

THE CONSTITUTIONS  
OF THE POOR FRIARS MINOR CALLED CAPUCHINS,

ordered by their General Chapter for a smoother observance of the Rule, newly corrected and reformed.

*Proverbs 6: "Keep your father's principle, my son, do not spurn your mother's teaching. Hold fast to discipline, never let her go; keep your eyes on her: she is your life. Put your trust in the Lord and do right; make your home in the land and live secure"*

\*\*\*\*\*

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 in Rome in the year 1536 saw fit to draw up certain statutes which might serve as a fence to protect the Order, 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.

Similarly, the General Chapter held in Rome in the year 1552 also thought it appropriate to revise, correct and complete those same statutes, so that in their renewed and reprinted form they could be understood and observed by all our Congregation. The intention in doing this was to imitate our above-mentioned Father who, having written his first Rule, and the one confirmed by the Holy See, kept it in force for a time. Later, he renewed and corrected it by divine inspiration, and it was confirmed and declared by many Popes to be firm and authentic. It has been left to us to be observed in perpetuity. These statutes are as follows:

**CHAPTER ONE**

1. CONCERNING THE FIRST CHAPTER of the Rule: 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 it 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 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 to the brothers which exhorts them to follow Christ crucified.

3. Furthermore, the brothers should give themselves space in which to speak to God continually, for this is a great help to grow in love of Him. In order to enable the gospel teaching to bear fruit in our hearts, and to root out the tares which might choke it, we ordain that no useless books, meaning vain or harmful to the Spirit of the Lord, be kept in any of our houses, and we order that no brother shall be eager to study irrelevant or vain sciences, but rather sacred scripture, together with approved spiritual books. Before all else, let them study Jesus Christ the Most Holy One, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God.

4. 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 all glosses and worldly, useless explanations which relax it, for these wrest the Rule from the merciful intentions of Christ our Lord and God, who spoke in St Francis. As the single living commentary on our Rule we accept the declarations of the Supreme Pontiffs and the holy life, teaching and example of our Father St Francis.

5. In order that we, as true and legitimate sons of Jesus Christ our Father and Lord, begotten again by Him in our Patriarch 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 Catholic manner.

6. And since we are good 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 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 his fervent words and loving deeds. For this reason they shall frequently read his life and writings and those of his blessed companions.

7. 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 Church they should try to stand in the lowest place, according to his own advice and example. Therefore we earnestly exhort every brother always to have due reverence for all priests, and always 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. Similarly, we order that the brothers are to be subject not only to their Vicars, Custodes and Guardians, but further, that when he is elected, our Father the General Vicar shall humbly present himself or send word to the Reverend Father General of the Conventuals, by whom he is to be confirmed. In the same way, the Provincial Vicars, when they are elected, shall present themselves or send word to our Father the General Vicar for his confirmation. Subsequently they may exercise their offices as elected Vicars as soon as they receive the reply confirming them. Apart from such a case, since our blessed Father in his Testament forbids his brothers to request any letter from the Roman Court, the General Chapter renounces all privileges which relax our Rule and, by widening the way of the spirit, make it appeal more to the senses.

## *CHAPTER TWO*

8. CONCERNING THE SECOND CHAPTER: 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 first carefully enquire into the condition and qualities (of prospective brothers). None shall be admitted except those of excellent disposition who demonstrate a fervent will. And in order to avoid all wonder and scandal it is forbidden to receive anyone who is not fully sixteen years of age, or, if they see fit, anyone with a boyish face, so that (the candidates) may know by experience everything they will have to promise by profession. Similarly we order that no-one is to be admitted to profession as a cleric who is not

suitably literate, so that he does not stumble when reciting the divine praises but is able to understand the words he speaks and to draw nourishment from them.

We order that those who are 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 brothers living in the place where (the candidates) were tested.

And in order that this be the better observed, (the candidate) shall be asked the following questions:

1. Does he firmly believe all that the Holy Roman Church believes and holds?
2. Is he healthy in mind and body; has he ever suffered any defect of mind or brain, or suffered any incurable or contagious disease?
3. Has he at any time committed any scandalous or major crime, or been notoriously reputed to have done so?
4. Was he ever previously professed in any other religious Order, or a novice in our Order?
5. If he has debts he is able to pay, he shall not be received until he has made satisfaction.
6. If he has a wife in a consummated marriage, the Rule is to be observed.
7. They shall make sure they do not have a boyish face, are suitably literate, or else capable of upright conduct. They shall not be too old, unless their reception would be greatly edifying to the people and to the clergy.
8. They must be fully informed of the austerity of our Rule and way of life.
9. They are to be asked whether their father or mother or children are so poor as to be unable to live without them.
9. If they are lacking in any of the above matters, they are not to be received. Furthermore, Christ, our eminently wise teacher, 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. And the clothing of the novices is to be kept until the day of profession, and similarly that of religious. Let the clothing of seculars be given to the poor by their own hand, and that of religious through vicars or spiritual friends.

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 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. 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.

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 the Master at least for three years, observing the above-mentioned things. 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.

16. Knowing that 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 therefore 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 makes a heartfelt exhortation to all the brothers 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 to be 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 lesser brother to use three items of clothing is an obvious sign of a lax spirit.

17. 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, and these measurements are to be simple, without adding knots. 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.

18. In each of our houses there shall be a 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.

19. 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 blankets.

20. 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.

21. 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."

22. In order that we may run our course unhindered along the way of perfection, no animal for riding shall be kept in any of our houses. Nor shall the brothers ride, but in case of need they may, according to the example of Christ and our blessed Father, ride a donkey if one can be had. In this way our lives will always show forth the humility of Christ.

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.

### *CHAPTER THREE*

24. Concerning chapter three: 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, as noted in the Calendar. 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. And in every place the martyrology shall be kept, and read at prime. Every Sunday there must be the Asperges, and the Peace is to be exchanged with the brothers at Mass. On principal feasts incense should be used at the altar at the conventual Mass, if it can be obtained without recourse to money.

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 this action pertains to God in the highest degree, one who performs it irreverently seriously offends God. 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 ordained priest until he is twenty-four years of age, as canonical regulations require, 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. 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 shall be said with all due devotion, attention, gravity, uniformity of voice and harmony of mind, without embellishments or harmonies and 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 Matins, Vespers and Compline and during 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.

30. In addition, to avoid anything that could offend the most sublime poverty, spiritual peace and tranquil humility, and in order to strengthen 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, since wherever the pure Lamb of God is present there must be no defilement. Our dead shall be buried in some becoming place close to the church or cloister. 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 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 for our deceased brothers.

33. Since holy prayer is without a doubt 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 Exaltation of the Cross, immediately after None, except on fast days when it shall be after Sext, and from the Exaltation of the Cross 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 with us and 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, but in the refectory it shall be kept from the first sign given at table until grace has been said. And in all places there shall be silence from after Compline until Prime. But from Easter until the Exaltation of the Cross the bell shall be rung for silence after Sext, until the completion of prayers after None. 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 about God in a subdued and humble tone whenever the time is right, modestly and charitably.

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. 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 reborn brother in Christ our Lord.

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

40. Because true lesser brothers should depend on their loving heavenly Father with lively faith, we order that when they are travelling they take no meat or eggs or delicate or rich foods with them, nor shall they carry flasks except in case of real necessity, in which case they may have a small bag or bottle, but not for their own use, but leaving all care of themselves to God, who feeds not only the animals but also wicked men. They shall not stop to sleep or eat in cities or towns that are near our places, except in case of great necessity.

41. Since delight in worldly feasts easily brings defilement, we order that the brothers are not to attend feasts except in order to preach, after the example of Christ who, when invited to a feast did not wish to go, but later went in order to sow the divine word. 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.

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

43. 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 sweet 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. 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. We order that no special treatment shall be given at table, except to sick, travelling, aged or very weak brothers, as charity demands. 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 plain napkin for each brother. There will always be some devotional reading during meals, so that the spirit may be fed as well as the body.

46. Besides this, the brothers shall not ask for or receive any costly food unbecoming to our state as poor men, except in the case of sick brothers, who must be treated with all due charity as the Rule and every just law command, after the example of our holy Father, who was not ashamed to beg for meat openly for the sake of the sick brothers. And should any superfluous food be given to us we should refuse it with humble thanks, or else, if we must accept, give it to the poor with the consent of the donors.

47. 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.

48. In order to nourish charity, mother of all the virtues, we order that anyone who comes to our houses shall be received with all possible Christian humility, especially religious, who are people specially assigned to the service of God. In this we follow the exhortation of our blessed Father in his first Rule.

49. 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

50. CONCERNING THE FOURTH CHAPTER: 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 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.

51. 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 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.

52. 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 Saviour of the world 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. Legacies shall not be accepted.

53. 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 begging, but always with the permission of the superiors, so that in every case of recourse there is real necessity and due permission.

54. 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 our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who, though Lord of all, chose to be poor and to suffer for our sakes.

55. 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.

## *CHAPTER FIVE*

56. CONCERNING THE FIFTH CHAPTER: 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.

57. But since it is impossible to reach one's desired end without the means, let each one strive to lay aside as useless and harmful everything which hinders or prevents us from walking in God's way. Let them not be concerned about irrelevant matters, and 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.

58. Because it is very difficult for man to have his mind always raised up to God, and in order to avoid idleness, the root of all evil, to give good example to our neighbour and following in this the example of the chosen vessel Paul who

sometimes worked while he preached, as did also many other holy Fathers, and in observance of the admonition given in the Rule, and in order to conform to the will of our Father St Francis expressed in his Testament, we order that the brothers, when not engaged in spiritual exercises, shall do some honest manual work. 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 or read some spiritual book.

59. 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.

60. On the other hand, each brother should remember that gospel poverty consists in not having affection for earthly things, in using the things of this world sparingly and as though forced by the necessities of life, and as a way of glorifying the Most High God, whom we should recognise as the source of all that is good.

61. But since, as St Bernard writes, nothing is more precious than time, though today it is reckoned the cheapest, and since 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. Rather let them spend all this precious time to acquire 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.

## *CHAPTER SIX*

62. CONCERNING THE SIXTH CHAPTER: 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 to God along the way of virtue. 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 the places where we live, nor of anything at all,

even things we use of necessity, in such a way that the true, full owners can send us away whenever they wish, and deliberately take back anything that belongs to them.

63. 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 and ask for the loan of a piece of land.

64. They shall be careful not to accept any place with the obligation of keeping it. Rather, let them expressly 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.

65. 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.

66. Therefore, for this purpose a small model has been constructed, and our houses 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 eight 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 other offices shall be small, poor, humble and low, so that everything preaches humility, poverty and contempt for the world. These measurements are to be understood as indicated above. Our churches shall be small, poor and 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 thereby we offend against holy poverty.

67. Again, in order to avoid whatever might obscure the splendour of poverty, the brothers shall not interfere in building, except to demonstrate to those in charge

of the project the poor style of the model, to encourage them and to offer manual help. As far as possible the brothers shall use reeds or wickerwork and clay, after the example of our Father Francis, as a sign of humility and poverty. Let them use as their models the small houses of the poor, not sumptuous modern mansions.

68. To avoid all disturbance no place shall be accepted or abandoned, built or destroyed without permission of the provincial Chapter and of the Father General Vicar. No Guardian may build or pull down anything except as commanded by his Provincial Vicar, who shall visit the place with a few competent brothers and advise on such buildings.

69. 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.

70. 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. In addition, as far as poverty allows, 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.

71. 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 and garden produce shall not be stored, nor shall it be sown or planted except to be eaten fresh.

72. 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. In winter, wood may be stored for up to two or three months more or less, according to the judgement of the provincial Chapter.

73. 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, except on behalf of the sick. However, should these things be given to us without our requesting them we may accept them, as long as the simplicity of our poverty is not harmed.

74. Barrels of salt fish are not to be received, either in the house or outside it, and 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 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."

75. Since voluntary poverty possess 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.

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

77. 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*

78. CONCERNING THE SEVENTH CHAPTER: 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 Vicar. Since this office requires not only sufficient knowledge and study but also experience, it shall not be exercised by

unsuitable brothers. Those who are appointed to hear confessions shall not do so habitually but only in particular cases, when charity and necessity requires. 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.

79. Furthermore, we order that the brothers shall confess at least twice a week and receive communion each Sunday. They shall 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.

80. 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 good Father and shepherd, and receive them in the same way that the merciful Father received the prodigal son in the Gospel, and together with our most merciful Redeemer, they shall joyfully carry the lost sheep on their shoulders, back to the evangelical sheepfold.

81. 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, and this the compassionate Son of God did, both physically and in His heart, when the adulteress was brought before Him. And our prelates should in no way judge the brother haughtily with rigid severity; they should rather remember that Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the world, 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 shall 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 Seraphic Father 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, using that finite number to indicate an infinite one.

82. 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 as in secular law.

83. 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 the General Vicar and by the whole General Chapter. And the present Constitutions declare excommunicated all apostates from our Order, leaving it to the same General Vicar and the Provincials to determine the type and amount of punishment to be inflicted on the said apostates and on all other offenders. The Vicars are to punish them according to the type of sins and the humility of the penitents, with charitable discretion, according to the ancient Constitutions, especially those of William Farinarius, and according to the praiseworthy customs of our Order. As the illustrious Doctor St Augustine says, both punishment and pardon have the same aim, namely, the reform of a person's life. 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.

84. 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.

85. 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, and if he is obstinate, the prescriptions of the Testament of our holy Father shall be observed. Hence we order that for this purpose our houses shall be equipped with secure but humane prisons.

86. We also give warning that our prelates are to be mature and discreet when elected, knowledgeable, conscientious and experienced. In all matters they shall proceed on the advice of the most senior brothers.

87. In order that the punishments inflicted by us with commendable zeal are not impeded or misconstrued, we command 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.

## *CHAPTER EIGHT*

88. CONCERNING THE EIGHTH CHAPTER: 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.

91. 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. In the last Chapter before the General Chapter, the Vocals of the Chapter shall be elected by all the Custodes.

92. 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. 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. And we 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.

93. 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.

94. 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.

95. In addition, in order to provide a sure and simple method of removing the General Vicar from office if at any time it should appear that he is not qualified (as our Father Francis laid down in the Rule), the first three definitors of the preceding Chapter, having provable and sufficient evidence as to the General Vicar's unfitness, may and must convoke the brothers to a General Chapter at a time and place they consider most expedient. The Chapter shall discuss whether he deserves to be deposed. Should the General Vicar try to prevent the convocation of the Chapter, we determine that he is ipso facto deprived of his office. If the General Chapter decides that the Vicar does not deserve to be dismissed from office, and that the Definitors caused the upheaval without good reason, they are to be severely punished, at the Chapter's discretion, for having proceeded so injudiciously.

96. The General Chapter has determined that after his term of office our General Vicar cannot be re-elected, but shall remain free of office for at least a year. The Provincial Vicars, when their triennium has expired, cannot be re-elected in the same Province but shall remain free of office there for a year. If however they are elected Vicar in another Province they may exercise that office for a further three years, after which they must be free of any office for two years. Similarly the Guardians may not

be elected to that office for more than three years in the same place, but they may be elected for a further three years in another place, after which they shall be free of guardianships for one year. However, there is nothing to prevent the aforementioned Guardians from being elected Provincial or General Vicar after that period.

97. The companions of the Provincial Vicars shall have both active and passive voice in the election of discreets in the place of the Provincial Chapter, and the companions of the General Vicar shall have active and passive voice in the election of discreets in the place of the General Chapter. In the election of the discreets there shall be no more than five ballots. After the fifth ballot, the names of the voters and the number of votes received by each shall be recorded, so that if the Discreet is not elected the result of the vote shall be sealed and taken to the Chapter. We determine that in the election of Definitors the Vicars shall have active voice: that is, the General Vicar at the General Chapter and the Provincial Vicars at Provincial Chapters.

98. 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.

99. 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 God 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*

100. CONCERNING THE NINTH CHAPTER: 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 holy Church, 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 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. 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.

101. 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 great prudence of St 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 preached to the perfect after he had become an adult Christian, for while still a Hebrew 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 but sacred scripture, whose authority carries more weight than any other persons or reasons in the world. Afterwards they may quote the holy Doctors.

102. 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 in them through overflowing love, not just in their words but in their efficacious actions. In this way they will resemble the glorious Apostle Paul, who did not dare to preach virtue to others unless Christ had first accomplished it in him. This above all was commanded and taught to us by Jesus Christ our perfect Teacher, not only in word but by His own example when He taught that those who do this will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

103. Again, we admonish preachers that whenever they feel their spirit weakening through familiarity with seculars, they retire to solitude and silence, until being full of God, the Holy Spirit once more moves them to preach. In this way, taking turns to serve like Martha and to be silent like Mary, they will be good disciples of God's only-begotten Son, Who spent some time in prayer on the mountain and then went down to the temple among the people, for whose salvation He willed to come down from heaven into this vale of tears.

104. Our preachers shall take care not to accept superfluous or sumptuous meals, but to live like poor mendicants of Christ, as they have promised out of love for Him. Being content with what is necessary for their keep, let them above all things beware of avarice, so that by freely and sincerely preaching Christ they may reap 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, and not their own.

105. Anyone who does not know how to read the Incarnate Word of life, the book that contains all truth, has no learning necessary for preaching. Therefore, since the blessed Christ Himself contains all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, in order to be able to study Him better (like the holy Apostles), they must first be constant in fervent prayer, and then in the ministry of the Word, to exercise that most excellent office of preacher, so pleasing to Christ our God, as He himself showed us when He wished to exercise it, generously dispensing His saving teachings. And the better to impress on the hearts of our preachers the norm and method they are to follow in the worthy task of preaching Christ crucified, 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 the sacred scripture in the Old and New Testaments as the principal foundation of all their discourses, notably the Gospel, so that by demonstrating in fact that we are evangelical workers we may form good people according to the Gospel.

106. 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 glorious Apostles and other saintly preachers who were on fire with the love of God, let them imitate above all our sweet Saviour, whose bright light illuminates our every action, and cry out with a loud, impassioned voice: "Repent, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Following the pattern of our holy Father, 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.

107. Let their discourses be careful and honest, without descending into criticism of any particular person, because as St Jerome says, a general discourse will offend no-one. Certainly they should condemn vices, but always respecting the image of the Creator in His creature, as our Seraphic Father also warns us in his Testament when he speaks of endeavouring to 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, who is their Father and Lord as well as ours. And as our Father teaches us in his Testament, we must always honour all preachers and teachers who minister spirit and life to us.

108. In order that, while preaching to others they do not themselves become outcasts, they shall sometimes leave the crowds behind and ascend the mountain of prayer and contemplation with our gentle Saviour. They shall endeavour, like the

Seraphs, to be inflamed with love for God, so that their own fervour may enkindle others.

109. As mentioned above they shall not carry many books with them, so that they may more easily and frequently study the most excellent and illuminating book of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Since it was always our Seraphic Father's intention that all books 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, 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.

110. 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 there shall be devout and holy studies, abounding in charity and humility, both in grammar and in sacred letters. Admission to studies is reserved to those brothers who, in the judgement of the Provincial Vicar and Definitors, have fervent charity, irreproachable conduct, humble and holy conversation, and able to learn, so that later by their life and teaching they may be useful and productive in the house of the Lord.

111. Let the students not seek to attain the sort of knowledge that only inflames pride, but the kind that gives light, inflames charity and edifies. 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. In so doing, they will find that the more they attend to the spirit rather than the letter, the more profit they will derive from their studies, since without the spirit true learning is never acquired, in fact the letter alone blinds and kills.

112. They 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 Whose Spirit is sweeter than honey to those who taste it.

## *CHAPTER TEN*

113. CONCERNING THE TENTH CHAPTER: 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 possibly can. And the Provincial Vicars shall strive to visit all their brothers at least two or three times 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 all humility and charity, always mixing the wine of strict justice with the oil of gentle mercy.

114. The brothers who are subjects shall obey their prelates with all humility and promptness, in all things which they know beyond any doubt are not offensive to God. They are to show all due reverence to their prelates, as the lawful Vicars of our Father St Francis, indeed of Jesus Christ our sovereign Lord. And when they are rebuked and corrected by them, let them follow the praiseworthy custom of our ancient Fathers and humbly kneel down, bearing all rebukes lovingly like good sons 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 their permission, under pain of taking the discipline in the presence of the brothers for the length of a Miserere. All shall strive to amend their defects, destroy their vices and acquire pleasing virtues through frequent virtuous acts, and to counteract the corrupting effects of evil through 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.

115. 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 a short time in devout prayer they shall present themselves to the prelate and show him their obedience, without which no brother is allowed leave any of our houses. 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.

116. So that all shall be 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 of the senior Father or brother who is there.

117. Let all the brothers avoid unnecessary conversation, nor shall they be much concerned to go seeking indulgences in the churches of others, since so many have been granted to our own.

118. We order that no fugitive brother from one Province be received into another without the written permission of the Father General Vicar, without which any such reception shall be null, and anyone receiving him is to be severely punished by the Father General for such disobedience.

119. To avoid all possible difficulties we order that no brother shall send or receive letters without permission of his prelate.

120. In truth, every brother should seek and desire above all things to be subject and obedient according to the example of our meek Lord Jesus Christ and of our Seraphic Father, much more readily than to rule or to command. Nevertheless, those who are entrusted by holy obedience with prelacies and with the care of the brothers shall not obstinately refuse them, but with all humility they shall bend their backs to Christ's yoke and perform the sacred service entrusted to them with all zeal and diligence.

121. We also exhort all the brothers, in accordance with the salutary 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, especially about the prelates of the Church, or clergy and religious of any kind. We should show respect to everyone according to their state, considering them all as our fathers and seniors in Christ Jesus our most merciful Saviour.

## *CHAPTER ELEVEN*

122. CONCERNING THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER: According to the opinion of holy Doctors, especially the wise St Jerome, familiarity with women, however spiritual, 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. 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.

123. And since 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 easily except to tried and mature brothers, and only in case of need or great piety.

124. In order that being pure in heart we may see the infinite light of God with the eyes of an undivided mind, and become more responsive to God's actions, the brothers shall not have any suspicious relationships or dealings with women, or have long conversations with them without necessity. And whenever they are obliged by reasonable 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 kindness will spread the good reputation of Christ our Lord in every place. Let them remember the memorable example of that holy brother who, setting fire to a wisp of straw, said: "What the straw gains from the fire, the religious servant of God gains from women". Pope John XX says of our brother St Louis, 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.

125. Women are not to enter our houses without real necessity, and when they do they are to be accompanied honourably by trustworthy men and women. Before they are admitted, the consent of the brothers of that place is required. Two mature and saintly brothers shall be deputed to accompany them, always speaking to them about holy things such as the salvation of their soul, with religious decorum and good example. Our dealings with seculars, both women and men, shall be rare and discreet, since excess and indiscretion are very harmful.

## *CHAPTER TWELVE*

126. CONCERNING THE TWELFTH CHAPTER: 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 nor more than twelve brothers. United in God's name 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 Good Master says: the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and those who do violence to themselves take it by storm.

127. We also order that in our churches there shall be only one small bell, weighing about one hundred pounds. There shall be no more than one 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 be at the most two small chalices with the cup in silver. There must be no more than three sets of poor vestments with fringes, with no gold, silver or silk or any other precious or unusual material. Everything shall be very clean, especially the corporals and purificators, which shall be fine and spotless. The altar-hangings are to be of non-precious material, the candlesticks made of wood, and our missals and breviaries simply bound without unusual fastenings, in such a way that the great simplicity of our poverty may shine forth in everything we use, and make us yearn for the riches of heaven, where all our treasure, our delight and our glory are stored.

128. 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 laudable 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.

129. 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 intention of our Seraphic Father in all things, his "Fioretti", the "Book of Conformities" and other works that speak of him shall be read.

130. 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 Christ and zeal for the Catholic faith, wish through divine inspiration to preach in the countries of unbelievers, they shall have recourse to their Provincial Vicars or to the General Vicar. And if the latter judge them suitable for such a mission they may go with their obedience and blessing. But these brothers shall not presume to judge themselves competent or 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 faith, such as those recently found by the Spanish and Portuguese in the Indies, and the Turks and

Hagarenes who defend their erroneous 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 God who takes unceasing care of us, let them in everything be guided by the Holy Spirit and by perfect charity, which does all things well.

131. In order that we may always keep our esteemed Mother Poverty alive in ourselves in all her entirety, we should 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.

132. Since we know that our Saviour first accomplished deeds before He began to teach, so shall our prelates be the first to observe the present Constitutions, and then with holy and efficacious zeal induce their subjects to observe them unfailingly. And if certain things appear harsh or difficult at first, habit will make them easy and pleasant. Wishing them to be impressed upon the minds of the brothers, we order the Guardians to have them read at table at least once every two months. And although we do not intend to oblige the brothers under pain of any sin, we nevertheless wish and we order that those who transgress against them be severely punished. And if the Guardians are careless in observing the Constitutions, or in causing them to be observed, or in punishing transgressors, they shall receive a more serious punishment from the Provincial Vicars, and the latter from the General Vicar.

133. Since the present Constitutions were drawn up with the greatest care and mature deliberation, 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, even in the Chapters, for experience has shown that great injury has been done to religious Orders by so many changes in ordinances. 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.

134. 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.

135. 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, is characteristic of true, legitimate sons of the Eternal Father. 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 we are made, that is a free and generous one, let them observe them inviolably, thus adding new graces upon their heads. Through such sacrifice 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 our sake. 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 ordinances, for to despise them would be a grave sin, but rather out of love for Him, using all our endeavours to put them into practice. They will without a doubt be helpful to us, not only in fulfilling the Rule but every other divine law and evangelical counsel. The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Mediator, will free us from all dangers, and as our labours abound, so also will our consolations, so that we are able for anything, in Him who gives us strength. In every doubt He will give us true understanding, since He alone is infinite virtue, unfathomable wisdom, our perfect Saviour, who gives Himself abundantly to all who ask Him in truth.

136. Let us likewise keep in mind that sacred and memorable text 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. This sweet penance which we do for God's sake will last but a short time, but endless will be the glory we shall receive in return. Many are called to the blessed Kingdom, 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 hell for the wicked".

137. Though the things we have promised may seem great, they are as nothing compared to the eternal reward we shall obtain if we are faithful. Let us therefore act manfully, and not distrust our strength, because God, that best of Fathers 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 to act, but in addition will rain down his gifts on us in such abundance, that laying aside every impediment we will not only be able to obey His sweet Son, but if we wish also to follow Him and imitate Him with great joy and simplicity of heart: may He be blessed for ever! AMEN.

\*\*\*\*\*