



CHAPTER OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
THIRD ORDER PREACHERS

PROGRAM FOR NOVICE FORMATION

UNITS I - III

The Apostolic Life
The Perfection of Charity
Preaching

Part I

M. H. VICAIRE, O. P.

The Apostolic Life

PREFACE

by

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Preface

For nearly a century the popes have been laying the groundwork for the age of the lay apostolate. It is no longer a strange idea that the apostolate is in some way the concern of every Christian and is a direct concern of vast numbers of the laity. What the apostolate is needs to be deeply and widely understood. This little book can play an essential role in developing that understanding.

Is it an exaggeration to say an essential role? It is not intended to be. The expression was chosen with care. If the lay apostolate is to be securely rooted in Christian reality it must be a normal, healthy growth in the irreversible pattern of the Church's life. In making sure that it is, history cannot be ignored.

Though in one sense the Church is timeless, nevertheless, as we experience it the Church is a living, historical reality. Its present life and thought can be understood only by those who have profoundly

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Introduction

THE APOSTLE

Representations of the apostles often appear on the ancient monuments of Christianity: the mosaics of Ravenna or of Rome, Roman frescoes and cornices, the arches of Gothic portals, fifteenth-century choir stalls—where they alternate with the representations of the prophets—the miniatures in medieval Books of Hours. They are pictured as ascetics in long robes with bare feet, their faces severe and surmounted by halos. Sometimes they surround and listen to Christ; sometimes they bear witness to the Messiah by the holy book which they clutch against their breast or by the particular instrument of their martyrdom. Although they are represented individually at times, more often they appear as a group, assembled for the washing of the feet or gathered together devoutly at the Last Supper. Other times they are shown in a moment of inspiration, confirmed by the apparition of the risen Christ with his wounds, inflamed by the mission which they

are receiving from Christ—as on the spandrel of the narthex of Vezelay—illuminated by the grace of Pentecost.

Do these lofty figures still convey to Christians the fullness of the message which they were charged to preach? Certainly we continue to see in them a memorial to the life of Christ, an illustration of the Gospel, the commemoration of the foundation of the Church, the invocation of powerful protectors whose names are freely given at baptism: Peter, Paul, James, John, Philip, etc. However, the principal lesson that Christians of earlier times learned from the representation of the apostles was something quite other. The image of the apostles was for them a book in which they were eager to discover the art of the perfect life. For, in their eyes, the apostles were the models of the full Christian spirit, its living norms. Their figures helped to recall its concrete formulation even to details.

Were not these apostles intimately associated in the life and death of Christ in order later to be his witnesses even to the ends of the earth? And what an intimate association! "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). Had they not been formed slowly by Jesus himself, in the rhythm of his divine, progressive, applied pedagogy? For ex-

ample, when Jesus sent them, two-by-two, to preach, he minutely described for them the way to behave in announcing the kingdom of God. It is as if he wished to accustom them, by repeated trials, to the manner in which they should speak and act after his Resurrection. He formed them into models that they might be "examples to the flock" (1 Pt. 5:3; 2 Thes. 3:9). Whence the unabashed expression of St. Paul: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; 4:16). Imitate the apostles? Of course! Both in their persons and by their institutions they were the formulators of the original Christian archetype in the church of Jerusalem. That is why their descendants created memory-prodding images of them.

The familiarity of the image, joined to reflection on the sacred writings, contributed to popularizing the idea that the *vita* or *conversatio apostolica*, as the texts say, was the model of the perfect life. Thus, at every step of the movement of perfection in the Church, whether in its beginnings or in its renewals, this idea appears among the reformers as a leitmotiv, the intention of observing in its fullness some forgotten or unrecognized element of the "way of life of the apostles." From Egyptian ascetics to contemporary communities of parish priests, unnumbered hermits, canons, itinerant preachers, mendicant religious, missionaries, and diocesan priests

propose to rediscover this way of life at its source, in the hope of better answering to the call of God.

Surprisingly enough, the direct heirs of the apostolic ministry, the clergy, were not the ones who gave the impetus to this movement; rather, the ascetics, the anchorites, and the cenobites, were the first born of the movement toward perfection in the Church. It is particularly interesting, then, to examine how the great heralds of the monastic movement, in instituting, developing, reforming a way of life which gave promise of a fruitful future, explicitly proposed to reproduce a way of life such as Jesus had wished. It was a way of life which the apostles had accepted and delineated by their lives as well as by their words and of which a number of texts of the New Testament still pass the message on to us today.

The Monks

I. THE APOSTOLIC MODEL OF THE CHRISTIAN
 Among the texts of the New Testament which in the eyes of the monks were the apostolic sources of their ideal, the most important were the phrases of the Gospel which settled upon one or another of the apostles a command to follow. Among all these words of personal commands, none are more important than the calls, the "vocations." The monks considered the famous "Come follow me" of Jesus to be the beginning of the *conversatio apostolica* of the Twelve. But it can be the same for others; it was not addressed only to the apostles. The rich young man also heard it: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt. 19:21). To this vocation the monks, imitating those of apostolic times, also answered yes.

The Gospel also contains counsels or precepts addressed to the Twelve as a group. The accounts of the preaching mission of the apostles yield a

good number of them, which will be pointed out when the canons and especially the mendicant religious are discussed. Nevertheless even the monks would occasionally seize upon them.

In the letters of St. Paul a number of phrases of the same type can be found. The apostle par excellence recommends certain attitudes or customs to which he was strongly attached. The monks paid special attention to what he had to say about manual labor. Paul's purpose was to be independent, to owe nothing to any man. The monks saw here a fundamental element of the *vita apostolica* as they claimed to live it.

However, in all the New Testament, what impressed the monks most were the descriptions of the primitive common life found in the Acts of the Apostles. The first chapters of this book contain four passages which the exegetes designate as "summaries," groups of parallel verses which describe the same series of attitudes in repeated strokes. The two principal ones, which are re-echoed throughout this story of the early Christians, are these: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them

all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need" (Acts 4:32-35). The second text is almost the same: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day-by-day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

These verses are the precious jewels of the first chapters of the Acts. In them we are still able to hear echoes of the Church's origins. For good reason, then, exegetes assign them the highest importance. The monks also noticed them, examined them, and lovingly scrutinized them. For many centuries they considered these verses the special source of their ideal. Numerous texts on this point, dating from the origins of monasticism to its magnificent

... *only as mention of the*
 ... *Uxor*

... wearing in the twelfth century with the Cistercians, could be cited. Texts from Cîteaux could be mentioned, but the attitude of Cluny at this time was the same. Evidence of this is found in a beautiful passage written by Clunisian Abbot William of Saint-Thierry (near Reims), who was later to be a disciple of St. Bernard. About 1122 he describes the history of the monastic life in this manner: "But we come to this spiritual society of which the apostle Paul spoke to the Philippians¹ in praise of the regular discipline and of the sublime joy of brothers living together in unanimity. To do justice to this discipline it is necessary to return to its beginning in the time of the apostles. Since it was the apostles themselves who instituted it as their own way of life, according to the teaching of the Lord, unless it was the grace of the Holy Spirit which gave them power from above to live together in such a way that all would have but one heart and one soul, so that everything would be held in common, so that all would be continually in the temple in a spirit of harmony. Animated by a great love for this form of life instituted by the apostles, certain men wished no longer to have any other house or any other lodging than the house of God, the house of prayer. All that they did they did according to a common pro-

¹ 2:1-5 (unanimity, imitation of Christ); 3:17 (imitation of Paul).

gram, under a common rule; in the name of the Lord they lived together, possessing nothing of their own, not even their bodily strength, nor were they even masters of their own will. They lay down to sleep at the same time, they rose up together, they prayed, they sang psalms, they studied together. They showed the fixed and changeless will of being obedient to their superiors and of being entirely submissive to them. They kept their needs to a minimum and lived with very little; they had poor clothes, a mean diet, and limited everything according to a very precise rule."²

This text leaves no doubt. The monks of the twelfth century genuinely considered that they were continuing the common life preached and practiced by the apostles. But this idea flourished for eight centuries, and the affirmation, frequently renewed, of the apostolic origins of the monastic state is no vague allusion. It is a precise declaration, a reasoned conviction, resting, from the fourth century, in the eyes of its authors on two facts that they believed completely established. One was the Egyptian origin of monasticism, which no one would question. The other, and this one is quite questionable, is that the Egyptian Christians lived a way of life identical to that of Jerusalem.

² *Liber de natura et dignitate monachorum*, chap. 9, PL 184: 395B-390D. Written in 1122 in the Abbey of Saint-Thierry.

Eusebius of Caesarea, in his history of the Church from the beginnings to the fourth century (303-325), is responsible for the second affirmation.³ He was under the impression that he had discovered in the writings of Philo of Alexandria proof that the customs of life taught by the apostles to the church of Jerusalem were extended likewise to Alexandria in Egypt and even farther. In his work on the contemplative life, which dates before the year 40, Philo described a very curious institution whose inhabitants he called the "Therapeutae." These men lived in the desert, followed an edifying common life, practiced strict poverty, held everything in common, and distributed to each according to his needs. During the period of their common life they read the books of the ancients and practiced very extended fasts, some even resolving to eat only once every three days and some only once in six days. Finally, the room in which they prayed, following Philo, was called the *monasterion*.

Eusebius was very impressed. The Therapeutae lived exactly as the first Christians did according to the Acts of the Apostles: they practiced poverty, holding everything in common, distributing to each

³Dk. II, chap. 17, ed. by Bardy (Paris, 1952), pp. 72-77. The various passages of the *De vita contemplativa* which Eusebius sums up and comments upon are to be found in the edition of Conybeare (Oxford, 1895), pp. 20-123.

according to his needs. The ancient books which they read must have been the apostolic writings, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews and the letters of Paul, and of course the Gospels. Their fasts are doubtless those of the first Christians. Eusebius ends his long and minute analysis: "That Philo wrote all of this, thinking of the first heralds of the evangelical teaching and of the usages transmitted from the beginnings by the apostles, is evident to all." Thus the apostolic life of the church in Jerusalem was extended to Africa in the time of Philo. In considering more closely the witness of Philo it becomes evident that this kind of life was instituted not only at Alexandria itself, but much farther, beyond Lake Mareotis and even in many other countries of the world. Eusebius concluded that the form of the primitive life described by the Acts of the Apostles was not established at Jerusalem alone, nor even only in Judea, but that it was far more widespread, that it reached Egypt in the time of St. Mark, and finally that it took root in other countries, probably those in which St. Paul preached. Thus a life of prayer and poverty, harmonious and communal, had existed everywhere in the primitive Church.

Eusebius did not draw his idea of this life from the life of the monks, although he did use the words

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ostolic ascetics" and even "monastery."⁴ Monasticism properly so-called did not yet exist. But a half century later the connection would be perfectly clear. St. Jerome, in chapters eight and eleven of his *De viris illustribus* (392), seized upon the information of Eusebius and of Philo on the Therapeutae and concluded: "It is evident that the Church of the first believers in Christ was indeed such as the monks now desire and strive to be. That nothing should be held as one's own; that there should be neither rich nor poor among them; that whatever they brought with them should be shared among those who were in need; that they should give themselves to prayer and to psalms, as well as to study and to continence. Is this not how Luke portrays the believers of Jerusalem?"⁵

Cassian, some thirty years later—he wrote between 419 and 428—did not satisfy himself merely with comparing, he claimed a definite continuity. Rereading what Eusebius had written on the origins of the church of Alexandria and on the Therapeutae, he specifies that the monks received this way of life in St. Mark, and even that they have improved upon the practices imposed by the apostles on the church of Jerusalem, or rather on the entire primi-

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 72, 74. On the theme of apostolic asceticism in Origen and in Eusebius, cf. Spaetling, pp. 21 f. ⁵PL 23:654-658.

tive Church.⁶ He established then the theory that would become classical and that would be found, as if by custom and often reduced to a schema, even in the bulls of the medieval popes.

From the beginning the apostles had established a communal life or apostolic life as described in the Acts for everyone in the Church. This life was extended to the whole body of the faithful including the church of Alexandria. St. Paul, however, introduced a completely disconcerting element. He taught that upon the Gentiles, who unlike the Alexandrian Jews had not been prepared to assume the rigors of the primitive life, should be imposed only the four ritual precepts of which the famous gathering called the Council of Jerusalem had spoken (Acts 15:5-29). The hierarchy, however, finally thought it fitting for all the faithful to be held only to the kind of life to which the Gentile converts had been bound. Therefore it was no longer necessary to renounce everything as was done in the beginning. In this way a form of life became common in the Church which was inferior to the way of life of the primitive Church and which put an end to the communal life. Some were not agreeable to it. The monks clung to the more perfect kind of life. Continuing the tradition of the church of Jerusalem

⁶See *Institutiones coenobiorum*, Bk. II, chap. 5, PL 49: 84-88. Written between 419-426.

what hierarchy

o writers: monasticism(?)
monasteries
standards for monks?

established by the apostles, they set up definite communities, isolated from the rest of the Church, in which they preserved as a precious thing the vitality of primitive Christianity. This is what the Abbot Plummer discusses in the eighteenth conference of the *Collationum XXIV collectio*, where Cassian gives an account of conferences with some of the principal ascetics or monks of the desert.⁷ And here is the conclusion of the conference: "But those who still live in the apostolic fervor [The expression "apostolic fervor" is well used! It evokes the tongues of fire which descended upon the apostles on Pentecost.] preserve the memory of this primitive perfection by going far away from their cities and from the company of those who consider illicit for themselves and for the Church of God the negligence of an easy life. Thus they went to live in the woods or in obscure places and strove to practice, privately and as if it were a particular . . . , the rules instituted by the apostles for the whole body of the Church. This discipline of life of which we speak is not lost among the disciples of those who separated themselves from these congregations. These men who isolated themselves from the crowd of the faithful were later called monks or 'lonely ones,' because they abstained from mar-

⁷Collatio XVIII, PL 49:109-1100A. Written between 420-428. Cf. Olphe-Galliard, col. 232.

riage and separated themselves from their families and from the world by the severe practice of the solitary life. They are justly called cenobites, since they drew together in the community of life."

Cassian is one of the authors most appreciated in the convents. Constantly reread by novices and monks, his conferences fashioned the medieval monastic life—and even the modern monastic life. Such a reading of history could not be sterile. The conviction of Cassian would influence subsequent monks and would play a large part in turning more than ever the eyes of those who wished to give themselves to the life of Christian perfection toward the origins of the Church, toward the great model of the apostles and of the community of the cenacle.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Conrad of Clairvaux gathered together the Cistercian compilation that is called the *Great Exordium*. The prologue he gave it is a history of the monastic life down to the least detail, inspired by the text of Cassian.⁸ Similarly inspired in the first quarter of the preceding century was the polemicist who defended the monks against the canons and the secular clerics in the little work called *De vita vere*

⁸See *Exordium Magnum cisterciense*, chaps. 2, 3, PL 185:997-999.

postolica.⁹ This vision was therefore a general one. When a William of Saint-Thierry, a St. Bernard,¹⁰ even an Abelard,¹¹ represented their monastic life as an apostolic life, they intended to signify, just as did the monk of the fifth century, that they were continuing the exalted life prescribed by the apostles to the Infant Church and practiced by them. Since many Christians, yielding to the temptation to a lower form of life infinitely less conformed to the inspiration of the Spirit who breathed upon the first faithful, had later abandoned this apostolic life, what was the value of this conviction? Was it authentic? Did it truly correspond to reality and to the intentions of the founders of the monastic life?

2. NOSTALGIA FOR THE EARLY CHURCH

The yearning to live as the early Christians did grew out of an error of fact, namely, a false gen-

⁹Chap. 4, PL 170:043-053. Martène attributes this opus-
cule, not without reasons, to Rupert of Tuy (Deutz); De-
reino thinks it the work of Honorius of Autun; others of a
monk of Brunwylers near the Abbey of Tuy. None are com-
pletely convincing.

¹⁰"Ordo noster qui primus fuit in Ecclesia, imo a quo
cepit Ecclesia . . . cujus Apostoli institutores . . . incho-
tores extiterunt." *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sti. Theodorici*,
chaps. 10, 24, PL 182:912B-C. On the content of the *Vita*
apostolica: Sermones de diversis, 22,2; 27,3; 37,7; In *Canti-*
ca Sermo, 85,12, PL 183:515D, 613C, 642CD, 1193D.

¹¹*Historia calamitatum*, chap. 7, PL 178:131D; *Theologia*,
Bk. II, PL 178:1179B and especially 1180DC.

eralization of the life of Jerusalem. Eusebius made a mistake when he saw the life of the early Church in the account of the life of the Therapeutae. The Therapeutae, if they had any other existence than in the generous and utopian imagination of Philo, were probably pious ascetics of Jewish origin, lovers of philosophy, who were doubtless few in number and left no trace at all other than the account found in Eusebius. They seem to have been one of those numerous institutions created by the Jewish spirit in the full ardor of its faith. An example of this type of institution is the seminonks of Qumran, the remains of which are being exhumed along the coast of the Dead Sea and which would have remained almost totally unknown to us had not their library been accidentally discovered. The Therapeutae are very interesting since they showed the creative ardor of a segment of the Jewish faith at the time of our Lord and the religious purity of this faith. However, they are not able to provide a basis for monastic history, especially as they are represented to us by Eusebius. They were not the first Chris-
tians, nor were they the first Christian monks; they were pure Jews of a very religious bent.

Note that, regardless of the error on which Eusebius and Cassian rest a good part of their theories and which therefore somewhat confuses the historical tradition, it is indeed exact that monasticism

ESSENES?

was inspired from its beginning—not exclusively, but truly—by a desire to imitate the apostles and the first Christians.

Certainly there are elements in monasticism which are not specifically Christian but common to every effort for interior perfection. This general basis of human spirituality explains the existence of real analogies between the monastic institution and institutions far distant from it both in time and in space. On the other hand, the Egyptian beginnings of monasticism resulted in the institution inheriting a certain number of local traditions. The better Orientalists, for example Lefort, have shown that many of the secondary traits of monasticism can be explained by its Egyptian origins better than by Greek or Pythagorean origins. Finally, among the Christian inspirations of monasticism everything cannot be reduced to the imitation of the apostles. Certain biblical themes such as "the angelic life," "prophetic hope," "the royal road," "abnegation," "martyrdom,"¹² have furnished to the monks who meditated on their institution elements of great fruitfulness. Nevertheless the most fundamental Christian factor which historians have discovered in the origins of monasticism is a powerful "nostalgia for the early Church."¹³ The principal expres-

¹²Lectercq, p. 170; Bacht, p. 66; Auf der Maur, p. 174.
¹³There is a certain number of these themes.

sion of this was the wish to take up the "apostolic life," that is to say, the Christian mentality communicated by the apostles to the early Church and lived by them. This is not surprising if it is remembered that the early monks were convinced of the universality of the formula of the Christian life described in the Acts as pertaining to Jerusalem.

At the heart of monasticism and indeed the very stuff out of which it was created is the anchoritism of the hermits: the flight to the desert and the solitary life. The eremitical life down through the centuries was the primitive nebula from which, as stars, the institutions or movements of perfection in the Church were shaped. It can be said that in every true religious there is something of the hermit, an element often almost totally ignored, but an inclination which is always there. The eremitical life, the origin of the monastic movement, was inspired expressly by the appeal to total renunciation addressed by Christ to the apostles and through them to all of the first Christians (Mt. 19:21). The account by St. Athanasius of the conversion of St. Anthony, one of the most ancient documents concerning the eremitical and monastic life, is significant of the whole tradition.

"One day as Anthony reflected upon why the apostles had abandoned everything at the call of Jesus to follow him and the first Christians had

... and their goods to place them at the feet of the apostles for distribution to the poor, and on the wonderful hope such people would have in heaven, he entered the basilica and heard in the gospel which was being read at that very moment the account of the call of the young man: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come follow me, and you shall have treasure in heaven.' He, himself, then sold what he had and went to the desert.¹⁴

As these flights to the desert became more and more common, various types of eremitical associations among the solitaries began to be organized in Egypt. In time the common life made its appearance. The powerful but unstable influence of the eremitical life then passed into an institution which gave it form and equilibrium and rendered it fruitful. This was the cenobitic life of Pachomius (about 320). But when one has recourse to the texts relevant to the substantial fortunate transformation of the flight into the desert into the community life, one again encounters the significance of the documents concerning the life of the apostles.¹⁵

The most ancient lives of St. Pachomius, written in the Coptic language, attribute to the founder the

¹⁴Vita Antonii, chap. 2, PG 20:842-840.

¹⁵K. Heussi (*Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Tübingen, 1930), having expressly denied it, Th. Lefort vigorously reasserted it in *Rev. d'hist. ecclésiastique*, 33 (1937), 345 f.

explicit intention of renewing the perfect community "according to what is written concerning the believers in the Acts of the Apostles."¹⁶ The coadjutor and successor of the Saint, Horsisi, made identical protestations according to the book that is known as his testament.¹⁷ The second successor, but direct disciple of the founder, Theodoro of Tabennesi, claimed even to have heard St. Anthony, to whom he went to announce the death of his master, declare that the cenobitic institution of Pachomius surpassed his own and that the grouping of monks into a community realized truly the "apostolic way"; to such an extent that if he were not himself so aged, he would himself take up this way of the apostles.¹⁸ Thus Theodoro could declare: "[It is by a favor] of God . . . that the holy *kotnionia* appeared [on the earth]; by [that] he made the apostolic life known to men who desire to be images of the apostles before the Lord of all forever. The apostles in effect abandoned everything and with their whole heart followed Christ After that they deserved to be seated on the twelve thrones

¹⁶It is a question of the first Sahidic fragment, in Th. Lefort, *Les vies coptes de S. Pachôme et des ses premiers successeurs* (Louvain, 1943), p. 3. Cf. pp. 186, 209, 209, 323.

¹⁷"Liber Horseisius," ed. by A. Doon, in *Pachomiana Latina* (Louvain, 1932), 142, n. 40, where Acts 4:32 f. is cited.

¹⁸Lefort, *Les vies coptes* . . . , pp. 208 f.

of glory and to [judge] the twelve [tribes] of Israel."¹⁹

The connection between the apostolic Church and the cenobitic life is more clearly, and above all more abundantly, expressed by Theodore, to whom we perhaps owe the stereotyped formula, "apostolic life."²⁰ Certainly it is fitting for a disciple to set down in formulas and in theories the insights of his master. But to prove that in doing this Theodore did not fundamentally modify the position of St. Pachomius, it is enough to note with the historians²¹ the primordial role that the direct inspiration of Holy Scripture or, to speak as Gennadius, his "apostolic grace"²² held in the work of the founder. At the same time it should be remembered that, at the very period of this foundation, Eusebius

¹⁹2^o *Catéchèse de Théodore*, in Th. Lefort, *Oeuvres de Pachôme et ses disciples, Scriptores copistes*, 24 (Louvain, 1916), p. 38. Cf. p. 41.

²⁰It is this which Stegwart justly emphasizes, p. 237. Nevertheless, to suspect that Theodore is the first to have formulated the theme of the apostolic life, or even to have projected his distinct idea on the documents of his predecessors is not enough to prove that, in doing this, he essentially distorted them.

²¹See H. Bacht, "Antonius u. Pachomius, von der Anachorese zum Cönobitentum," *Studia Anselmiana*, 38 (1950), 92-97.

²²"Vir tum in docendo quam in signa faciendo apostolicene gratiae," in *De vitis illustribus*, chap. 7, ed. by Cushing and Richardson (Leipzig, 1800), p. 63. If the rule of Pachomius did not contain biblical citations, this results from his mode of thought from his mentality.

spread the idea that in Egypt, Rome, and Antioch, the first Christians following the apostles had universally undertaken a life of holy community, similar to that of Jerusalem. The theme of the invitation of the apostles no longer suggested only sensational gestures of abandoning riches and fleeing the world, as it did in the time of St. Anthony and the first anchorites; rather it provided a complete program of the perfect life, a life in community.

Such then, in its beginning, was the apostolic ideal of the movement of the perfect life in the Church. It is of little importance that this movement did not have the historic continuity of passing to monasticism from the life of the early Church. It is not even important that the summaries of the Acts schematized to excess and risked giving a deformed picture of the life of the primitive Church as a result of a somewhat too heavilyhanded exegesis. What is essential to our eyes for the moment is the notion that this scriptural schema, such as it was understood by each century in turn, has directly influenced the history of the life of perfection and especially the cenobitic life. This partially, justifies Cassian. It is true that he was mistaken and betrayed tradition according to the historical facts. But it was not precisely history which concerned him. His purpose was to affirm the spiritual filiation

THE APOSTOLIC OBSERVANCE OF THE MONK

Having established the original "apostolic" inspiration of the monastic movement, it is possible now to enter into details and to explore the attitudes, the practices, the institutions which—in the course of the long history of monasticism—the masters of the monastic life have discovered in the apostolic example. Among these the monastic profession holds the first place. Their reading of the Gospel persuaded the monks that their profession, that is to say their monastic commitment, was prefigured by the commitment of the apostles. They specify even the instant at which this was done. It was in the course of the famous proclamation of St. Peter to the Lord: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you."²¹

The common opinion of the monastic masters held that, at that instant, St. Peter made profession in the name of all the apostles. For this reason he went on to add: "What then shall we have?" It was a profession somewhat selfish but precise. Through-out the vast monastic literature it is customary to refer to this act as the "apostolic profession." Thus St. Bernard did not hesitate to designate the monastic profession, or rather the pre-profession which

²¹10:27. Cf. Leclercq, p. 90 and notes 0 and 51.

of the ideal which flourished in his times in the monasteries to that which reigned in the apostolic church of Jerusalem—as he understood it from the text of the Acts. From this point of view he was right. The expressions then employed to indicate the connections of the monastic movement with the apostles, with the first monks, and with the great founders of the monastic rules are characteristic.²² The apostles are called "authors of the monastic life," "institutors," "initiators." They were considered responsible for monasticism since they had given it its stamp of authentic and original Christian life. Moreover, they were considered the original models because they were the first to teach and to practice the formulas and the fundamental institutions of the monastic life. To St. Paul the Hermit, to St. Anthony, the title of "founders" is given, because they initiated the monastic life; yet they are called also "conservators," because by the institution of the monasteries, they prevented this spirit, the life of the apostolic Church, from disappearing totally from the world. As for St. Benedict and St. Augustine, authors of the traditional rules, they are called "particular masters" of the monastic life.

²²Texts cited by Leclercq, pp. 87 f.

was called "the renunciation of the world," *apostolica professio*.²⁸

The monks considered that the apostles had also left them an example of a novitiate. Our Lord himself was the Master of novices. Here is a delightful passage from Peter of Cellas: "To the religious who were the twelve apostles and the seventy-two disciples Jesus taught the discipline of the cloister; . . . so great was their reverence toward their Master and so great their obedience and their submission, so great their fraternal affection, that never was a breath of discord raised among them, except perhaps when they had a discussion among them to know which held the greater rank, or when they became indignant on the subject of the two brothers who asked to sit the one at the right and the other at the left hand of Jesus. But all the human frailty contained in such fragile vessels not yet sufficiently baked in the fire of the Holy Spirit the hand of the potter reshaped in correcting them. . . . They never wished to be separated from him, and when he announced to them that he was going into Judea, Thomas said to the disciples: 'Let us go with him, that we also might die with him.'"²⁹

²⁸St. Bernard, *Sermones de diversis*, Sermo 37.7, PL 183: 042CD; Sermo 27.3, PL 183:013C; In *Cantica* Sermo 85.12, PL 183:1103D.

²⁹*De disciplina claustrali*, chap. 2, PL 202:1101D-1102C.

Like the life of the apostles, the monk's life had for its purpose the perfect practice of the life of charity, which is the beginning and the end of the entire Christian life. This above all Jesus accomplished by the *otia apostolica*, namely, the possibility of living more completely "at the very wellsprings." On this point it is important to consider the words of St. Bernard: "It is your life which makes the apostolic life present to the Church to-day. What does that mean? The apostles left everything and, gathered together close to the Lord, lived under his tutelage. From the fountain of the Lord they were able to draw the waters of joy, and at the very wellspring itself they drank the water of life. How fortunate the eyes of those who have seen him! But you yourself is it not very much like that for you, even though you no longer live in his presence since he is bodily absent, and you do not hear words from his mouth but from those whom he has sent? Pass on this treasure of having believed on the hearing and the faith of those sent, just as the apostles believed at sight and on the words themselves. Persevere in this state, and just as the apostles kept to the royal road of justice in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in many laborings, fasts, vigils, and other observances, strive

equal them, not in their merits but in their practices."²¹

The apostles gave the monks the example of a life in the élan of the Spirit, completely animated by the "apostolic fervor" which they received on Pentecost and by which they passed on the secret of receiving and radiating grace. The text of the Acts of the Apostles, immediately after mentioning the communal life, adds, "and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). This grace manifested itself even by miracles: "And many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). In this way a true monk, who lives in community, possesses an extraordinary grace for radiating sanctity and thus of spreading the Church abroad. He can obtain the power of a miracle worker. The biographers of the great monks and of holy founders sought to emphasize the fact that, because of their great holiness, these men, like the apostles, had received the power of working miracles. Examples are to be found in Cassian's account of the Abbot Abraham,²² Gennadius' account of St. Pachomius,²³ or St. Gregory's account of St. Benedict.²⁴

²¹St. Bernard, *Sermo* 22, 2, *PL* 183:505D-506A.

²²*Coll.* 15, chap. 9, *PL* 49:1003A; cf. chap. 1, 990A.

²³Cf. *supra*, p. 20, n. 4.

²⁴*Dialog.*, Bk. II, chap. 32, *PL* 60:188C; cf. chap. 7, 140AB.

The monks also drew from the apostles the example of communal prayer: "And day by day, attending the temple together" (Acts 2:40). Is this not the origin of their liturgical office? Following the apostles and the primitive community, the Church has formed the custom of common recitations at fixed hours which form its official prayer. The apostles clung to this as an essential part of their ministry. Their institution of the diaconate was, as the apostles themselves declared, to "devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 4:4). The monks took their cue from the apostles: regular prayer to fulfill the precept of the Lord, "that they ought always to pray" (Lk. 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17). Here we find the origin of the major monastic prayer.

From another point of view it is evident that the monks drew from the apostolic life the fullness of a fraternal community by holding everything in common. With regard to the ordinary necessities of life they had a common table and a common shelter. Their spiritual life was formed around common prayer and the *lectio divina*. With regard to practical activity they engaged in bodily labor and the service of their neighbor. The common development of the moral life was rooted in fraternal correction according to the precepts of the Gospel. From this sprang a variety of institutions of which

the chapter of faults is one of the most fruitful. Finally, the entire group was to be dominated by a fraternal spirit: "They wished to have but one heart and one spirit." This unanimity, the earthly fulfillment of fraternal charity as sketched in the fine touch of St. John the evangelist, plays the role of end or purpose in monastic life. Everything else is a means. The developments of the notion of unanimity that can be read in the spiritual writings and in the legislation of the monks are a direct echo of the Acts of the Apostles.

Would it not be entirely fitting that the charity which dominates the interior life of a community of monks should break out to illumine the exterior world in a ministry of salvation? If there is truly an Eastern tradition of monasticism, of which St. Jerome occasionally made himself the defender in the West²¹ and which rejects missionary activity for the monks, there is another tradition of which St. John Chrysostom,²² the Syrian monks, and the Western monastery of Lerins²³ are the most ancient witnesses. This other tradition resolutely turns the

²¹See *Epistula L, ad Romanos*, 4, *PL* 22:514; *Contra Vigilantium Liber*, *PL* 23:367A, reproduced in Gratian, chap. 3, XVI, q. 1. It is the famous text: "Monachus non doctoris sed placentis habet officium, qui vel se, vel mundum lucet et Domini pavidi praestolatur adventum." Jerome did not always follow his own advice. See *Auf der Maur*, 117, n. 3.

²²See *Auf der Maur*, pp. 110-14, 130-34, 177-82.

²³See *ibid.*, pp. 11, 178.

monks toward the evangelization of the pagans, for who is more suited to the preaching of salvation than "men animated by the burning zeal of the apostolic philosophy [by which is meant the life of total renunciation]."²⁴ These words of John Chrysostom can be annotated by those of St. Nilus (d. 430), his disciple: "A holy life without preaching is more useful than preaching without a holy life. But when a holy life and preaching are joined together, then one achieves the perfect image of the apostolic philosophy"²⁵ Obviously the ministry of salvation is included in the imitation of the apostles; this element is so important today that it is the only one to be clearly expressed by the adjective "apostolic,"²⁶ (from which the noun "apostolate" derives) in modern languages. It is certain, however, that such was not the case during the first twelve centuries of the Church. For St. John Chrysostom²⁷ himself,

²⁴In this way he described the monks he requested of Leontius of Ancyra to evangelize the Goths, according to Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.*, 5,31, ed. of Parnentier, pp. 330 f. Cf. *Auf der Maur*, pp. 130 f. On the use of philosophy to signify a type of the perfect life, *ibid.*, pp. 87-92, 130 f., 169 f., and E.T. Beltencourt, "L'idéal religieux de S. Antoine," *Studia Anselmiana*, 38 (1950), 40 and ff. 3.

²⁵*Epist.*, Bk. III, 243, *PG* 79:496D; cf. *Ep.*, Bk. II, 103, *PG* 79:245BC.

²⁶L.M. Dewilly, "Note sur l'histoire de l'adjectif: Apostolique," *Mélanges de science religieuse*, 5 (1940), 141-52.

²⁷See *Auf der Maur*, p. 143, nn. 10, 11. But this attitude of life, for St. John Chrysostom, included evangelization, p. 147, n. 5.

as for all ancient tradition, the term "apostolic" is applied essentially to the discipline of life as it was observed by the apostles and by the faithful instructed by the apostles in the early Church, the models of the perfect Christian.

It is, then, from the descriptions of the church of Jerusalem that the monks drew the fundamental discipline of their common life, apostolic poverty. But apostolic poverty was not a total absence of the means of existence, for the community itself had possessions; rather it was a renunciation of personal ownership. This epitomized, in the eyes of the monks, the rule of the apostles. As late as the eleventh century the council of Nimes (1906) stated: "For the monks live according to the rule of the apostles and follow their footsteps in practicing the common life, according as it is written in the Acts of the Apostles: they had but one heart and one soul and they held all their goods in common."³⁹

The monks also took from the apostolic model the ideal of renunciation and of penance. Like the apostles, who abandoned everything at the word of Jesus, a monk should abandon everything. (And, notes a monastic author, he should give all that he renounces to the poor, not to his parents; a fitting rebuke to those monastic vocations which had no

³⁹Mansi, *Sac. Conc. nova et ampl. collecta*, XX, col. 934. Cf. XVI, q. 1, c. ex auct.

other purpose than to prevent excessive division of the family heritage.) They took the notion of obedience³⁹ from the obedience of the apostles ("Lo, we have left everything and followed you"); likewise penance⁴⁰ and even fasting. This is somewhat surprising. Does not the monastic tradition on this point lack precise support in the life of the apostles? It is true that St. James, according to Hegesippus,⁴¹ fasted intensely, that St. Paul spoke of his numerous fastings, that Jesus himself had foreseen the time after his death as a time when the apostles would fast. To these texts the monks added a number of traditions more or less apocryphal.⁴² Specifically following Eusebius, who took Philo for the dragon-man of the Therapeutae, the certitude became general that the primitive Church gave itself over to fasts so harsh that it was not unusual for early Christians to fast two or three days, even for five days out of six.

Is it necessary to add certain characteristics of dress?⁴³ The bare feet prescribed for the apostles by Jesus in the words of St. Matthew were respected by certain monks at least in the Orient. Modest

³⁹See Hugh of Rouen, *Dial.*, Bk. VI, chap. 4, PL 192: 1219B.

⁴⁰See Leclercq, p. 99.

⁴¹See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, Bk. II, chap. 23, 4.

⁴²See Leclercq, p. 100.

⁴³See *ibid.*, pp. 100, 101.

garb was demanded by St. Paul, the narrow-cut tunic in place of the flowing robes of the Romans, a likeness to the appearance of the faithful servant proposed by Jesus as a model to the apostles; this servant, his loins girt, was always ready to be immediately of service to his master. Even in the least details the monks took pleasure in thinking that they observed the rule of the apostles and could legitimately give to their monastic clothing the name of "apostolic habit."⁴⁴

Much more important was the manual work. St. Paul was not the only apostolic proof of this in the eyes of the monks. Were not many of the apostles fishermen, and did they not return to their nets after the Resurrection? It is easy to understand the point in the Rule of St. Benedict: "Then only are they truly monks, when they live by the work of their hands, as did our fathers and the apostles."⁴⁵ The Rule of St. Isidore also affirms this in declaring: "All the apostles gave themselves over to corporal work."⁴⁶

Finally the monks felt that they participated, according to the response given by Jesus to the "profession" of the apostles, in the "apostolic hope."

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴⁵Rule, chap. 48. On the manual work of the monks, see Siegwant, pp. 242-44.

⁴⁶*Regula monachorum*, chap. 5, PL 83:873B.

And this hope was twofold. In one sense, it was the hope of building up the Church. Jesus had promised them, in the person of the apostles, that the apostolic life, practiced with generosity, that the a source of grace for the continual growth of the Church. They thus had the certitude that the observance of their rule was a contribution to the word which led to conversions, because it was itself a preaching by example.

And in regard to God their hope was for the hundredfold. Cassian brought his celebrated conversations with the fathers of the desert to an end with a chapter on the hundredfold promised on this earth to those who empty themselves in the search for perfection.⁴⁷ Peter of Cellles preferred to consider the promise as it is fulfilled in eternity: "What shall I say of those monks who were the apostles? I would compare them to the angelic spirits with this difference that they have served him, who made himself less than the angels, when he was still clothed in our mortal condition. Yet when crowned with glory and honor by his Father, raised above the Powers and the Principalities, he is seated upon the throne of his Majesty; the apostles are themselves seated on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and perhaps even

⁴⁷See Collatio XXIV, 20, PL 49:1320C-1328C.

the angels, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 6:3). This hope lives also among those who dwell in the cloister. Since their observances are the same as those of the apostles, they have received from Jesus Christ the same promise as have the apostles."¹⁰

On this point, as on the others, the monks found in the imitation of the apostles a complete guide for their lives. It is understandable that, in the midst of the twelfth century, a Benedictine chronicler, after having recopied the significant verses of the Acts of the Apostles and joining one to the other, was able to write full of enthusiasm: "What element in the sum total of our monastic observances is lacking when compared to the way of life of which we have just written? In this account can be found the hearing of the Word of God, holy communion, prayer, the living of the communal life. Here also is found contempt for riches and the distribution of material things according to the needs of each, the assiduous application to the divine office as well as to almsgiving, the common table, spiritual joy and simplicity. We also express without ceasing the divine praises and thanksgiving; we also are a congregation one in spirit and tranquil, detached from domestic affairs. In a word, all that is discovered in the rules of the fathers, all that is practiced in

¹⁰*De disciplina claustrali*, chap. 2, PL 202:1102D.

the customs of the monasteries, the whole complex is as clear as day in the Acts of the Apostles."¹¹ It was not in vain that the monks pondered in their hearts and in their heads what the Sacred Books in no little detail allowed them to learn of the life of the apostles. The history of monasticism, with its remarkable renewals, is to a great extent the fruit of these meditations, a blessed fruit of the Gospel of the apostles. However, these meditations, taken up again, were apt to give rise to quite different results.

¹¹"Casus Monasterii Petrisinsensis," chap. 11, in *Die Chronik des Klosters Petershausen*, ed. by Fejfer (Lindau-Constance, 1956), p. 20. The texts cited from the Acts were: 2:44-47; 4:32,34 f.; 5:13.

We have seen that, among the monks from the end of the fourth century, those of Syria and of St. Chrysostom had a way of understanding the apostolic life that adapted it very well for missionary evangelization. For even better reason there

was a similar interpretation of it by certain clerics and bishops. This interpretation was carried to extremes by certain fanatics whose one-sidedness eventually resulted in their separation from Catholic unity and orthodoxy. When monasticism came into being, certain "apostolics" or "apofactics," catalogued later by St. Epiphanius, seemed to have conceived as the apostolic ideal a singularly disturbed preaching activity.¹³ Later the Messalians, the Paulicians, the Bogomils of Bulgaria or of Bosnia, and eventually in the twelfth century in the West the different kinds of evangelical preachers raised up by the heretic Lombards and Albigensians followed an analogous line. All the apostolics of this tradition, however, were not dissidents. Some itinerant preachers of France, from the beginning of the twelfth century to the Poor Catholics of the first decade of the thirteenth century, a series of good Catholics, manifested the possibility of living within the Church itself an apostolic ideal entirely different from that of the monks.¹⁴

The imitation of the apostles of which Diego spoke at Montpellier refers expressly to this ideal, the imitation of the itinerant life which the Twelve lived under the guidance of the Lord. The description of it is found in the Gospel, among other places

¹³See Spaelting, pp. 3-35; Siegwart, p. 230.

¹⁴See Spaelting, pp. 43-47.

in the account of the mission which Jesus confided to the Seventy-two, truly a practical exercise of preaching. "[He] sent them on ahead of him, two-by-two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come" (Lk. 10:1-10, cf. 9:1-6; Mt. 10:5-16; Mk. 6:7-13), and gave them on this occasion the very concrete counsel from which it is possible to draw a complete program of life. These are the essential elements:

1. A personal mission, that is to say a vocation and a mandate. Each of the apostle-preachers heard the "come follow me." Each had received a mandate: he was sent, *missus*. The point is very important; it is precisely the mission which the heretics did not possess.
2. A ministry, an *officium*, conferred by the mandate: the preaching of the Gospel. "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel (Mk. 1:15)."
3. At the same time a precise and exacting way of life: total poverty. It is no longer a question of divesting oneself of one's own goods to live henceforth without personal property but from the goods of the community; poverty is to be absolute. There is to be no property at all, neither individual nor common: "Have neither gold nor silver nor money in your belts"; do not even carry bread with you;

do not have either a bag or a wallet for your journey. For daily subsistence one must depend on good will, on daily charity; "have no care for tomorrow." Nourishment depends upon the discretion of those one meets along the way and especially upon those to whom one preaches. It is necessary to accept what is offered; there are no forbidden foods. This is an important precision which departs from the practice of the monks in this matter. One should eat what one is offered and as it is offered, lest one give pain or embarrassment to the host. Nor should one pass from one host to another. Clothing also ought to be poor, limited to one tunic. Finally the feet should be bare; St. Mark, however, allows the use of sandals. Likewise, while Luke and Matthew say that the preacher should not have even a staff, St. Mark permits one. He is then a little less austere than the other two. Here is a slight scriptural problem which in times when inspiration was understood in a fashion too material gave occasion for disputes on the Gospel.

Such then is the first part of the picture of the apostolic life; it can be summed up in two words: mendicant poverty.

4. Another element is mobility; it is necessary to travel. What a difference from the life of the Cenacle! Do not wait for men to come, but go into the city and into the villages wherever the Lord ought to be. That is to say, into the entire universe. One must go without rest, go swiftly; "Do not greet anyone on the way" (a neat Eastern touch which graphically signifies the haste of the trip). But when a destination is reached a greeting is given. However this "peace" which one gives upon arriving, if by chance those to whom it is offered are not worthy of it, returns to its author: a little apostolic economy. Finally shake the dust from your feet if anyone does not receive you, that you may owe him nothing. Thus is created the spirituality of the road. *Vos estis hospites et advenae*, you are guests and pilgrims. You are not to be settlers. From this is drawn the spirituality of the *peregrinatio pro Christo*, of becoming an exile for Christ. It was that which in the seventh century set those doughty Irishmen on the road under the guidance of St. Colombanus and caused them to cover a good part of the West, renewing Western monasticism.
5. Finally the last element, which must not be neglected. In this traveling there is an affinity

for the common life. It is not the solitude of St. Paul. Two-by-two should they go. Certainly the community is not large, but it is already sufficient to permit charity, as the Fathers of the Church who comment on this text observe, for it is sufficient that there be two in order that fraternal charity may be practiced. It is by design that manual labor is not added to these elements. It is not that one never encounters it among the apostolics who devoted themselves to evangelization. It was a tradition too unanimous in the whole history of the movement of perfection. Canons regular of the *arctior consuetudo*, for example, had considered themselves obliged to work with their hands by the *ordo monasterii* and still more by the example of St. Paul. This was true at the turn of the thirteenth century of the Humiliati of Lombardy and of the first companions of St. Francis. However, other apostolic groups, such as the Vaudois and the Catharists, clearly rejected it: work, as the Scripture says, for "the food which endures to eternal life" (Jn. 6:27). It would be a crime, they thought, for one who was consecrated to the work of the Gospel to work with his hands lest he would give part of his resources to something other than spiritual