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APPENDICES

- a. The Benediction of a hermit (or widow)
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A. OFFICE FOR THE BENEDICTION OF HERMITS (and Widows)
(According to the Rule of St. Paul)

My translation of the Latin rite is from a sixteenth century Pontifical used in the diocese of London (and perhaps Durham), printed in R.M. Clay: *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, 1904), Appendix B (pp. 199-202). The whole was used for hermits following the so-called Rule of St. Paul while the first part, with appropriate changes of gender, was used for the profession of vowesses. Words printed within square brackets [...] are not represented in the original.

[Introduction]

The form and manner whereby a man, having been in his heart turned^d from the world may make his profession as a hermit to the bishop (or his commissary). This profession should be formalised on some ecclesiastical feast-day [i.e. Holy Day] designated as the occasion when it will take placeⁱⁱ. On this day, the bishop (vested in the customary manner for the celebration of High Mass) shall proceed with the celebration until just before the Gospel.

[The Ceremonies within the Mass]

Then, during the singing of the Alleluia, Tract or Sequence which precedes the Gospel, the would-be hermit should come forward in a devout manner, dressed in the conventional habit and carrying over his left arm the scapularⁱⁱⁱ or other garment suitable to the hermit's vocation. He should advance, with bare feet, as far as the altar step^{iv} and there kneel before the feet of the bishop (or his commissary).

Immediately [after the singing of the Gospel?] the bishop and those standing round him [in the quire and presbytery] should sing antiphonally the psalm "Miserere mei Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam"^v, followed by the doxology (Glory be to the Father...).

[Instruction]

When the psalm is finished the bishop, from his chair^{vi}, should speak to the postulant about the intention to be chaste and examine him about [his understanding of] the implications of the Rule^{vii} which he is about to accept and the necessity of making a public profession of his intention. He should also discuss all the matters which to him seem relevant to the spiritual health of the postulant.

[Profession]

When all this has been done in the light of godly fear the postulant should read his profession aloud or, if he be unable to read [Latin], he should repeat it after the bishop. Then the bishop, from his throne, should turn towards the congregation^{viii} and repeat the profession after the following form:

"I, (name of postulant), unmarried^{ix}, make a vow and promise to God, blessed Mary, and to all the saints, in the presence of the reverend father in Christ (name of bishop) of perpetual chastity in accordance with the Rule of St. Paul".

Then the professed should mark the end of the written vow with the sign of the cross and hand the document to the bishop before lying prostrate while the bishop says the following prayers over him:

" Let us pray.

Almighty God, we beseech Thee to be present with this thy servant (Name) who renounces the pomps^x of the world. Open the gates of thy grace to one who has fled from the despised devil (to fight) under the banner of Christ. Bid him come to thee to be received with a welcoming countenance so that the enemy might not triumph over him. Grant him the tireless support of thine arm. Armour his mind with the breastplate^{xi} of faith that in purity, fortified by thy fortunate defence, he may rejoice to have escaped the enemy. Through...[Jesus Christ our Lord who with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth one God for ever and ever.]

Let us pray.

O God who made the children of Israel to sojourn forty years in the desert solitude when you gave them manna for food, and also brought it about that thy Son lived like a hermit for forty days and forty nights, and also hast shown thyself pleased that prophets and saints passed time in the desert, be gracious to thy servant .N. who after his fashion has chosen a similar kind of life by assuming the hermit's vocation, (grant) that he may change his behaviour to what is seemly and become fitted by perseverance to his profession so that he may attain perfection in this way of life and be worthy to the joys of those made perfect. Through the same...[Jesus Christ etc.] "

The **blessing of the habit** follows:

V." The Lord be with you".

R. "And with thy spirit".

"Let us pray.

O God whose promises of everlasting good things never fail and who art our ever reliable surety^{xii} and hast promised to thy faithful the vesture of salvation and the apparel of joy^{xiii}, we humbly beseech thy clemency that these garments may be a symbol of a humble heart and contempt for the world by which thy servant gives visible form to his holy purpose. Vouchsafe, of thy grace, to bl+ess^{xiv} them so that he may maintain through thy protection the habit of chastity that he has put on and that he whom thou hast dressed in the habit of a revered profession may be forever clothed in blessed immortality. Through our Lord Jesus Christ who with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth one God for ever and ever.

O God, the giver of all good things and the generous dispenser of all blessings, hear our prayers so that this garment with which thy servant clothes himself as a sign of his dedicated chastity, you may vouchsafe to bl+ess and make holy to the praise and glory of thy holy name. Through Christ our Lord".

R. "Amen".

[The vesting]

Then the bishop sprinkles the garment with holy water and then gives it to the hermit and as he puts it on he [the celebrant] says:

"May the Lord strip off from thee the old man and clothe thee with the new man who according to God is created in righteousness and true holiness".

R. "Thanks be to God".

Then the bishop speaks the following words to the professed if he is lettered [i.e. knows Latin], otherwise he gives them in the mother tongue:

"Brother^{xv}, behold we have bestowed upon you the dress of a hermit and, together with it, we admonish you to live in purity, sobriety and holiness. Pass your time in vigils^{xvi}, in fasting, in work and prayer, and in the works of mercy^{xvii} so that you may possess eternal life and so live for ever and ever. Amen."

To which the 'conversus'^{xviii} makes this reply devoutly upon his knees:

"And I, reverend father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ receive this habit, promising as far as in me lies to devote myself to God and, aided by the grace of God and the kindly prayer of his saints, to follow your precepts faithfully".

[Blessing and Invocation of Holy Spirit]

Then the conversus prostrates himself while the bishop says the following prayers over him.

"Let us pray.

Defend, O Lord, with thy due compassion this thy servant that he may ever preserve intact the vow which by thy inspiration he has undertaken. Through our Lord...

Let us pray.

Attend to our prayers, O Lord, that you may vouchsafe to bless this thy servant whom in thy holy name we have clothed in the religious habit. Grant, of thy generosity, that he may both stand devout and steadfast in thy Church^{xix} and also that he may be worthy to attain eternal life. Through the same..."

Then the bishop, turning towards the East,^{xx} shall intone this hymn:

"Come thou Creator Spirit..."^{xxi}

(The above form may be used thus far for the blessing of widows^{xxii}).

[The vocation of a hermit was more difficult, with particular trials and a special rule, and so the order for the blessing of hermits continues with:]

[More Prayers & Blessings]

Then is said [sung]

"Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Our Father....trespass against us

V. And lead us not into temptation

R. But deliver us from evil. Amen.

V. Grant salvation to thy servant.

R. Who puts his hope in thee, my God.

V. O Lord, send him help from thy holy place

R. And salvation out of Zion.

V. Lord, be to him a tower of strength

R. From the face of his enemy.

V. Lord hear my prayer

R. And let my cry come unto thee.

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And with thy spirit.

C. "Let us pray.

Almighty God, we beseech thee be attentive to thy servant who trusts in thy mercy and keep him under thy protection so that, freed from all adversities, he may be found worthy of everlasting blessing. Through Christ the Lord.

O God who restores the offender to righteousness and does not desire the death of a sinner, we humbly beseech thy majesty that thou protect thy servant .N. who trusts in thy heavenly mercy. Of thy goodness keep him safe by thy unceasing defence that he may always remain thy servant and never be separated from thee by any temptation. Through Christ the Lord.

Almighty and ever-living God have mercy on thy servant and guide him according to thy kindness in the way of eternal salvation so that, giving himself to thee, he may desire what pleases thee and bring to perfection every virtue".

Then turning to the conversus, he says

"And may almighty God bless thee and grant thee the grace to live well (in this life) and bring thee to the life eternal. Through Christ..."

Then the bishop blesses the conversus as he kneels [before him] in these words:

"May almighty God bless thee: Fat + her, Son + , and Holy + Spirit."

[The crosses in the text indicate the threefold sign of the cross made over the kneeling hermit]

[Instruction on the Rule of St. Paul]

But before the hermit goes away he should be given an exposition of the general life-style of a hermit with some mention of the particular observances that he personally is to follow.

Firstly, the bishop should enjoin him openly and publicly^{xxiii} to say the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria and the [Apostles'] Creed so that they might be heard clearly by everyone [in the ^{xxiv} church?].

Then the bishop should give him instructions about the way in which he should say his equivalent to the Church's monastic Hours^{xxv} and the number of prayers which he should devoutly offer for the salvation of his soul and that of each of his benefactors^{xxvi}, namely:

For Vespers he should say the Lord's Prayer twenty times and the same number of Hail Marys..

His Compline should consist of thirteen Our Fathers and the same number of Hail Marys.

For his Matins he should repeat both these prayers thirty times; for Lauds, fifteen and for Prime, twenty-four.

For the other Hours, namely Terce, Sext and Nones, he should repeat them fifteen times as a substitute for each.

[Like the religious houses, the hermit was held to have a responsibility of praying for the departed and so he is enjoined:]

On weekdays for his 'Placebo', fifty Our Fathers and Hail Marys; for 'Dirige', thirty-

three; for 'Commendation' twenty-four.^{xxvii}

He should also repeat the Creed thirteen times every day and every night^{xxviii} and hear Mass daily.^{xxix}

If the hermit can read [Latin] then he is to say the Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary^{xxx} with the seven psalms^{xxxi}, also the Litany^{xxxii} with the 'Placebo' and 'Dirige' for the departed. In addition, he should append to each of these 'Hours' three Paternosters and three Aves, together with half a Nocturn.^{xxxiii}

In place of the above, the hermit may recite the entire psalter once a day.^{xxxiv}

Because idleness is an enemy of the soul and to prevent the devil's discovering him without an occupation, the hermit is to provide himself with manual work to fill the time when he is not at prayer. This may involve the production of food or the maintenance and repair of roads and bridges.^{xxxv}

During the season of Advent and in the forty and ten days^{xxxvi} before Pentecost, he must abstain from meat so that at the end of those fasts he might make his communion^{xxxvii} after first going to confession. On all Wednesdays he should eat fish or milk-products [i.e. no meat] while on Fridays he must fast on bread and water unless he is granted a dispensation^{xxxviii} on account of serious illness or overwork. He should also fast on Saturdays, satisfying himself with fish.

The wearing of linen [underclothes] is not permitted to hermits (except for the provision of 'leg-warmers'^{xxxix}). Their footwear is limited to shoes/sandals and they are not allowed boots.

When his formal ecclesiastical dress has been bestowed by the bishop's arrangement, then let the hermit depart [to his hermitage] in peace and in the name of the Lord.

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NOTES

ⁱ Latin "conversus", hence "convert".

ⁱⁱ The choice of a Feast Day is not only to emphasise the importance of the occasion by its setting but also to make it a public one, since all the parishioners are obliged to attend mass on major festivals.

ⁱⁱⁱ The scapular is a sort of loose overall consisting of a long piece of cloth, about 18" (c.45 cms.) wide with a hole for the head in the centre. It formed part of the regular monastic dress and the Benedictine Rule prescribed its use when monks were engaged in manual work.

³ A single step divided the presbytery from the quire. It marked the sanctuary or holiest part of the church.

^v Psalm 50. 51 in Anglican and other Protestant numbering.

^{vi} The bishop's official chair was his 'cathedra' and this detail may indicate that the public implications of a hermit's formal commissioning (which included his right to be supported by almsgiving) were such that the ceremony was carried out in the chief church of the diocese.

^{vii} On the Rule of St. Paul, see essay in W.J. Shiels, ed. 'Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition' (Oxford, 1985).

^{viii} One of many indications of the congregation's involvement in this ceremony.

^{ix} Unmarried. Ideally, the religious was a virgin but widows and widowers could be accepted. Chastity was an expected Christian virtue but there was a long tradition that regarded virginity as a superior state to marriage and holy widowhood as generally preferable to remarriage.

^x Here there is a reminiscence of the baptismal promises.

^{xi} Cf. Ephesians vi, 11.

^{xii} On God as the surety for what we owe and the one who freely discharges our ^{xiii} debts to Him, cf. the Lord's Prayer.

^{xiii} Cf., Revelation iii, 5, 18

^{xiv} Here the bishop makes the sign of the cross over the vestment.

^{xv} The bishop addresses the hermit as 'Brother' because he too now belongs to the ecclesiastical state.

^{xvi} Vigils - watching in prayer, keeping prayerfully awake when others are sleeping and interceding to God on their behalf. Vicarious prayer is an important element in Catholicism.

^{xvii} 'Works of mercy' cover most of what the modern world calls 'charitable' work. The heart of medieval 'love of one's neighbour' was centred on these, particularly the so-called 'Seven Corporal Works of Mercy' derived from Matt.xxv, 31ff. with the addition of the burial of the dead.

^{xviii} The 'conversus' was a layman who had abandoned worldly life for that of religion. It was the name given by the Cistercians to their lay brothers and later adopted by other orders and also applied, as here, to hermits.

^{xix} Hermits could be 'wild men', standing somewhat apart from the established organisation of the church. They could be parasites or heretics and in the later medieval period attempts were made by both church and state to bring them under control by requiring that they be licensed by the bishop. In 1399 the devout Richard II issued a law ordering unlicensed hermits to be punished as vagabonds. Hence this prayer that the hermit 'devotus in ecclesia persistere'.

^{xx} Churches were orientated; their main axis lay east-west with the altar at the east end. The rising sun was seen as a symbol of Christ and the east was where he was born as a man, therefore in a sense, turning to the east is turning to address God rather than the congregation.

^{xxi} 'Veni Creator Spiritus' is the office hymn for Vespers of Whitsunday and may indicate the appropriate season for the commission of hermits but the hymn was used in much the same way as the 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' (Whitsunday Sequence) i.e. as an invocation for the special help of the Holy Spirit.

^{xxii} Widows, like hermits, were a recognised 'order' in the church and could be dedicated to that state by a similar service to that which established hermits. 'Holy widows' (or vowesses) were bereft wives who took a vow not to remarry and to give the rest of their lives to prayer and works of mercy, usually from a base within their own home. (It is more than likely that such a widow supported the hermit Robert of Knaresborough).

^{xxiii} Since these prayers were to be the substance of the hermit's orisons, it was necessary to check that he had them firmly by heart. Their repetition provided the background to the prayer life of the Cistercian 'conversi' as well as the (illiterate) lay brothers and sisters of other orders. The public recitation may be another example of the congregation's involvement.

^{xxiv} This practice might be seen as a breach of the Dominical injunction against the use of 'vain repetitions' after a heathen manner, in prayer (Matt. vi, 7). But the church was not ignorant of the Gospels and the crux is in the word 'vain' (i.e. 'empty'). The repetitions were not meant to be empty but the shell enclosing a kernel of devoted intention: of union with the prayers of the church at large and of their direction to a particular aim e.g. the good estate of the living or dead, the well-being of the realm, thanksgiving for the ministry and death of Christ (associated with particular 'hours'), and so on.

^{xxv} 'Redeeming the time' by prayer did not require literacy or knowledge of Latin. Though the non-clerk could not cope with the formal 'hours' he could offer a substitute of 'intention' within the framework of repeated prayers which he had by heart. This system of meditation lies behind the devotion of the Rosary and a number of non-Christian practises

^{xxvi} The hermit's 'benefactors' were presumably those who provided him with shelter, land, food or alms.

^{xxvii} These relate to various parts of the Office of the Dead. 'Dirige' (hence our word 'dirge') refers to the morning office which opens with the anthem (from Ps. v, 8) "Guide my way, O Lord God, in thy sight..."

"Placebo" has similar reference to the Vespers of the Dead and the 'Commendatio' to the ritual which took place at the bedside of a dying person (memorably set to music in Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius') - "Go forth, Christian soul, in the name of God..."

^{xxviii} The frequent repetition of the articles of the Christian faith is to be a constant reminder and hopefully a deepening of the 'faith by which we are saved.'

^{xxix} The requirement that he should hear Mass daily may imply that the hermit is a priest (as some were) but basically it is an obligation that he presents himself at this rite every day. Many hermitages possessed an altar or were associated with a chapel (cf. the surviving chapel of Our Lady of the Crag at Knaresborough or the Alnwick hermitage) at which a visiting priest may have arranged a celebration. Otherwise the hermit would have to present himself at the nearest parish church or chapel of ease for this daily service (Some hermitages were attached to parish churches).

^{xxx} The 'Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary' or 'Little Office' was perhaps the most popular layfolk's service of the Middle Ages and formed the substance of most 'Books of Hours' owned by the laity. It is modelled on the monastic 'Hours' but is considerably shorter and was made popular by the Cistercians as part of their devotion to the Mother of God and was later taken over by the secular clergy and eventually by the laity.

^{xxxi} The 'seven psalms' are the Seven Penitential Psalms intended to induce and represent sorrow for sin. They were Pss. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143. They were used liturgically from early Christian times and later, in the Middle Ages, they were ordered to be recited on Fridays in Lent after Lauds.

^{xxxii} This is the "Litany of the Saints" a very long intercessory prayer that invokes dozens of saints by name and asks a number of blessings from God before concluding with Psalm 69 and about a dozen collects. It is still printed (often in an abbreviated form) in Catholic prayer books

^{xxxiii} A 'Nocturn' is a division of the long night office and usually consisted of twelve psalms together with associated prayers.

^{xxxiv} The Psalter was fundamentally the church's ancient prayer book and it seems that many Christians knew it by heart. It provided the main substance of all the monastic offices and therefore to recite it in its entirety represented a reasonable substitute for the offices themselves. A hermit might well know the Psalter by heart but might not possess a (costly) book of Hours (though Robert of Knaresborough seems to have owned one).

^{xxxv} The repair of roads and bridges seems to have been a common responsibility assumed by hermits. Their hermitages were often located by the side of roads, particularly where they passed over desolate or difficult country and many were attached to bridges.

^{xxxvi} Advent, like Lent, was in the Middle Ages a normal period of fasting and abstinence but the requirement that the hermit should also fast during the period between Easter and Pentecost is unusual and is perhaps intended to emphasise the penitential nature of the hermit's life.

^{xxxvii} Communion was a rare event among the laity of the Middle Ages but canon law required that they should make their communion at least in Eastertide, i.e. between Easter and Pentecost (Whitsunday). This event would naturally be preceded by Confession. It almost seems as if the hermit out of reverence is being required both to prolong his fast and delay his communion.

^{xxxviii} . A dispensation, or permission to break a rule for good cause, could only be granted by a bishop

and this arrangement helped to lock in the hermit to the general jurisdictional system of the church.

^{xxxix} The Latin is 'femoralibus pedulis' which seems to relate to some covering reaching from the thighs to the feet - a sort of 'puttee' or 'long Johns' ?