. In every doubt He will give us true understanding, since He alone is the Wisdom of God, our perfect Saviour, who gives Himself abundantly to all who ask Him in truth and does not reprove them. He will continue to give us strength, since He alone is virtue, the Word that sustains all things.

137. Let us often recall, dearest Fathers and Brothers, that sacred and memorable subject on which our Seraphic Father preached a fervent sermon to that large multitude of good brothers. He said: "Brothers, we have promised great things to God, but He has made even greater promises to us. Here below, let us not fail to observe what we have promised to God, and then yearn for the blessings He has promised us in eternity. We know that worldly pleasures are very short, but the punishment for sin is endless. The sufferings we endure and the penance we do for love of Christ will last but a short time, but infinite will be the glory we shall receive from God in return. Many are called to the Kingdom of eternal life, but few are chosen, for rare indeed are those who follow Christ in sincerity of heart. But at the end God will reward all according to their deeds, glory for the good, and damnation and eternal fire for the wicked".

138. Though the things we have promised are great indeed, they are as nothing compared to the eternal reward God has in store for us if we keep them faithfully. Let us therefore act manfully, and not distrust our strength, because God, the Eternal Father who created us and has offered us the perfection of the Gospel to observe, well knows our natural frailty and will not only give us the strength and power by his help, but in addition will rain down his heavenly gifts on us in such abundance, that laying aside every impediment we will not only be able to obey His sweet Son, but also to follow Him and imitate Him with great joy and simplicity of heart, utterly despising visible and temporal things and always yearning after those which are heavenly and eternal.

139. In Christ, then, who is God and Man, true Light, the brightness of glory and of Eternal Light; in Christ the spotless mirror and image of God; in Christ, appointed by the Eternal Father to be the Judge, Lawgiver and Saviour of mankind; in Christ, to whom the Father and the Holy Spirit bore witness; in Christ, in whom also are found every merit, example, help, grace and reward of ours - in Christ be all our thought, meditation and imitation. For in Christ all things are sweet, easy and light, gentle, learned, holy and perfect, since He is the light and expectation of the nations, the fulfilment of the Law, the salvation of God, Father of the world to come, and our final hope, whom God has made our wisdom, justice, sanctification and redemption.

140. To Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is co-eternal, consubstantial and co-equal, and lives and reigns as one God, be everlasting praise, honour and glory, world without end.  
AMEN.



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