

## **The Hidden Apostolate**

### **Pius XI's letter "Umbratilem"**

#### **Apostolic constitution Umbratilem of our most Holy Father Pope Pius XI approving the statutes of the Carthusian Order**

PIUS, BISHOP SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

For a Perpetual Memorial of the Matter

[1] All those, who, according to their rule, lead a life of solitude remote from the din and follies of the world, and who not only assiduously contemplate the divine mysteries and the eternal truths, and pour forth ardent and continual prayers to God that his kingdom may flourish and be daily spread more widely, but who also atone for the sins of other men still more than for their own by mortification, prescribed or voluntary, of mind and body - such indeed must be said to have chosen the better part, like Mary of Bethany.

For no more perfect state and rule of life than that can be proposed for men to take up and embrace, if the Lord calls them to it. Moreover, by the inward holiness of those who lead the solitary life in the silence of the cloister and by their most intimate union with God, is kept brightly shining the halo of that holiness which the spotless Bride of Jesus Christ holds up to the admiration and imitation of all.

[2] No wonder, then, that ecclesiastical writers of former ages, wishing to explain and extol the power and efficacy of the prayers of these same religious men, should have gone so far as to liken their prayers to Moses, quoting a well-known fact, viz., that when Josue was engaged in battle with the Amalekites on the plain and Moses on the top of a hill near by was praying and beseeching God for the victory of his people, it happened that as long as Moses held his hands raised heavenward, the Israelites conquered, but if from weariness he lowered them a little, then the Amalekites overcame the Israelites; wherefore, Aaron and Hur on either side held up his arms until Josue left the field victorious.

This example most aptly symbolizes the effect of the prayers of the religious We have spoken of, since those prayers are borne up by the august Sacrifice of the Altar on one hand, and on the other hand by works of penance, as by two props typified respectively in a certain way, by Aaron and Hur; it being the usual and indeed the principal duty of these solitaries, as We have remarked above, to offer themselves up to God and devote themselves as propitiatory victims and hostages for peace for their own weal and that of the world - a function which they fulfil in an official way, as it were.

[3] Therefore, from the earliest times this mode of life, most perfect and at the same time most useful and fruitful for the whole of Christendom more than anyone can conceive, took root in the Church and spread abroad on all sides.

For if we pass over the "Ascetics" who right from the very outset of our religion used to live so austere, though in their own houses, that Cyprian considered them as "the noblest part of Christ's flock," it is known that many of the Faithful in Egypt, persecuted under the Emperor Decius on account of their religion, had fled into the desert parts of the land and had found by experience that the solitary sort of life they led there was most profitable for attaining perfection, they continued that way of living even after peace had been granted to the Church.

The number of these anchorites was so immense that there were said to be as many inhabitants in the wilderness as there were citizens in the towns. Some of them went to live far away from all human society, while others, under the leadership of Anthony, began to live in lauras. That was the origin of the common life - life in community - which, gradually evolved, organized and ruled by certain definite laws, was quickly propagated throughout all the countries of the East and then spread over Italy, Gaul, and Proconsular Africa, while monasteries rose up on all sides.

[4] Since the whole object of this institution lay in this, that the monks, each one in the privacy of his cell, unoccupied with any exterior ministry and having nothing to do with it, should fix their thoughts exclusively on things of heaven, wonderful was the benefit that accrued from it to Christian Society.

Both the clergy and the laymen of that age could not help considering, to their own great profit, the example given by men who, urged on by the charity of Christ to all that was highest and most arduous, sought to follow the obscure and hidden life he himself had led in his home in Nazareth, and, like sacrificial victims vowed to God, to fill up those things that were wanting in his sufferings.

[5] Nevertheless, in the course of time the institution so pre-eminent, that is called the contemplative life, declined somewhat and lost in vigor. The reason was that, although the monks, as a rule, shunned the care of souls and other exterior ministry, yet they came by degrees to combine the works of active life with their pondering on divine things and their contemplation.

They thought that they ought to comply with the earnest request of the bishops and assist in the labors of the secular priests who were not able to cope with the many needs of the Faithful, or, that it behoved them to take charge of popular instruction - an object of Charlemagne's solicitude. Moreover, owing to the widespread disturbances of these times, monasteries had perhaps suffered some harm and had slackened.

[6] Consequently it was highly important for the Church that this most holy form of life, which had been kept unimpaired for so many centuries in monasteries, should be restored to its pristine vigor, so that there should never be lacking men of prayer who, unimpeded by any other care, would be perpetually besieging the Divine Mercy and would thus draw down from heaven benefits of every sort upon men, too neglectful of their salvation.

[7] According to his great kindness, God, who is ever attentive to the needs and well-being of his Church, chose BRUNO, a man of eminent sanctity, for the work of bringing the contemplative life back to the glory of its original integrity. To that intent Bruno founded the Carthusian Order, imbued it with his own spirit and provided it with those laws which might efficaciously induce its members to advance speedily along the way of inward sanctity and of the most rigorous penance, to the preclusion of every sort of exterior ministry and office: laws which would also impel them to persevere with steadfast hearts in the same austere and hard life. And it is a recognized fact that through nearly nine hundred years the Carthusians have so well retained the spirit of their Founder, Father and Lawgiver that unlike other religious bodies, their Order has never in so long a space of time needed any amendment, or, as they say, reform.

[8] Who can help feeling admiration for these men? Shut off completely and for all their lifetime from the society of men in order to give themselves up to a sort of hidden and silent apostolate for the eternal salvation of their fellow-creatures, they live each one in the solitude of his cell all the year round and never leave it for any reason nor under any stress of any need.

At fixed hours of the day and night they assemble in the sacred temple, not merely to chant the divine office without modulation, as is the custom in other Orders, but to sing the whole of it "viva et

rotunda voce" - in lifelike, moulded tones - according to the very ancient Gregorian melodies of their choir books, and with the accompaniment of no musical instrument. How should God who is so merciful, fail to grant the prayers of those most pious brethren who thus raise their voices to him in behalf of the Church and of sinners who need conversion?

[9] Wherefore, just as Bruno never lacked the esteem and benevolence of Our predecessor, Urban II, who, having had that very learned and holy man for his master in the school of Rheims, later on, when he was Pope, took him for his counsellor and made use of him in that capacity, in like manner the Carthusian Order has continuously enjoyed the special favor of the Apostolic See, commendable as that Order has ever been for the simplicity together with a certain holy rusticity in the way of living of its members. We ourselves bear the Carthusian monks no less good-will and We wish as much as anyone that so valuable an institution should spread and increase.

[10] For, if ever it was needful that there should be anchorites of that sort in the Church of God it is most especially expedient nowadays when we see so many Christians living without a thought for the things of the next world and utterly regardless of their eternal salvation, giving reign to their desire for earthly pelf and the pleasures of the flesh and adopting and exhibiting publicly as well as in their private lives pagan manners altogether opposed to the Gospel.

[11] And there are perhaps some who still deem that the virtues which are misnamed "passive" have long grown obsolete and that the broader and more liberal exercise of active virtues should be substituted for the ancient discipline of the cloister. This opinion Our predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII, refuted, exploded and condemned in his Letter *Testem benevolentiae* given on the 22 of January in the year 1899; and no one can fail to see how harmful and baneful that opinion is to Christian perfection as it is taught and practiced in the Church.

[12] It is, besides, easy to understand how they who assiduously fulfill the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labor in tilling the Master's field; for unless the former drew down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, the evangelical laborers would reap forsooth from their toil a more scanty crop.

[13] It is hardly necessary to say what great hope and expectation the Carthusian monks inspire in us, seeing that since they keep the rule of their Order not only accurately but also with generous ardor, and since that rule easily carries those who observe it to the higher degree of sanctity, it is impossible that those religious should not become and remain powerful pleaders with our most merciful God for all Christendom.

[14] Those same Statutes, by which the Carthusian Order is governed, did indeed seem to Our predecessor, Innocent XI, worthy of being strengthened with "the favor of Apostolic protection;" wherefore by the Apostolic Constitution *Injunctum Nobis*, given on the 27 March in the year 1688, he approved them "in a specific way," as it is called. In which Constitution we see the many great praises lavished by Our same predecessor on the Carthusians, and that encomium has all the more weight in that it comes from a Pontiff illustrious for the great sanctity of his life.

[15] As it has now become necessary, however, to bring the aforesaid Statutes into conformity with the Code of Canon Law, those members of the Carthusian Order who had a right to assemble, came together in General Chapter to accomplish this by mutual counsel. They have done so very well, and, besides, they have abrogated certain points of the rule, and practices brought in by custom and which have become obsolete, without any detriment to the substance of Carthusian life, or which

seemed no longer suitable to the age we live in; while on the other hand, they have added certain prescriptions of General Chapters.

[16] These Constitutions, drawn up in Latin, amended and revised as We have said, were submitted by Us, as was proper, to the Sacred Congregation of Regulars to be examined. Their tenor is as follows:

THE STATUTES OF THE CARTHUSIAN ORDER CONFORMED TO THE PRESCRIPTIONS OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW

(There follows the entire text of the Carthusian Statutes.)

[17] Since, however, the Minister General of the Carthusian Order and all those who of right had assembled in General Chapter, humbly prayed Us to approve by Our Apostolic Authority, these Statutes inserted above and included in this present Apostolic Constitution, We have determined to accede and consent to their wishes. Therefore We do approve and confirm by Our Apostolic Authority the Statutes of the Carthusian Order corrected and revised as they appear above. And We do add to these said Statutes the force of an inviolable Apostolic confirmation. We do supply and make good all and each defect that may perchance have crept into them.

[18] We know for certain that the Carthusians have no need of Our exhortations to observe for the future and with the greatest zeal these Constitutions which they have constantly and faithfully observed in the past. However, for their encouragement to give them yet another gage of Our fatherly goodwill towards them, We grant in perpetuity, by these same letters, to all Carthusians who visit their Church and fulfill the other customary conditions, that annually they may gain in the Lord a plenary indulgence of all their faults, on the 8 day of July, the anniversary, so memorable for them, of this new approbation by the Apostolic See, of their Statutes.

[19] And thus do We ordain and decree that these present Letters and these Statutes, therein inserted and included, shall possess and keep in perpetuity their force, validity and efficacy, and shall receive and obtain their full and entire effect; and that they shall constitute a right of the first order both now and for the future in favor of those whom they concern or may concern in the future. And thus judgements to be given or decisions to be taken must be conformable to them; and any measure that may be taken contrary to them no matter by whom or by what authority, knowingly or not, is to be considered henceforth null and void. All things to the contrary notwithstanding, even when worthy of special and individual mention. We will further that to copies and extracts of these Letters, even in print, provided that they be witnessed by some Notary Public and sealed with the seal of some person of ecclesiastical dignity, there shall be given the same credence as these Letters, were they shown and presented.

GIVEN AT ROME AT ST. PETER'S,  
THE 8 DAY OF JULY 1924,  
THE THIRD YEAR OF OUR PONTIFICATE.

P. Card. GASPARRI  
Secretary of State

C. Card. LAURENTI  
Prefect of the S. Cong. of Religious

Dominic Jorio  
Pronotary Apostolic

Vincent Bianchi-Cagliesi  
Pronotary Apostolic